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Francophonie and Human Rights:
Diasporic Networks Narrate Social Suffering

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Comparative Literature

by

Simona Liliana Livescu

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Francophonie and Human Rights:
Diasporic Networks Narrate Social Suffering

by

Simona Liliana Livescu

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Efrain Kristal, Co-Chair

Professor Suzanne E. Slyomovics, Co-Chair

This dissertation explores exilic human rights literature as the literary genre encompassing under its *aegis* thematic and textual concerns and characteristics contiguous with dissident literature, resistance literature, postcolonial literature, and feminist literature. Departing from the ethics of recognition advanced by literary critics Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, my study explores how human rights and narrated lives generate larger discursive practices and how, in their fight for justice, diasporic intellectual networks in France debate ideas, oppressive institutions, cultural practices, Arab and European Enlightenment legacies, different traditions of philosophical and religious principles, and global transformations. I conceptualize the term *francité d'urgence*, defintory to the literary work and intellectual trajectories of those writers who, forced by the difficult political situation in their home countries, make a paradoxical aesthetic use of France, its

territory, or its language to promote local, regional, and global social justice via broader audiences.

The first chapter theorizes a comparative analysis of human rights literature produced at a global diasporic site by transnational authors circulating between several locations - Middle East, North Africa, Cuba, Eastern Europe, France and the United States - that inform their cultural identities and goals. The second chapter reframes the works of the Moroccan writer Abdellatif Laâbi and Iraqi-Saudi 'Abd ar-Rahman Munif by exploring the ways in which two renowned Arab writers uniquely give voice to the suffering of the outside while writing from the inside of a Moroccan and Iraqi prison, respectively, under the regimes of Hassan II in Morocco and the Baath Party in Iraq. The analysis of the Cold War literary output of Eastern European and Cuban cultural diasporas in France (based on the works by Paul Goma, Lena Constante, Eduardo Manet, and Reinaldo Arenas) completes this critical excursus.

Through the writing of dissident, feminist, resistance, dictatorship and prison literature, world exiles, expatriates, refugees, and former prisoners of conscience in France reconfigure cosmopolitan networks and cultural centralities far away from the native centers that matter to them. These exilic writers propose alternate histories, identities, and modes of interaction and map a critical model of understanding global cultural nodal points that can be applied to other world cultural centers or metropoli as well (London, New York, or Madrid are only several examples). Similarly to postcolonialism, authoritarian political systems and coerced migrations unwittingly create new world systems such as the literary and political *Francophonie* (or *Anglophonie*), through which narratives of abuses and rights are filtrated; by and large, these are systems in motion, regionally and globally inflected, and actively involved in the movements of contemporary history. In this process of Francophone cultural remodeling, the disputed universalism of the French language and space gets surprisingly validated by the universal

language of rights that diasporic writers in France advance in their efforts to counteract the *language du bois* of the world republics of fear with the human rights lingo of the republic of letters.

The dissertation of Simona Liliana Livescu is approved.

Nouri Gana

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2013

For my mothers,

Ana (you lovingly bought me the six hundred books of my childhood)

and

Rodica (you lovingly brought in the master teachers)

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Introduction

A Multiethnic Literature of Human Rights in France

This dissertation is a study of Francophone human rights literature produced by world writers originating from several geopolitical areas -- North Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the Caribbean -- after WWII until present. Written at the intersection of the postcolonial, authoritarian, and post-authoritarian conditions either in French, on the French soil, or addressing France, human rights literature produced in this cultural world center invites a rethinking of the locality, regionality, and globality of cultures and points to a productive dislocation of borders, identities, and audiences.

The intermingling of multilingual cultural diasporas in France after WWII generated new modes of political and cultural interaction, literal and imaginative, that encouraged a cross-fertilization of philosophical ideas, colonial and authoritarian legacies, and creative visions for the future. In metropolitan Paris, Francophone cultural diasporas brought along their interventional national and regional histories that sought to change the ideological course of the dominant French cultural establishment through the juxtaposition of different traumas, different national memories, and different historical legacies. Multiethnic writers in Paris advocating for human rights elsewhere and everywhere produced a literature that not only unpacked their oppressive experience of forced displacement and exile, but also subverted key antinomial concepts such as “center-periphery” and “universality-locality,” reconfiguring metropolitan cultural and political mappings.

The first chapter of this dissertation advances an original conceptualization of literary *francophonie*, by discussing on the one hand several critical approaches that have marked the

field of Francophone studies scholarship for the past decades and, on the other, by redefining categories such as “Francophone” and *francophonie* from the perspective of a global literature of human rights in France. For the reader of this study to better understand the complex linguistic and spatial positioning of world writers residing temporarily or permanently in France and/or producing human rights literature either in French or their respective maternal languages, an extended discussion of *Francophonie* opens this chapter, and joins, *in media res*, a recent and highly controversial debate surrounding the problematic status of a “Francophone” writer. In 2007, forty-four reputed writers of French signed a manifesto in Paris protesting against their categorization by the cultural politics of the French publishing industry as “Francophone authors,” a label by which they felt relegated to nothing less than an inconsiderate second-class, if not invisible authorial status.

This project arose from my impetus to offer a convincing critical answer to the discontent provoked by the problematic designations of “French vs. Francophone” and the usage of “French vs. Francophone” language that had disquieted not only numerous writers and critics, but political figures, publishers, and large audiences of readers in France and extended to other Francophone and non-Francophone countries as well. Analyzed through the lens of the Francophone multiethnic literature of human rights, these critical categories are investigated in my first chapter in ways that bring a clarification on the status of the French/Francophone/Francophile writers and their language of publication in France or elsewhere. Working outside the ivory tower during my pre-dissertation research in Paris and Geneva, I checked my theorizations about the Francophone literature of human rights and the links between *francophonie* and human rights against the opinion of Parisian writers such as Cuban-French Eduardo Manet and Romanian-French Matei Visniec and Dumitru Tsépeneg,

who enthusiastically agreed to the re-categorization that I proposed to them, namely that of being examples *par excellence* of what I term as *francité d'urgence*.

I conceptualize this critical term to reflect the major preoccupation of world writers in post-WWII France to speak truth to power about human rights abuses happening elsewhere and to mobilize public protests against the authoritarian and dictatorial practices in their countries of origin. Various practitioners in the field of human rights, such as representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Swiss human rights activists, lawyers, and scholars also encouraged my critical efforts to link *francophonie* and human rights literature in ways that highlighted the numerous human rights challenges that the French-speaking cultural and political centers such as Paris and Geneva had mediated (or not) in the second part of the twentieth century. The conclusion was that *la francité d'urgence*, theorized in Chapter One of my dissertation appealed to literary authors, legal practitioners and scholars, and multilingual audiences of diverse social, cultural, and political orientations in an equally strong manner. The task of my scholarly excursus became that of bringing forth palpable evidence supportive of the preeminence of this cultural and political urgency of writers and activists to adhere to an ad-hoc *emergency Frenchness* in order to further their aesthetic and political aims.

Consequently, I selected for my analysis three cultural diasporas in France that produced dictatorship and prison literature indicting the oppressive political regimes left behind in their home countries: the Francophone Arab, Cuban, and Romanian exilic intellectual communities in Paris. The criteria behind this selection were based on ensuring that a diversity of major and exceptional examples could be adduced to this argumentation. Thus, I analyze Francophone human rights literature emerging from countries governed by the regimes of the Left (Cuban and Romanian prison and dictatorship novels) and of the Right (prison literature written under the

regime of Hassan II of Morocco). The prominence of first-generation Francophone Arab diaspora in France is indubitable; by comparison, East European diasporic presence in France, although well known, has been discussed to a lesser extent in French-Francophone scholarly contexts; finally, the juxtaposition of Cuban exilic community's cultural production in France, considerably smaller than its Arab or East European counterparts, provides here a complementary exceptional example.

Each chapter of this dissertation begins by contextualizing the cultural production of the respective Arab, Cuban, and Romanian diasporas in postwar Paris within the French cultural landscape with particular attention to the decades between the sixties and the eighties. This background foregrounds the reader in the cultural debates and critical ideological turns enabled by the metropolis at the time and offers novel perspectives on the interconnectedness of marginalized cultural groups and their newly-acquired paradoxical centrality. Marginal to their home countries that disposed of them via forced or voluntary exile, world writers of human rights literature become "centered" in Paris, where they produce or publish a literature that is both intraneous and extraneous to the center; in this center, the cultural and ideological politics of the mainly pro-leftist and pro-communist French literary establishment are prevalent and preclude the anti-communist Francophone writers' attempts to protest against the abuses of the communist regimes in their countries of origin, especially during the sixties and the seventies. Equally, anti-monarchist Francophone writers of human rights are relegated to the dustbin of literary history by the pro-monarchist foreign politics of the French political establishment (see *Notre ami, le roi* by Gilles Perrault, a book that shook the French public consciousness in 1990 when it disclosed the horrors of the political prisons maintained by Moroccan king and French ally Hassan II).

Each of the three intellectual diasporas mentioned above is represented in this study through the work of two writers, one who writes in French and another who writes in his or her maternal language on the French soil, or publishes his books in France in a groundbreaking manner. Chapter Two deals with the Francophone Arabic literature of human rights by exploring the prison memoirs of Abdellatif Laâbi (Francophone Moroccan writer, resident of Paris and winner of the 2009 Goncourt Prize for poetry), and ‘Abd al-Rahman Munif (Saudi-Iraqi writer resident of Paris in the eighties). Their prison novels remain exemplary in the Arab letters for their enduring aesthetic and political relevance and eloquent illustration of the role that France and *francophonie* had for the human rights in the Arab world. Chapter Three positions Eastern European dissidence in Paris during the Cold War and after, by analyzing Paul Goma and Lena Constante’s autobiographical prison novels. Paul Goma has resided in Paris for more than thirty years and continues to write in Romanian, while Lena Constante lived and died in Romania, but wrote in French and published her influential prison memoir in France. Chapter Four explores the works of two anti-Castroist Cuban writers, Eduardo Manet and Reinaldo Arenas. Manet holds the French nationality and has been a resident of Paris since 1967, writing exclusively in French ever since. Although Arenas’ work is written in his native Cuban Spanish, the persecution and imprisonment that he experienced in Cuba resulted in his books being smuggled and published in France through the help of his French friends and publishers.

If these cultural diasporas find themselves engaged in drawing demystified cultural and ideological cartographies by eliciting a re-orientation of the French milieu toward the truth of world human rights abuses perpetrated either under the regimes of the Right or of the Left, they do so by facing an obverse and initially adverse center, but also by confessing to their own loss of former ideological worlds. Reinaldo Arenas, Lena Constante, Paul Goma, and Eduardo

Manet have all espoused leftist beliefs in their youth, undone by their subsequent disillusionment brought about by the stripping of their rights under leftist regimes. Writers of human rights literature analyzed in each chapter had to reevaluate their own misplaced ideological allegiances before confronting those of the French center. In this study, the reader will notice that the manner in which exile and (the lack of) human rights intersect with historical contexts reveals a grammar of self-confessed peripatetics (Munif), screamers (Arenas), meanies (Goma) and fools (Laâbi) of human rights. This grammar invites novel ethics of reading, writing, listening, and responding to the passionate interpellation of the Other, the oppressed subject whose basic rights get incessantly erased and re-inscribed on legal and affective local and global palimpsests of human rights.

Through the writing and publishing of dissident, feminist, resistance, and prison literature, world exiles, expatriates, refugees, and former prisoners of conscience in France reconfigure cosmopolitan networks and cultural centralities far away from the native centers that matter to them. These exilic writers propose alternate histories, identities, and modes of interaction and map a critical model of understanding global cultural nodal points that can be applied to other world cultural centers or metropoli as well (London, New York, or Madrid are only several examples). Similarly to postcolonialism, authoritarian political systems and coerced migrations unwittingly create new world systems such as the literary and political *Francophonie* (or *Anglophonie*), through which narratives of abuses and rights are filtrated; by and large, these are systems in motion, regionally and globally inflected, and actively involved in the movements of contemporary history. In this process of Francophone cultural remodeling, the disputed universalism of the French language and space gets surprisingly validated by the universal language of rights that diasporic writers in France advance in their efforts to counteract the

language du bois of the world republics of fear with the human rights lingo of the republic of letters.

Note on translation: unless otherwise specified, all translations from Arabic, French, and Romanian are mine.

Note on transliteration: due to the limited list of special characters approved by the UCLA Graduate Division, the Arabic and Romanian diacritical marks had to be left out.

Chapter One

Francophonie* and Human Rights: A New Concept of *Francité

In 2007, forty-four multiethnic writers of French signed a literary manifesto entitled “Pour une littérature-monde en français” in Paris, in which they rejected the “Francophone” categorization of their *oeuvres* deployed by the politics of contemporary French literary and publishing establishments.¹ Instead, the manifesto argued that the literature produced in French by the signatory writers was consciously open to a global world and that literary “*francophonie*” (mainly understood in its postcolonial acception) was solemnly dead,

Soyons clairs: l'émergence d'une littérature-monde en langue française consciemment affirmée, ouverte sur le monde, transnationale, signe l'acte de décès de la francophonie.

Personne ne parle le francophone, ni n'écrit en francophone (“Pour une littérature-monde en français”)

This radical assertion signaling the death of *Francophonie* and supported by such authoritative authorial backing incensed the literary and political French and Francophone-speaking spaces equally, leading to highly-mediatized critical debates on issues of linguistic and cultural representational rights. All French and Francophone studies scholars know that the putative centre or the heart of the Hexagon represents more than a hegemonic space that marginalizes or assimilates writers deemed “peripheral” into its vortex and only intends to disrobe them gradually of their native linguistic or cultural references as a condition of their propulsion to fame. Nonetheless, the extent of the *métropole*'s dimensions inside or outside France, real or

¹ This article-manifesto was followed a few months later by a collection of essays on the same topic edited by Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud, under the title “Pour une littérature-monde,” published by Gallimard.

imaginary, is still an incomplete story. This is why contemporary critics such as Roxana Verona, Anne-Rosine Delbart, Stéphane Dufoix, Ramona Bordei-Boca and Martine Fernandes -- to name only a few -- filled some important gaps and published research challenging the latest oversimplification of *Francophonie*. Provocative new categories -- literary, social, and historical -- proposed by these researchers urge French and Francophone studies scholars to re-evaluate their field and avoid resorting to sonorous death-of-a-discipline statements. However generous is a type of fashionable rhetoric deployed by proponents of *littérature-monde* (precisely because they invoke the erasure of certain categorizations for the sake of the all-inclusive globalization), their approaches run the high risk of generating questionable conceptualizations.

Based on literary works by French and Francophone writers of various backgrounds such as Eduardo Manet, Eugène Ionesco, Paul Goma, ‘Abd al-Rahman Munif, Abdellatif Laâbi, Mahmud Darwish, etc., and scholarly texts by Anne-Rosine Delbart, Stéphane Dufoix, Bordei-Boca and others, my study makes the case for a new dimension of *francité* sustained by human rights literature in French. By addressing the notion of *francité* from the perspective of the universality of human rights, I conclude this chapter by returning to reaffirm and enrich Léopold Senghor’s civilizational definition of the term. In addition, by providing evidence of writers who “speak Francophone” and “write Francophone” -- to paraphrase the opening quote from the *littérature-monde* manifesto -- I insist that *Francophonie*’s lifeline remains rich and strong.

Histories of “Francophone” and “Francophonie”

Although French and Francophone scholars and writers debate the concept of "*littérature-monde*," either by signaling *Francophonie*'s demise or by insisting that, on the contrary, its colonial and postcolonial expression is a distinct phenomenon impossible to dismiss,

a number of different approaches to *Francophonie* and Francophone literature draw attention to them. The *Cambridge Introduction to Francophone Literature* (2007), written by Patrick Corcoran, opens with an etymological discussion of the term “francophone;” he points out that although semantically the word is similar to cognates like “anglophone” and “hispanophone,” denoting “French-speaking,” the first two are relatively neutral, describing a community of language users, while “francophone” has been “invested with a range of additional ideological and political meanings. ‘Francophone’ can easily serve to conflate French/Francophone into a single term of a binary opposition, in which the second term is Anglophone (Corcoran 7). *Francophonie* is either France looking outward and embracing the world with unifying vision and a homogenizing discourse or the periphery as marker of difference and diversity. Corcoran separates the “official” institutional *Francophonie* -- “state sponsored version of *francophonie*” that has “a hagiographic, spiritualistic tone,” and represents France’s “belated response to the loss of its empire” -- from postcolonial *Francophonie*, for which he proposes a practical approach (Corcoran 8). He aptly concludes his argument by stating,

The expression “francophone” inevitably evokes a relationship or a set of relationships. To argue for a view of *francophonie* as foregrounding *relationships*, spoken or unspoken, is both to echo and to advocate an essentially pragmatics-based approach to understanding the word. In practical terms this means paying careful attention to subject positions (who is speaking? where from? and for what purpose?), delving into historical and cultural contexts so that we avoid imposing our own values and hierarchies (...)

(Corcoran 12)

Corcoran’s two major categories are further defined, “on the one hand, then, we have a state-sanctioned version of *francophonie* that operates under the sign of continuity, and on the other, a

postcolonial version which can best be envisaged as a counter-discourse in which difference, fragmentation and discontinuity are allowed free play” (Corcoran 19). He then proceeds to declare the postcolonial approach to francophone literature as indubitably the right approach, “One of the underlying premises of this book, therefore, is that francophone literature, in so far as it exists as a single body of work at all, is first and foremost a *postcolonial* literature.” (Corcoran 22, author’s emphasis). For Corcoran, “francophone literature is indeed necessarily and unavoidably postcolonial”; Francophone literatures of European nations are excluded from his study, as “they can be most easily approached as examples of “national” literatures” (of Belgium, the French Switzerland, and Luxembourg, for example) with many of these countries’ authors having merged seamlessly into the French literary scene. However, Moroccan authors of French such as Fatima Mernissi or Abdellatif Laâbi are also considered part of the Moroccan national literature since in their works, albeit written in French, are primarily concerned with complex socio-political and religious aspects of contemporary Moroccan life.

This discussion can be followed by an inquiry into whether postcolonial literary *Francophonie* is part of the national literary tradition of the country of origin of the respective authors, or is to be seen as separate from that tradition. But most importantly, with this taxonomical statement, Corcoran implicitly infers that Francophone literature in its postcolonial variants enjoys a central position or supremacy over other types of Francophone literatures, which he does not name (literatures of “nations,” or “enclaves” and “regions” of Europe are summarized through general geographical terminology; non-European Francophone literatures are not even mentioned in a study with, ultimately, an indeterminate title (Corcoran 22-23). Scholars and readers interested in an introduction to Francophone literature and not exclusively to Francophone postcolonial literature would rightly ask where the Francophone Romanian or

Vietnamese literature disappeared, to name just two. Thus, the model of analysis and the selective criteria that Corcoran employs by decentering the French model -- the refusal to assign a privileged position to France and French history -- end up not only being also a hegemonic act, but also less a re-conceptualization and more of a re-classification of the *Francophonie*.

According to Corcoran, when a Francophone literature is not first and foremost postcolonial, it risks being deemed either as “national,” or as assimilated into the French metropolitan scene.

The result of this classification leads to the conclusion that other types of Francophone literatures may exist somewhere in the suspended space between the French literature and the Francophone postcolonial literature, at their margins, or in their shadow. Despite Corcoran’s efforts, a new (invisible or absent) periphery has been born.

This is exactly the space where much *Francophonie* or Francophone literature is happening, as Roxana Verona writes in her article “In the Francophone Zone: The Romanian Case,” published in the special issue dedicated to the new literary histories of the new Europe by the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*. She insists on “the existence of a legitimate cultural family formed by exiled authors writing in French, whose uniqueness is yet to be explored” (Verona 117). Stéphane Dufoix, author of *Politiques d’exil* (2002), indirectly contradicts Corcoran’s assumption by pointing out that the history of the immigration and cultural and political activities of diasporas in France does not belong to any national space,

La politique de l’émigration n’appartient ni aux pays d’origine, ni aux pays d’accueil, ni à l’histoire de l’immigration, car elle fait éclater, encore plus que cette dernière, la relation entre l’identité et le territoire. (Dufoix 19)

Names such as Matei Vişniec/Matéi Visniec (Francophone playwright and novelist born in

Romania in 1956 and living in Paris since 1987, recently awarded a SACD prize),² or Marius Daniel Popescu (Romanian-born author living in Lausanne since 1990, awarded the Robert Walser prize for the autobiographical novel *La Symphonie du loup*, which he wrote in French about his life under the Ceausescu regime) and Eduardo Manet/Eduardo Gonzáles-Manet (Cuban-born playwright and novelist settled in France since 1968, awarded the Goncourt among other prizes) demonstrate the existence of an unusual category of Francophone non-postcolonial authors. None of them -- Popescu, a Roma immigrant and bus-driver in Lausanne; Visniec, who started his literary career in Romania before settling in Paris; Manet, whose books focus on Cuba -- are assimilated enough into the French literary scene to fully merge into the French metropolitan culture. They are nonetheless fulfilling Corcoran's criterion for postcolonial Francophone literature authors, that of having been born outside of France. However, their literary *Francophonie* is supposed to take a backseat, in spite of their literary awards' visibility. Their non-postcolonialism is not as distinct a category as the postcolonial *Francophonie*; above this category of *Francophonie* hovers the shadow of cultural merging or contamination with the center, an aesthetic *faux-pas* probably not attributable by Corcoran to the Francophone postcolonial writers selected for his study.

Staying with his classifying criterion, one could inquire about the absence of Francophone Vietnamese authors born outside France from an authoritative source on Francophone literature. Understandably, one critic or one volume cannot encompass all; however, not acknowledging the multiplicity of Francophone literatures in their irregularities because one of them (the postcolonial) is seemingly easier to categorize and comprise within a critical study must be addressed. Corcoran or other critics cannot disregard Central and Eastern European *Francophonie* (be it Romanian, Czech, Hungarian, or Polish) as dealt with in Delbart,

² SACD stands for *Société des Auteurs Dramatiques*.

Verona, Bordei-Boca and Dufoix' studies. Their works indicate that much more than the "anxiety of influence" and the apparently eternal relationship of dominator/dominated, center/periphery or major/minor positioning is at stake in regard to these literatures; one aspect, for example, would be what Roxana Verona calls "cultural commuting," which implies change and exchange or the nomadism of the French-Francophone writers that Delbart addresses. If we are to consider the decentering of the privileged role of the metropolis as the reference point of culture and influence as many French and Francophone studies scholars aim for, it is equally justifiable to consider discussing Eastern *Francophonie*. How many Easts can be brought into a "Francophone" discussion? Perhaps Eastern European, Middle Eastern, South-East Asian, and Far East's *Francophonies* could provide other approaches for the analysis of Francophone literature? How many ways of conceptualizing *Francophonie* are still missing remains unknown.

What makes the Romanian *Francophonie* an example challenging Corcoran's conceptualization? First, it speaks to a literary East-West axis present in French-Francophone letters before the Maghrebian francophone literature comes onto the literary metropolitan scene. Second, it deals with many of the Francophone postcolonial themes, such as the identity crises present in the works of the Francophone Maghrebian writers; Francophone Romanian writers' works are suffused with various tensions about "inferiority and superiority complexes, linguistic ordeals, dependencies on the French culture, and rebellion against the French cultural establishment" (Verona 116). Verona gives the example of both Cioran and Ionesco, frequently classified as French (and very rarely Francophone); Cioran admitted the he could never feel at home in France and Ionesco "tried to distance himself from the French literary milieu when he declared 'I hope I still have in me that Danube peasant I once was'" (116). Verona's concept of

cultural commuting “marks out the site of an imagined community located in an imaginary geography that is the site of the Francophone zone” (116). The cultural differences and the tensions or balance between the national ancestral space of an ‘orientalized’ East and the culture of the metropolis in which they may or may not reside is present as well,

Both the Cornis-Pope/Neubauer and Casanova literary histories pinpoint the process of writing literature in mixed territories, in what Homi Bhabha calls “in-between spaces” where one needs “to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on these moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences”(1-2). In the francophone zone, the Romanian Diaspora’s “Bucharest-on-the-Seine” meets “Little Paris”/Petit Paris, as Bucharest was called in the first decades of the twentieth century; this is the place where writers and artists negotiate differences and common interests that stem from the a priori baggage they bring from the country of origin, as well as from their struggle for aesthetic freedom on the Parisian cultural stage. (Verona 117)

Recognizing the difficulty of “defining and delimiting Francophone literatures in general vis-à-vis French literature,” she asks “what is the status of Romanian francophone writers? Are “Francophone” all those who speak French without being French, or are they all “French writers that come from elsewhere,” as Anne-Rosine Delbart calls them? The same question could be extended to all creators who occupy this space” (Verona 116). As Corcoran proceeded in his *Cambridge Introduction to Francophone literature*, other recent literary histories revisited various sites of the *Francophonie* to shift “the emphasis away from Paris - and away from any metropolis for that matter,” such as the multi-volume *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe* edited by Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer in 2004. Verona wrote about

“how the cultural corridor of the Danube” conferred “multiple identities on the cultures of the regions. In that particular scenario, not only Romanian literature, but also Hungarian, Croatian, and other literatures of the region are implicated in the process of frenchification and orientalization that interfere and overlap” (Verona 117).

By examining France’s cultural politics after 1960 and by analyzing a particular strain of the cultural production of the exilic margins in the center (Paris), an overlooked aspect of *Francophonie* in which “human rights and narrated lives” emerges intertwined in a transnational manner (Schaffer, Smith 2). Former political prisoners in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, China, or Cuba who, besides writing prison memoirs in France, also chose to file individual complaints with the UN Committee against Torture, the UN Human Rights Commission or The International Red Cross in Geneva helped transform individual and collective suffering into international law. The UN database and archives in Geneva contains UN-issued resolutions and country human rights reports based on these individual testimonies. The new concept of *francité* proposed in this article is sustained by a multi-ethnic human rights literature in French and serves as a bridge between the proponents and the challengers of the concept of *littérature-monde* as outlined in Le Bris and Rouaud’s manifesto, enriching thus the ongoing “French vs. Francophone” debate.

Who speaks Francophone?

Two complex categories - invisible until now, “because we were blind” -- to quote Alain Mabanckou here -- enrich Francophone literature, adding to the Anglo-Saxon scholarship’s perspective of hybridity, ambivalence, “cultural commuting,” and “resonances” (Mabanckou 2009, Verona 2005-06, Finkenthal 17). One of them is that of the French-Francophone writers

who are arguably both French *and* Francophone authors (italics mine). The immediate question emerging is: who is a French-Francophone writer? He or she embodies both the presence of “oneness” and the presence of “otherness” at the same time (carriers of a French identity through their heritage, but carriers of alterity through their birthplace and primary formative cultural environment). Eugène Ionesco/Eugen Ionescu and Eduardo Manet/Eduardo Gonzáles-Manet are examples par excellence for this category. Both are repeatedly classified as French authors; Parisian bookstores shelve their plays, novels or essays under the “French Literature” heading, as opposed to Bujor Nedelcovici or Agota Kristof’s works, authors of French shelved under the Francophone literature classification. Ionesco and Manet both have French ancestry (Ionesco’s mother and Manet’s father were French), while Nedelcovici and Kristof do not. Although Ionesco and Manet’s French lineage can be easily traced, Manet speaks French with an accent and Ionesco was a perfectly bilingual author. More importantly, neither really began their literary careers in France.³

Ionesco’s success as a playwright in Paris had been preceded by a decade of writing in Romanian in Bucharest. Before settling in Paris for the rest of his life in 1942, Ionesco had been educated through his high school and university years in Romania. From approximately 1928 to 1938, he collaborated with more than ten Romanian literary journals and published poems, essays, and literary criticism in Romanian.⁴ In his turn, Manet, before he wrote his first novel in French and established himself in Paris in 1968, he had already tried his hand at writing several works in Spanish, Italian and English. His trajectory is detailed in Phyllis Zatlin’s book *The*

³ Hamdan, Alexandra. *Ionescu avant Ionesco: portrait de l’artiste en jeune homme*, Bern: Peter Lang. 1993. Print; Zatlin, Phyllis. *The Novels and Plays of Eduardo Manet*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press. 2000. Print.

⁴ Ionescu, Gelu. *Les débuts littéraires roumains d’Eugène Ionesco (1926-1940)*, Trans. Mirella Nedelco-Patureau, Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag. 1989. Print.

Plays and Novels of Eduardo Manet (2000) from the poetry and plays he wrote in Spanish in his youth to his mature, full-fledged French phase. Neither writer is solely a French author, despite being categorized as such by many critics,⁵ or even their own descendants.⁶ In her study, *Les Exilés du langage*, Delbart classifies Ionesco under the category of “nomad writers” and the sub-category of writers of French as “preferred language,” for Ionesco had declared, “le français est ma première langue. J’ai appris à lire, à écrire, à compter en français, mes premières livres, mes premiers auteurs sont français” (Delbart 126). Born in Romania in 1913 and raised in France until he was thirteen years old, Ionesco left for Romania where he lived until 1942 (with a two-year hiatus in France for literary studies in 1938). At fourteen, he started learning Romanian, and later wrote his very first poems in Romanian. In 1942, Ionesco settled definitively in France, and later declared, “Quand je suis revenu en France, je savais le français, bien sûr, mais je ne savais plus l’écrire. Je veux dire “littérairement”. Il m’a fallu me réhabituer. Cet apprentissage, ce déapprentissage, ce réapprentissage, je crois que ce sont des exercices intéressants” (Delbart 127).

⁵ Gilles Plazy writes in his biographical work on Ionesco, ‘Il y fit ses débuts d’écrivain, en roumain, et se révéla être un critique agressif et peu conventionnel, fortement marqué par le dadaïsme et le surréalisme [...]. Il avait plus de trente ans quand il s’installa en France, pendant la guerre, bien décidé à ne jamais revenir là où s’était installé le communisme. Ainsi, de nouveau, fut-il parisien. Écrivain français” (Plazy 10); In his chapter titled “Notes and Counternotes on Eugène Ionesco” Michael Finkenthal asks: “how can a Romanian author become *spontaneously* a French one” (author’s emphasis) (Kluback, Finkenthal 18). His answer follows the aesthetic identity of Ionescu/Ionesco by complicating the statements offered by Ionesco himself, “The real questions hiding behind the question of the continuity in Ionesco’s creation are these: What gives meaning and confers authority to an idea? To what extent is the author himself aware of the ideas which shaped him? How does the resonance between cultures work? For instance, in his conversations with Claude Bonnefoy, Ionesco claims that Flaubert and Jarry had a more decisive influence on him than the Romanians Caragiale and Urmuz (moreover, he claimed in these conversations that ‘there is no Romanian literature that really influenced me’). But if, in fact, the opposite were true, as I believe to be the case, isn’t it strange to find the postwar liberal and democratic West so much in tune with a product of this provincial outpost of Europe which was Romania? To me, this is one of the most interesting questions related to Ionesco. I call it the question of “resonances”: Why can ideas born in remote places propagate and develop in new territories into something else?” (Finkenthal, Kluback 17).

⁶ During a telephone conversation I had with Ionesco’s daughter in November of 2008, Marie-France Ionesco, born, raised, and educated in France maintained that her father was not a “Francophone” writer, but a “French” one. It is pertinent to note that she formulated her firm categorization in several ways that uncovered her perfect access to fluent idiomatic and literary Romanian.

The second category that unsettles a “classical” definition of a French or Francophone writer is an aporetic group in which neither “oneness” nor “otherness” in the relationship to the center is clearly present: these authors suffer from an ad-hoc Frenchness which is French by location and more or less Francophile in spirit: their allegiance or belonging is neither to France or its language, nor to a former or present Francophone space. They are physically inscribed in the French space, yet their primary historical responsibilities lie elsewhere. More concretely, they are members of what Stéphane Dufoix, author of *Politiques d’exil* has called “exopolity” (*exopolitie*), as these individuals live and write in France. However, they are not part of the metropolis’ political or historical landscape, nor do they belong to the political or social scene of their countries of origin. This category is peopled by an exceptional series of writers who do not write in French, but make creative use of the (real or imagined) French cultural values in their works while residing on the French territory. They choose to live for a determined or undetermined period in France and happen to write the best part of their literary *oeuvres* in exile (famous cases are ‘Abd al-Rahman Munif, Mahmud Darwish, Paul Goma, Alejo Carpentier). Oftentimes they address France textually or include Western/French literary tropes in their writings.

These writers who may read, even speak, but not write French, end up speaking 'Francophone,' in the sense mentioned by Mabanckou in his article “Le chant de l'oiseau migrateur,” when he says, “To be a francophone writer is to benefit from the heritage of French literature in general” (Le Bris 55–65). These writers form thus an unexpected category of prominent foreign-born writers, permanent or temporary residents of Paris, never included in the French critical landscape (Mahmud Darwish declares at some point in a biographical documentary directed and produced by the Israeli-French Simone Bitton and Sanbar Elias, “My

love for French probably comes from the fact that I do not speak it, and Paris allows me to be myself” (Bitton and Sanbar, 1997). The writing style of these French/Francophone authors, unlike that of postcolonial African Francophone writers for example, is not “decentered” as their “decentered” identities are (Cazenave 24). Their writing is enhanced by the multifarious intercalation of spaces and languages, those inhabited and those neighbored or absented (the arch-present, yet non-spoken French or a problematic maternal space and language for those forced to use the image of a country frozen in memory, which they left behind many years before).

Critics agree that Mahmoud Darwish’s stay in France was the most prolific one.⁷ Sinan Antoon writes in a front-page article in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, following the death of the Palestinian poet, that “Darwish settled in Paris where he would have a most productive phase and transform his poetry to new heights in works such as “I See What I Want” (1990) and “Eleven Planets” (1992)” (Antoon 2008). Hala Khamis Nassar writes about Darwish’s stay in Paris, “He fondly recalls the French metropolis and claims that there he wrote the best of his writings” (Nassar 208). When exactly did Darwish decide to move so far away from his birthplace? After failing to return to Jerusalem, Israel, where he resided, he lived in various Arab countries, such as Egypt, Jordan, and Tunis. Nassar writes in a note to her article, “Darwish moved to Paris after the PLO was evacuated from Beirut in 1982, instead of joining his contrymen in Tunisia” (Nassar 341).

In the documentary film *Mahmoud Darwich, Et la terre comme la langue* (1997), Mahmud Darwish’s Parisian exile is described by the Israeli-French Simone Bitton as “the most distant and the most prolific” (Bitton, Sanbar 1997). Darwish declares in this film, “the fact that I

⁷ Antoon, Sinan. “Farewell Mahmoud Darwish.” *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 910 (2008):14-20. Web. 2 Aug 2008. Jaggi, Maya. “Poet of the Arab World: Mahmoud Darwish.” *The Guardian*. 08 June 2002; Web. 5 Aug 2008. Celik, Ipek Azime. “Alternative History, Expanding Identity: Myths Reconsidered in Mahmoud Darwish’s Poetry.” *Mahmoud Darwish, Exile’s Poet*. Eds. Hala Khamis Nassar and Najat Rahman. Massachusetts: Olive Branch Press, 2008. Print.

do not speak French explains perhaps my love for Paris. It has allowed me to remain on the margin, and has granted me a freedom to carry myself as I wanted” (Bitton, Sanbar 1997). While in other cities like Beirut or Washington people recognize him, in Paris he can write freely: “Here I am unknown” (Bitton, Sanbar 1997). Maya Jaggi writes about Darwish’s stay in France for over a decade as representing the mature phase of his poetry when he incorporated world mythological and historical paradigms in his new epic poems written about Palestine’s *nakba* or ‘the catastrophe’. Jaggi adds that he has not only written “some of his masterpieces” but has also written his very “personal autobiography,” the famous poem “Why Have You Left the Horse Alone?” in 1995 (Jaggi 2002). In 2001, seven years before his death, Darwish still considered himself an exile. He is quoted in an article by Adam Shatz, “A Poet's Palestine as a Metaphor,” as saying, “I've built my homeland, I've even founded my state -- in my language” (Shatz 2001).

‘Abd al-Rahman Munif is another important Arab author belonging to this category. Born in 1933 in Amman from an Iraqi mother and a Saudi father, he lived and studied law in Baghdad and Cairo in the early fifties, was active politically (he was expelled from Iraq in 1955 for having participated in student demonstrations), obtained a degree in law in Cairo and spent three years -- 1958-1961 -- earning a doctorate in oil economics in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Upon return, he became a member of Iraq’s Ba’ath party, quitting in 1963 because of its increasingly aggressive practices. His Saudi citizenship was revoked the same year. The MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES), which dedicated a special issue to Munif's life and work, indicates that he stayed in Beirut from 1975 until 1981, when the Iraqi-Iranian war broke out. He left for Paris where he devoted himself exclusively to writing novels. The first volumes of *Mudun al-Milh/Cities of Salt* were the most important outcome. He returned to Syria in 1987 (Mejcher-

Atassi 44). *Cities of Salt* (1984-1989) are deemed by critics as his *magnum opus*.⁸ Here is an author who has lived in several world capitals such as Amman, Baghdad, Cairo, Belgrade, and Beirut before settling in Paris for six years at the very apex of his literary career. But even before settling in Paris in the eighties, Munif had already written his very first novel titled *Sharq al-Mutawassit/L'Est de la Méditerranée* in 1975. In this book, Munif built a metaphorical relationship with France, writing in Arabic, but addressing France textually. His entire book was conceived as a report written on the French soil to be addressed to the UN Human Rights Committee in Geneva; the protagonist's mission was not only to write, but also transport this report across the sea from the Middle East to France and then to Switzerland; his only goal (and last wish before dying at the same time, knowing he was terminally-ill) was to testify before the highest international court of law against abuses in a nameless country or region, "east of the Mediterranean." The book's impact and reception more than thirty years after its publication still amazes: every two years a new Arabic edition appears in print and quickly sells out regardless of the Arab country that publishes it.

Like Darwish, Paul Goma, a long-time French resident, has been able to speak truth to power in Paris, where he lives as a political refugee and *apatride*. Like Darwish (a Palestinian with an Israeli residence card but no access to an Israeli passport), Goma also had problems with his identity papers. He remains the most prominent Romanian dissident of the Cold War era against a Communist regime guilty of wide-ranging human rights abuses; he was arrested and tortured in Bucharest in 1977 for having expressed in writing his solidarity with the Czech dissidents and their Charter 1977 movement. After the Romanian government stripped him of his citizenship and forcibly exiled him, he went to Paris, where the French government offered him and Milan

⁸ Mejcher-Atassi, Sonja. "Writing: A 'Tool for Change' 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, an Introduction'", *The MIT Electronic Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 7 (2007): 43-47. Web. 21 Apr. 2009; Hafez, Sabri. "An Arabian Master." *New Left Review*. 2006. Web. 21 Apr. 2009.

Kundera the French citizenship. Goma refused; what he wanted was his Romanian citizenship restored to him along with the rights denied to him and his family. Goma has now lived in exile in Paris for more than thirty years and, like Darwish, he often declares, “My country is the Romanian language.”⁹

Alain Mabanckou, one of the 44 authors who signed Le Bris and Rouaud’s manifesto for a world literature in French declares,

To be a francophone writer is to benefit from the heritage of French literature in general, but it is above all to bring a personal touch to a harmonious whole, one that dissolves borders, erases race, reduces the distance between continents in order to achieve a fraternity in both language and the universe. The francophone family is on its way. We will no longer come from such and such a country, from such and such a continent, but rather from a language. And the proximity we share as creators will simply come from a common universe. (Mabanckou 2)

The perspective Mabanckou develops in generous language becomes inadvertently exclusionary; erasing the borders between countries and continents within this universal ‘francophone family’ erases not only the concrete contemporary historical background of the French/Francophone writers both in its specificity and universality, but also does away with the category of Francophile writers who are Francophone through the sharing of a certain geographical and cultural space (France), rather than through the full sharing of its language. Thus, Mabanckou’s Francophone family acquires new borders defined solely according to linguistic criteria, no matter how much he insists on both “language and universe.” The proximity that exiled world writers of other languages in Paris share with their French/Francophone/Francophile counterparts

⁹ In an interview with Radu Negrescu-Sutu in 2006, Goma declares, “Therefore, I live in Paris where I don’t feel uprooted because my country is the Romanian language.” (“Tradarea Exilului” *Altermedia.Info*, 10 June 2006. Web. 9 Nov. 2010).

is spatial -- not linguistic -- and comes not from a “common universe,” as Mabanckou indicates, but from various specific universes little known to the French cultural milieu.

La francité d’urgence

Searching for the universality of French culture established in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, many French researchers have been making efforts to unearth its far-reaching influence over the world during the twentieth century. While H. Stuart Hughes talks about ‘France’s lingering cultural provincialism’ after WWII, Anne-Rosine Delbart looks at things rather differently, using the term *francité* instead of *Francophonie* to categorize the vast diversity of non-French writers active in Paris during the same period,¹⁰

De la Russie, à l’Argentine et à Cuba, en passant par la Grèce et le Canada, les sonorités des noms des lauréates invitent au voyage: Amin Maalouf, Mohammed Dib, Andreï Makine, Vassilis Alexakis, Hector Bianciotti, Nancy Huston, Eduardo Manet, Boris Schreiber. L’étonnante jeune chinoise Shan Sa reçoit en 1998, sept ans à peine après son arrive en France, le Prix littéraire de la vocation (souvent appelé “le Goncourt du premier roman”) pour *Porte de la Paix céleste*. François Cheng, son aîné de près de la quarante ans sur le chemin de l’exil, obtient le Prix Femina 1998 avec *Le dit de Tianyi*, et, en 2001, le Grand Prix de la Francophonie décerné par l’Académie française. (Delbart 15-16)

She adds,

¹⁰ Rosine Delbart references Senghor, Barthes, and de Ziegler with the origin of the term, considered a better alternative “pour nommer un courant de civilisation dont ni la France ni la francophonie géo-politique n’ont le monopole.” She also proposes three versions: “Une francité donnée sur les territoires de langue française (la France métropolitaine et les DOM-TOM, la Communauté française de Belgique. La Suisse romande et le Québec), une francité reçue sur les territoires autrefois colonisés, une francité acquise en dehors des territoires français.” (Rosine-Delbart 19-20)

La reconnaissance institutionnelle des écrivains étrangers, exotiques ou excentrés n'est certes pas un phénomène nouveau, du Goncourt attribué au Guyanais René Maran pour *Batouala, véritable roman nègre*, en 1921, aux élections à l'Académie Française des Russes Henri Troyat (1959) et Joseph Kessel (1962), du Roumain Eugène Ionesco (1970), de l'Américain Julien Green (1971) du Sénégalais Léopold Sedar Senghor (1984) de l'Argentin Hector Bianciotti (1996) et dernièrement du Chinois François Cheng. (Delbart 16)¹¹

If Delbart prefers the term *francité* for avoiding the exclusivity of the geopolitical *Francophonie*, in this study I insist on the geopolitical as being entirely adequate as a selective criterion for encompassing what she calls *francité acquise* and *francité reçue* in the case of human rights writing in French. I propose an addition to her classification, *la francité d'urgence*, in the case of those writers who, forced by the political situations in their home countries, feel compelled to make a paradoxical aesthetic use of France, its status or its language, whether speaking and writing in French or not. During the twentieth century, an impressive number of writers have done so and wrote books that attained literary and political recognition not only in France, but also in the authors' birthplace and worldwide via French translation (Eugène Ionesco, Mahmoud Darwish, Eduardo Manet, Paul Goma, Abd al-Rahman Munif, Gao XingJian, etc.). Some of those who did not write in French, but resided and produced their best work in Paris, textually addressed France in its real or imagined capacity to represent the quintessential land of freedom.

A close examination reveals that the reason behind these writers' decisions to choose France and mainly Paris as their place of residence is the difficult political situation back home.

¹¹ Rosine-Delbart believes that the relationship to French as a fundamental split with the maternal language that Romanian writers Emil Cioran and Ion Caraion confess to is similar to that described by the Algerian Kateb Yacine and in her book offers quotes from all three.

Appalled by the rise of fascism in Romania, Ionesco made repeated efforts to leave the country for France with his wife after WWII started in Eastern Europe.¹² Mahmoud Darwish had been an exile in many countries after 1970 due to political reasons before his decade-long Parisian exile, but instead of going to an Arab country's capital as before, he chose Paris, a Western capital, after the start of the Lebanese civil war.

After the destruction of Beirut, after the "heroic" defeat of the PLO in Lebanon, after the Palestinian *fida'iyun* ("the ones who sacrifice themselves" or "the freedom fighters") and their leader Yasir Arafat were sent off to sea on a Greek ship bound for Tunisia, after the Palestinian intellectual resistance scattered around the Arab world and Europe, Darwish isolated himself in his Parisian apartment and composed *Memory for Forgetfulness*.

Three years had elapsed since the Israeli bombardment of Beirut. (Reigeluth 299)

Eduardo Manet, who, similarly to Ionesco, had returned to Cuba with renewed hope after Castro's Revolution, leaves for France in 1968 after Castro publicly states its solidarity with the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, leaving no doubt about his increasingly totalitarian practices.¹³ Paul Goma is forcibly exiled by the communist Romanian authorities in 1977, and chooses France because of his Paris-based Romanian activist supporters and friends. 'Abd al-Rahman Munif will remain in France for five years after fleeing the civil war in Lebanon. The list of writers in similar situations is considerably longer.

¹² Nancy Lane writes about Ionesco's reason for leaving Romania after having established a good professional reputation and having married Romanian Rodica Burileanu in Bucharest in 1936, "For the next two years, he worked as a French teacher, became the literary critic for the magazine *Facla* and enjoyed a growing reputation as a critic of promise. Alarmed by the rising tide of fascism around him, he determined to get back to France [...]" (Lane 3).

¹³ In his memoir titled *Un Cubain à Paris*, Eduardo Manet describes Néstor Almendros and Ramon Suarez' reasons for leaving Cuba as similar to his, "Ces deux chefs opérateurs de talent ont quitté Cuba, comme moi, en 1968. La création d'un Parti Communiste calqué sur celui de l'Union Soviétique en 1965, une répression de plus en plus présente et l'invasion de la Tchécoslovaquie approuvée par Fidel Castro ont eu raison de tout espoir de voir se maintenir une révolution socialiste à visage humain à Cuba. Ramon Suarez s'est installé pour un temps en Espagne. Almendros et moi avons choisi Paris" (Manet 55).

Human rights narratives

Who writes human rights narratives during the twentieth century? From China to Eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, to Cuba, geopolitical contexts force intellectuals from those parts of the world where suffering is part of daily life to give (fictionalized or documentary) expression to their grievances. The creation of the United Nations and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by this international legislative body offered the world a common frame to uphold a human rights standard across the globe. In *Human Rights and Narrated Lives* (2004), Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith explain the wide-ranging political contexts that triggered counter-memorial practices under the form of human rights literature,

Not only movements of national liberation from colonial rule, but involved complex negotiations-by states, communities and individuals-of the psychological, political and economic, and cultural legacies of a colonial past that had to be remembered, made, and remade for the sake of national futures. For its part, the Cold War effectively remapped the globe through spheres of influence that displaced earlier spheres of colonialism. Cold War politics also sparked contentious debates within the United Nations about the nature of rights, particularly the relative priority of “negative” rights that protect individuals from the state and “positive” rights that pertain to aspirational goals and an enabling standard of living that might extend human dignity and freedom for everyone. (Schaffer, Smith 14-15)

Schaffer and Smith discuss human rights narratives’ role as well. According to them, published narratives, as meta-sites for social critique,

sometimes unsettle received conceptions of personal and national identity, sometimes dismantle the foundational fictions through which nations and imagined communities construct and reconstruct their histories, sometimes promote new platforms for and platforms of political action, and sometimes produce a backlash of actions that forestall recognition and redress. In local communities and through global flows, stories sometimes enable the reconstitution of lost subjectivities, call forth new narratives of affiliation and belonging, and open up new international debates on the practical means through which to achieve justice with respect for the historical, national, religious and philosophic traditions both consonant with and different from those foundational to the UDHR. (Schaffer, Smith 31-32)

Human rights narratives in French written by world writers across the globe are numerous. This study offers three main examples, grouped according to the writers' countries of origin. What these French and Francophone writers share is a desire to speak truth to power in a cultural and political center (Paris, France) about human rights abuses happened elsewhere. Writers of human rights literature in French from Morocco, Romania, and Cuba illustrate this category.

A Francophone Arabic literature of human rights

Social injustice and political repression by means of arrest, exile, disappearance, incarceration, torture and death have been an overwhelming part of the modern social reality of every Arab country across the Middle East and North-Africa. In the Middle East, political prison narratives have become a prevalent genre in the last few decades despite the Arab governments' extensive attempts to suppress them. Overwhelmingly, these have been written by Arab secular intellectuals who regarded Marxist-Leninist ideology as the only alternative to curing social ills

in a Middle East marked by a strong clerical presence in the social and political life. One of the most influential contemporary Moroccan writers, Abdelkader Chaoui, who studied philosophy and like many of his generation, was for a long time a declared Marxist-Leninist, links his political and intellectual trajectory to the politics of the *métropole* when declaring, “J’ai eu mon bac en juin 1968, un mois après la révolution de mai en France.”¹⁴ Already mentioned, ‘Abd al-Rahman Munif’s work *Sharq al-Mutawassit/L’Est de la Méditerranée* (1975) is a novel whose main message is that the reverberation of the social suffering caused by massive imprisonment and repression often transcends national borders and regional historical specificity, rendering them irrelevant whenever marked by horrific pain and crushed aspirations for freedom. Munif’s relationship with France is not only political, but also metaphorical. He writes in Arabic, but addresses France textually in his book, in which the protagonist’s mission is not only to write but also transport an incriminatory report on human rights abuses in a nameless country or region “east of the Mediterranean.”

In contrast to Munif’s book, a fictional account of the prison experience, Tahar Ben Jelloun’s *Cette aveuglante absence de lumière/ This Blinding Absence of Light* appropriates a real political prisoner’s voice, is written in French, and has been well received in France and the European space (Ben Jelloun was awarded the Impac Award for this novel in Dublin, Ireland in 2004). However, the book was quickly surrounded by controversy in the Arab cultural space after a disagreement between the author and the real former prisoner of the infamous Tazmamart prison (the book’s protagonist). Ben Jelloun’s Moroccan audience insistently questioned the authenticity of his narrative voice, disregarding its high literary quality. Appropriating the I, or the subjectivity of a former victim of human rights abuse in the name of eloquently speaking for

¹⁴ Boukhari, Karim. “Portrait. Abdelkader Chaoui. Ma vie, ma plume.” *TelQuel OnLine*, 10 Jul. 2009. Web. 5 Nov. 2009.

another, did not play well with Arab audiences. The fact that the victim was still alive and claimed that his traumatic memories have been exploited by a writer for literary or monetary gain proved more important for the Moroccan than the French or international audience. Yet even more important for Ben Jelloun's Moroccan readership was that the author had never been an active voice against oppression during the reign of Hassan II. This was an accusation that Munif never faced, as he had had his Saudi and Iraqi citizenship revoked after being persecuted for his political writings and beliefs; he died without renouncing them and without receiving the full recognition he deserved. Differences notwithstanding, Munif and Ben Jelloun's cases are representative of

how narratives that bear witness to suffering and impact differently upon dominant and marginalized, subaltern and outgroup communities, emerge in local settings that are inflected by and inflect the global; how in these settings rights discourse enables and constrains individual and collective subjects of narration; how the generic shapes that stories take are contingent upon the specific cultural, historical, and political contexts in which they arise; how acts of narration affect survivors, their communities, and dispersed audiences; how they raise questions about the status of evidence, the historical past, and narrative truth. (Schaffer, Smith 7)

Fatima Mernissi is another contemporary Moroccan writer and sociologist who wrote extensively in French on the human rights situation in Morocco. Her works are largely concerned with women's economic and political rights in her country as an Islamic society (*Shahrazad n'est pas marocaine, autrement elle serait salariée!* (1988); *L'Amour dans les pays musulman* (1984). Two more important figures illustrate this category; Abraham Serfaty and Abdellatif Laâbi are two Moroccan dissidents forcibly exiled who have written accounts of their many years of

imprisonment and torture during the Years of Lead under the dictatorship of Hassan II (the king of Morocco from 1961 to 1999). Among Serfaty's books in French are titles such as *Dans les Prisons du Roi - Écrits de Kénitra sur le Maroc* (1992) and *La Mémoire de l'Autre* (1993). Abdellatif Laâbi produced an impressive work of poetry, novels, plays, political essays and translations; he has lived in Paris since 1985, and among his titles are *Le Chemin des Ordalies* (1982) and *Le Fond de la Jarre* (2002). Many other Moroccan writers of French and residents of France not named here accompany and continue their work alongside their Algerian, Tunisian or Lebanese counterparts, such as Assia Djebar, Malika Mokkeddem, Muhammad Dib, Kateb Yacine, Farida Belghoul, Leila Sebbar, Amin Maalouf, etc.

A Francophone East European literature of human rights

Decades before the North-African prison accounts written in French in the nineties received international attention, East European intellectuals exiled in France had provoked cultural and political debates with their denunciation of political oppression, human rights activism and testimonial literary *oeuvres*. After years of what has been called by East European émigrés the 'conspiracy of silence' of the French Left intellectuals in the fifties and the sixties, Solzhenitsyn's publishing of *The Gulag Archipelago* (1974) shocked the consciousness of many French Marxist intellectuals. Eastern European poets, writers, journalists and activists exiled in France— with Eugène Ionesco a leading figure — had been protesting against the oppressive regimes in the Eastern bloc and their Marxist-Leninist ideology since the 1950s and the 1960s, fighting also against what Sanda Stolojan called "the dictatorship of pro-Communist, pro-Soviet Marxist Left" in Paris. In her article titled "The Intellectual Exile in France" she writes,

For a long time, the international communism and its collaterals in the West have

intoxicated public opinion and especially Parisian intellectuals, as it is already known. A paradoxical aspect, in the same France where Romanian refugees were admitted without much difficulty, the situation of the intellectual, of the exiled intellectual in particular, was problematic. As a rule, the one who run away from communism was dubious in the eyes of the [French] intelligentsia, which was setting the tone. In Paris, one lived under the dictatorship of the Marxist pro-communist, pro-Soviet Left. Anyone who tried unmasking the truth about the communist system in power was labeled as “visceral” or “base” anti-communist, or as a retrograde conservator. A retrograde. With the occasion of a meeting between Eastern European intellectuals, the French poet Pierre Emmanuel answered exiled poet Ion Cusa, "on ne peut pas vous croire car vous êtes concerné". The testimonies were hitting the wall of communist propaganda and were buried under the conspiracy of silence. In May 1968, under the eyes of their older ideologues (like Jean Paul-Sartre) or newer ones (like Cohn-Bendit), Maoist and anarchists set the Latin Quarter on fire. For an instant, France had been shaken and stood on the edge of the abyss. Solzhenitsyn's appearance changed in some sense the course of history. (Stolojan 2003-2006)

The question of belonging and non-belonging to a cultural-literary space in exile affects aspects such as the reception and audience of the writers' work, especially when the message is intensely political. As Schaffer and Smith aptly point out, “the [human rights] narrative reaches broader audiences beyond the local community, but those audiences subject the narrative to different and unpredictable readings, put the narrative to different and unpredictable uses. At any historical moment, only certain stories are tellable and intelligible to a broader audience” (Schaffer, Smith 32). The solution found by prominent Eastern European intellectual figures

from all former Eastern bloc countries residing in France after WWII was to publish their own journals either in their respective languages (Romanian, Russian, Czech, etc.) or in French. Publications in French gathered around them an array of writers attuned to different cultural and linguistic traditions, yet connected by common political backgrounds.

These exiled intellectuals also founded several important institutions such as C.I.E.L., (Comité des intellectuels pour l'Europe des libertés), whose president was Eugène Ionesco, and with which various French intellectuals, such as the historian Roy Ladurie, were affiliated. The literary and political journal titled *Les Cahiers de l'Est*, published by Sanda Stolojan brought together, among many others, the writer Jan Kott, historians Denis de Rougemont and François Fejtö, and Czech novelist Jan Skvorecki. The journal *Cahiers de l'Est*, whose editor-in-chief was Dumitru Tsépeneag, was the first literary magazine open to émigré writers from all over the East European countries voluntarily or forcibly exiled and subsequently censored in their own countries. They wanted to create an ethics of recognition within the Western countries signatories of the UDHR in regards to the oppression in the former Communist bloc. Eugène Ionesco, Monica Lovinescu, Paul Goma, Dumitru Tsépeneag, Marie-France Ionesco, Virgil Gheorghiu and others produced human rights writing and/or militated actively in Paris against Ceausescu's regime in Romania. Their voices were consonant with those of Milan Kundera, François Fejtö, Ismaïl Kadare, Andrei Siniavski/Sinyavsky, Julia Kristeva, etc.

A Francophone Cuban literature of human rights

Eduardo Manet's work is inscribed in a larger tradition of Hispanic writers residing in Paris and originally from Latin America, the Caribbean or Spain. At the time when 'Abd al-Rahman Munif wrote his book about human rights abuses east of the Mediterranean (1975), Julio

Cortázar published the prize-winning novel titled *Libro de Manuel* (1973), in which he exposed, in an absurdist and disconnected narrative style the tortures suffered by Latin-American political prisoners. Manet, a Cuban who had been writing in Paris theater plays dealing with political assassinations and torture since the sixties, must have been thoroughly familiar with Cortázar's political and intellectual work, as well as with that of other Hispanic writers active in Paris, since throughout the twentieth century the French capital had been a hotbed of exiled Spanish, Caribbean and Latin-American writers fleeing oppressive regimes either before or after WWII. Names such as Miguel Ángel Asturias, Agustín Gómez-Arcos, Manuel Scorza, Fernando Arrabal, José Bergamín, Juan Goytisolo, the Argentinean Copi and others who wrote works of political urgency must have colored intensely Manet's Parisian literary milieu (Asturias' novel, *El Señor Presidente*, written in Spanish in the thirties during the author's Parisian exile is hailed by some critics as the first real dictator novel).

An exploration of Manet's novel *Zone Interdite* (1984) has to deal with the modalities in which the poetics and politics of voluntary exile uses novelistic language as a fictional account "to document alien passage," the real and metaphorical passage not only of Cuban or Latin-American exiles through spaces more merciful to them, but also that of the "boat-people," or *apatride* political refugees symbolizing every individual condemned to traverse the vicissitudes of history (Schwartz 89). The concrete identity of foreign nationals forcibly expelled from home and then forced into menial jobs in their host countries or the identity of those who oppress them at home or abroad has no acute or ultimate relevance. Manet's world of injustice is colorless in terms of national markers, names, or maps; this version of an abusive, authoritarian, yet nameless country ambitiously and metaphorically represents more than an imagined fictional space. Conscious of the multiplicity of oppression's faces in a Paris colored by an intellectual dissident

potpourri from all over the world, Manet opts in this book for a larger and more complex indictment of dictatorial leadership anywhere in the world not only in Cuba. The Cuban revolution and the subsequent social and political order it generated was extremely important to all exiled Spanish-speaking writers. Fernanda Eberstadt for example, writing an article on Goytisolo in *The New York Times*, points to his prescient reaction to both the relevance and *dénouement* of revolutionary movements,

Although he was an initial enthusiast for revolutionary movements in Cuba, Indochina and Algeria, Goytisolo was quick to point out how freedom-loving guerrillas, once in power, tended to morph into dictators backed by an omnipresent secret police. In the 60's, he was one of the first writers on the left to acknowledge that Fidel Castro had turned (as he wrote) 'that ex-paradise of a Caribbean island. . . into a silent and lugubrious floating concentration camp.' (Eberstadt 2)

About the possibility that Paris would represent a political and cultural alternative and catalyst for a real or narrative exilic passage characterized not only by the sense of homelessness and nostalgia, but also by imperative political writing and activism, Eduardo Manet declared in *Le Monde*,

Deux pôles-et seulement deux pôles-attirent tous ceux et toutes celles qui, en Amérique latine, rêvent de culture, d'art, et ont soif de cet héritage humaniste qui sert de bastion de résistance contre les dictatures larvées ou les gouvernements dits "forts" que beaucoup des pays de ce continent subissent. Car en ce début des années 50, les généraux règnent sur presque toute l'Amérique latine. Deux pôles agissent sur la jeunesse comme un aimant: New York, où toutes les chances sont permises, et Paris. (Delbart 2005)

Paraphrasing Marcy E. Schwartz, one could note that Paris is marked by an urban topography

of desire not only for the Latin Americans; Eastern Europeans have insisted also on the role that France and its center have played in their nation-building projects and literary movements as key factors in the “ongoing process of cultural definition” (Schwartz 24). No matter to what degree France and *la métropole* prove to be real or imagined by these intellectuals, their frenchified spatial and cultural imagination is conducive to exploring issues such as displacement, exile, oppression, and transnational human rights. Schwartz’ opinion that the artificiality of the medium, that of Paris as a sophisticated modern invention of a never-before-seen cosmopolitanism with no real roots, but persistent in the twentieth-century imagination of Latin American intellectuals rings true in the case of other diasporic Parisian writers as well. Paris still exudes for many of them the vibrant cultural values of freedom, democracy, and human rights. To the nomadism, psychological conflicts of otherness, homelessness, and nostalgia for the motherland that, for example, Francophone North-African writing often displays, other exiled communities and diasporas in Paris provide a corrective supplement: the freedom of expression and political activism rendered possible in and by the center, indicting either foreign dictatorial regimes, former colonial practices or their extension during postcolonial or post-independence times.

Francophonie and human rights

It is a known *adage* that language and literature innovation stems from political change. The “French cultural provincialism” that H. Stuart Hughes mentions in his book, *Sophisticated Rebels* (1988) may well come from the fact that, as he explains, more important political changes were happening elsewhere after the WWII than in France. Referring in 1987 to the political situation during the last third of the twentieth century in Europe, he finds that the constellation of

two “supremely articulate peoples, the French and the British shine less brightly than they did a generation or two ago,”

Observers who have tried to define social evolution of those peoples during the 1970s have sounded puzzled; neither of their subjects was changing as markedly as the script demanded. In Britain, there remained “a gulf between the proponents of the new culture and the older generation,” in France, an “insular....debate” or series of debates, a self-concentration which mattered less in the old days, when French culture and thought were globally supreme and radiated their own universality.¹⁵ As the century entered its last quarter, innovation in political culture for the most part was springing up elsewhere -- in Germany, in Eastern Europe, and along the Mediterranean. (Hughes 3)

Although Hughes focuses his inquiry on the European movements of dissent between 1968 and 1987, his perspective could be perhaps extended to imply that important political culture changes were also happening during that time in China, the Middle East, Latin America or Asia. And political discontent, as he warns, was less about ideology, hegemony, or classes as it had to do with specific and diverse historical contexts. While France’s most notable intellectuals such as Barthes, Foucault, Lacan, or Althusser were busy demythologizing and deconstructing notions of subjectivity, hegemony, individual agency, and humanism, other world intellectuals like Milan Kundera or Assia Djebar dedicated themselves to the struggle against the regimes of “organized forgetting,” to use Kundera’s famous expression. Here is where I interject to add that a major role in the wind of change in the French cultural life was played by the human rights writing in French (as well as world literature written on the French soil or addressing France) by writers insisting on humanist values such as the universality of human rights, individual agency or

¹⁵ H. Stuart Hughes quotes Arthur Marwick’s book here, *British Society since 1995*. London: Penguin, 1982. Print. Also, that of John Ardagh, *France in the 1980s*. London: Penguin, 1982. Print.

historical epistemology, insisting that neither France nor the global community was done with disposing with them.

Speaking about dissident literature framed around the French space and language invites a novel examination of the works of a plethora of authors who have never been studied comparatively before. Exiled or not, dissident French, Francophone and Francophile writers and journalists are united by more than linguistic criteria: the common denominator is their similar political aspirations and needs. Dissidence organized around French culture works with the assumption that France is the land where revolt is welcomed, resistance is revered and freedom is reality. An example of a Francophone-Francophile writer's credo before WWII is offered by Ramona Bordei-Boca: "Pour Istrati, le français représente les Droits de L'Homme et la Liberté si chère à son Coeur (..)" (Bordei-Boca 369).

The re-conceptualization of French-Francophone literature around the *francité d'urgence* becomes important due to the impressive amount of human rights literature produced in French during the twentieth century. This *francité* is culturally formed and formulated around cultural influences and historical conditions. It is and has been formed in the space between oppression, protest, rejection, denial and acceptance according to each period, sometimes with significant changes from one decade to the next, especially during the second half of the last century. To quote Schaffer and Smith's study here, human rights literature

explores how narratives that bear witness to suffering and impact differently upon dominant and marginalized, subaltern and outgroup communities, emerge in local settings that are inflected by and inflect the global; how in these settings rights discourse enables and constrains individual and collective subjects of narration; how the generic shapes that stories take are contingent upon the specific cultural, historical, and political

contexts in which they arise; how acts of narration affect survivors, their communities, and dispersed audiences; how they raise questions about the status of evidence, the historical past, and narrative truth; how the affective force of stories impacts upon political, legal, cultural, and aesthetic vectors of experience, knowledge, and action; how life narratives are transformed as they become attached to a range of different desires, politics, and interpretations in arenas far from their immediate locus of meaning; and how and under what conditions their calls for recognition, response, and redress are mediated by the formal and informal structures of governments, politics, and culture. (Schaffer, Smith 7)

Human rights literature in French is important to categorize and analyze as such because it allows the researcher to connect these multiethnic diasporas in France and survey the connection between them as an expression of local, regional and global politics. The personal and professional paths of Francophone and French-Francophone North-African, Cuban, Latin-American and Eastern European writers in Paris intersect significantly. As part of the same literary juries or the same human rights associations and organizations, more or less “peripheral” writers like Abdellatif Laâbi, Eduardo Manet, Eugène Ionesco, Milan Kundera, or Dumitru Tsépeneag interact in the centre, creating a fluid and mostly unacknowledged (sometimes formal, sometimes informal) networks testifying to social suffering across the globe. Schaffer and Smith’s definition of what constitutes the field of human rights applies to these exilic-diasporic networks in Paris as well,

By the phrase “the field of human rights” we signal formal networks and informal networks of intersecting domains through which life narratives are enjoined to human rights activism. Networks refer to independent, organized, hierarchical, and

geographically dispersed organizations and institutions that investigate, promote, monitor and adjudicate rights claims. (Schaffer, Smith 8)

More and more the manner of looking at Francophone literature as an expression of personal and intellectual freedom makes its presence felt. Martine Fernandes groups the Francophone writers she analyzes in her book, *Les Écrivaines francophones en liberté* (2007), according to the spaces they occupy. One is circumstantial, defined through the political-institutional and geo-cultural positioning and encompasses those authors whose writing is framed by the postcolonial hybrid mentalities (like the Algerian Assia Djebar, coming from a new nation to the formerly colonial space yet writing from a place of exile); another group lives in the “center” of the Francophone space, but writes from a culturally decentered position (the Beur writer Farida Belghoul, born in France from Algerian parents); a third category is “les Départments français d’outre-mer dans les Caraïbe, institutionnellement “au centre” et/mais géo-culturellement “à la périphérie” (the example she offers is that of Maryse Condé, who returns to Guadeloupe after having lived in France and the US). The second space Fernandes proposes is that of the French language as a writing language considered from the perspective of a linguistic and literary post-Francophonie characterized by a hybridity no longer tributary to unique linguistic norms or unique literary references. In her opinion, even if French is the linguistic criteria, heterolinguisism would be the reference for this enlarged community; this type of French is suffused with regional differences and marked by a generalized post-francophone mentality deterritorializing the language and the literature even in the interior of the linguistic and cultural space of France (as examples, she offers the writing of Farida Belghoul, and Arab-French writer, and Calixthe Beyala, an Afro-French writer, who make recourse to particular idiolects while writing in French, producing stylistic effects emerging from their singular and collective experiences marked by socio-cultural

and geographic differences from the literary French characterizing the French canon.

It is surprising how many Francophone diasporas and their cultural or literary expression are still unexplored. In the Introduction to *Francophonie et multiculturalisme dans les Balkans* Pierre Brunel writes, “il est des écrivains qui, sans appartenir à une collectivité considérée comme francophone, ont choisi, pour des raisons historiques, familiales, plotiques, psychologiques, culturelles, our autres, d’écrire en français. Il s’agit d’une diaspora qui n’est pas du tout négligeable et dont la critique littéraire doit commencer à considerer...” (Brunel 5-6).

Not only are Francophone Croatian, Bulgarian or Hungarian literatures disregarded, but French/Francophone authors from these areas are only occasionally examined and even then only individually. Moreover, larger diasporas speaking truth to Western powers about world political events are in the same situation. Although the 1989 wind of change that swept across Eastern Europe toward the end of the year had already made its presence felt in China in June during the Tiananmen protests, Chinese Francophone works testifying to these events have not been brought together critically with Francophone East European anti-Communist writing.

Considering that after the 1989 Tiananmen Square’s massacre, tales of the repression came out not from China, but “have become public in different contexts -- geographic, linguistic, cultural, and temporal- and through different fields of recovery -- interviews, stories, documentaries, film, art, music, and silence,” one wonders how much of these events reached the Western world and France, and when (Schaffer, Smith 192).

While official China closed down its remembering processes, the transnational Chinese intellectual diaspora, made up in part of dissident exiles in residency in the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, and England, participated in “world remembering” in another place. Their stories, recovered in particular in and through the Western media, were

translated into new landscapes of memory where they were subjected to new meanings, interpretations, controversies, and usages. (Schaffer, Smith 192)

Chinese writers of French or Chinese writers residing on the French soil have written testimonial works attesting to these events, but they have only been discussed by French-Francophone studies on an individual basis and not integrated into a larger Chinese Francophone tradition, although France has a considerable Chinese French community. Names such as François Cheng, Dai Sijie, Gao Xingjian, or the Chinese Canadian Ying Chen are only some of the authors who can be mentioned here. Sijie and Xingjian are famous for having written in France about forms of dissent during the Cultural Revolution in China and after.

What do these Francophone diasporas have in common? Margins speaking the language of the center in more than one sense form a “dense flow of connections among groups and peoples working on behalf of human rights that transcend national, ethnic, racial, class, gender” (Schaffer, Smith 8). Their artistic and political discursive practices take the form of resistant, dissident or feminist literature and activism, to name only a few. These practices translate as “global flows of rights discourse” that “extend into and are transformed by multiple contact zones where ideas, institutions, cultural practices, and peoples mingle and contend with one another, with Enlightenment legacies, with other traditions of philosophical and religious principles, with global transformations, and with ongoing struggles through which people take responsibility for the “global quest for justice”” (Schaffer, Smith 230).

Peripheries speaking the language of the center, such as the formerly colonized Francophone spaces, inserted their cultural production into the world literary scene after these countries gradually obtained independence from France after WWII. Their aesthetic production has been analyzed by the Anglo-Saxon critical scholarship within the interdisciplinary fields of

postcolonial and Francophone studies. Much has been said and still is about the intersection of oppression under the occupation by the colonizers and the oppression of the traditional patriarchal mores at home. This large corpus of writing has not been analyzed under the definition of human rights literature where it could have encountered and shared similarities of style and concerns with other categories of Francophone literatures. While some of these margins' perspectives are indeed subaltern, other point to subalterns subordinated to powers other than the French centre -- a centre which, nevertheless, remains problematically situated in dialogue or in opposition to the margins' internally or externally oppressive centers.

In a public address given at Laval University in 1966, Léopold Senghor offered his definition of *Francophonie*,¹⁶

la francophonie est l'ensemble des peuples qui emploient le français comme langue nationale, langue officielle, langue de communication internationale ou, simplement, comme langue de culture. Une sorte de latin des temps modernes. La francophonie, c'est aussi la communauté d'esprit qui résulte de ces différents emplois. Cependant, en ce dernier sens, je préfère le mot francité (...). La francité, c'est d'abord l'esprit français, tel qu'il apparaît encore dans la langue française. (Tshisungu 3-4)

The *francité* that Senghor proposed has been perceived by some critics as an essentialized notion.¹⁷ By recuperating a (romanticized or not) French tradition of freedom and public protest, the French/Francophone/Francophile authors mentioned in this essay challenge a solely essentialized view of the francité. *Francité* is not necessarily positively understood (see the

¹⁶ Tshisungu wa Tshisungu. "La Conception Senghorienne de la Francophonie." *Ethiopiennes, Revue negro-africaine de littérature et de philosophie*, 5: 3-4. (1988) 50-51. Web. 5 Feb 2009.

¹⁷ See Bostock, William Walter. "Assessing the Authenticity of a Supra-National Language-Based Movement: *La Francophonie*." *Language in geographic context*. Ed. Colin H. Williams. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, (1988):73-110. Print.

rejection from a significant part of the French Left denounced by East European and Cuban Francophone literature authors in the sixties and the seventies), inviting, nevertheless, a balanced interpretation. Segments of the French intellectual establishment made great efforts to create various forms of support (including academic positions financed by the French Ministry of Education ensuring the exilic authors' survival in France -- Ferdinand Braudel is just one of them -- see Stéphane Dufoix' study, *Politiques d'exil*, 2002). Their efforts to preserve the voices fighting injustice can be interpreted as a voluntary and necessary extension of their own Frenchness, or *esprit français* to these dissident voices, implicitly recognizing a commonality of interests and solidarity expressed politically and aesthetically. *Francité* is also neither exclusively internally produced, nor intrinsic to the French. In the article, "Reflection on Exile" (2000), Edward Said quotes George Steiner's concept of Western literature as extraterritorial, having been produced by exiles and refugees,

Modern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees. In the United States, academic, intellectual and aesthetic thought is what it is today because of refugees from fascism, communism, and other regimes given to the oppression and expulsion of dissidents. The critic George Steiner had even proposed the perceptive thesis that a whole genre of twentieth-century Western literature is "extraterritorial," a literature by and about exiles, symbolizing the age of the refugee. (Said 173-74)

By considering only the French literary-prize-awarding habits of the last century as enumerated by Delbart in her study, one can argue that *francité* has as many external sources as inner ones. Understood in this light, Senghor's *francité* and *esprit français* have the capability of encompassing a *Francophonie* gathering under its *aegis* a multitude of Francophone literatures, comfortably accommodating their colonial, postcolonial and non-postcolonial expressions, while

still allowing for multiple categorizations and conceptualizations. The *francité d'urgence* removes the suspicion of essentialization from this term by offering a novel conceptualization of French/Francophone and French-Francophone authors and also the literatures they represent within specific historical and cultural contexts.

Chapter Two

Human Rights East of the Mediterranean

“In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountain start,
In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise.”
W. H. Auden “*In the Memory of W. B. Yeats*”

A Multivocality of Rights

Modern Francophone, Arabophone, and Anglophone literatures have been enriched by the Arab writers’ contribution to the competing and complementary world memories and histories in ways that are increasingly acknowledged. This chapter explores the Francophone and Arabophone political prison literatures that display characteristics of traditional human rights discourses, while remaining also refreshingly experimental. While human rights theorists constantly discuss the legal, political, historical, or psychological frameworks for delineating and conducting more efficient rights discourses, the Arab authors engaged in narrating the story of human rights attest to the exceptional power of the literary in the modern battle for human rights.

A long and stellar list of Egyptian writers who have been imprisoned for their writings such as Edwar Al-Kharrat, Sonallah Ibrahim, Nawal Saadawi, Yusuf Idris, ‘Abd al-Hakim Qasim, and Jamal al-Ghitani, points towards this generalized phenomenon across the Arab world. According to literary critic Roger Allen’s genealogy,

While this list and its implications for writers’ freedom are regrettable, to put it mildly, it needs to be put into a broader context: at least these facts about Egyptian novelists are known. Reference to the Index on Censorship shows with disarming regularity that writers in several other countries in the Arab world who cross the line of officially established acceptability may suffer still worse fates: life imprisonment and even death,

sometimes announced, sometimes not. When contemporary critical schools postulate the disappearance of the author, they are clearly not envisaging such a literal interpretation of their theoretical explorations by governmental authorities. (Allen 39)

The number of writers who survived their prison terms to publish scathing accounts of their countries' oppressive regimes in a variety of languages is considerable, with many having had their works translated into English. Among them are Sonallah Ibrahim, Egypt (*The Smell of It, The Committee*), Nawal Saadawi, Egypt (*Memoirs from the Women's Prison*), Sherif Hetata, Egypt (*The Eye with an Iron Lid*), Fatna El-Bouih, Morocco (*Talk of Darkness*, 2008), Tahar Ben Jelloun, Morocco (*This Blinding Absence of Light*), Zaynab Al-Ghazzali (*Return of the Pharaoh*), Latifah Zayyat, Egypt (*The Search: Personal Papers*), Haifa Zangana, Iraq (*Dreaming of Baghdad*), etc.

The year 1975 marks the publication of a human rights book well-known in Arab *belles-lettres* entitled *East of the Mediterranean*, but it registers also the first official acknowledgement of the Western world that human rights in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) should be part of their regional and international political agenda. Thirty-three European states, the United States, and Canada signed the Helsinki Accords in 1975, with Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia contributing to the discussions that generated one section of the Helsinki Declaration; this section, titled "Questions relating to Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean," stipulates that the participating states, "convinced that security in Europe is to be considered in the broader context of world security and is closely linked with security in the Mediterranean area as a whole," and "believing that the strengthening of security and the intensification of co-operation in Europe would stimulate positive processes in the Mediterranean region," express their intention to "contribute towards peace, security and justice

in the region.”

For the first time in the twentieth-century, Europe, the US, and Canada affirm that the participating States and the non-participating Mediterranean States possess a common interest not only in peace and economic issues, but also in human rights. As a result of the 1975 Helsinki Accords, a parallel consequence, -- namely to acquire at last a legal frame to protest internationally -- underpinned Eastern European and MENA writers' impetus to draw on the same legal tools and language for resistance and representation in their fight against abusive regimes. Examples of dissident writings from Eastern European countries imbued with references to the UDHR, the Helsinki Conference, The Madrid conference, etc. include the works of former political prisoners such as Irina Ratushinskaya (Russia), Paul Goma (Romania), Adam Michnik (Poland), Vaclav Havel (Czechoslovakia), and countless others, claiming their rights by invoking the international legal documents signed by their respective governments in Helsinki. In the Middle East and North Africa, the situation during the second part of the twentieth century is similar. Writers from twenty Arab countries, like countless ordinary citizens, spent time in prison for protesting dictatorial or authoritarian government policies while wondering about their rights.

The two writers selected for analysis in this chapter reflect the situation of the intellectual both under the regimes of the Right and the regimes of the Left in the Arab world. One is Iraqi-Saudi author, 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, and the other Moroccan poet Abdellatif Laâbi. Their prison literature is considered among the most moving for twentieth-century Arab letters, enthralling readers with the representation of human suffering in its extraordinary multiplicity of voices and temporalities, while making a case for the universality of trauma and the human responses to it. I introduce Munif and Laâbi for reasons of their stylistically innovative

techniques as much as for the impact of their political message. This chapter starts with a discussion of Munif's contribution to the Arabophone and Francophone prison literature and the ways in which he presents the role of France and the role of women in the political context of the modern Middle East. Although, in contrast to Laâbi, he has not experienced prison, his detention novel offers not a generic, but a highly individual response to the suffering under dictatorship. The chapter continues with the exploration of Abdellatif Laâbi's prison memoir written in French, which offers an exploration of similar themes, yet in a Moroccan, thus North African context.

Regardless of their Moroccan or Iraqi-Saudi roots, both writers are keenly aware of their aesthetic lineage and legitimacy drawn from the universality of human rights passionately argued by Charles Malik, a fellow Arab intellectual, before the United Nations in 1948. A critical approach to the Arabophone, Francophone, or international character and impact of Munif or Laâbi's aesthetic and political human rights activism must closely link them to the fundamental role that Charles Malik, a Lebanese philosopher and diplomat representing the Arab League at the United Nations in 1946; Malik was one of the four drafting members of the UN Human Rights Commission led by Eleanor Roosevelt that drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1946-1948. "The moral terrain of international relations was forever altered late one night in Paris, on December 10, when the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights without a single dissenting vote" (Glendon, xix).

'Abd al-Rahman Munif is one of the writers referencing these human rights international legal documents in his fictional and non-fictional work. During the last decades of the twentieth-century, his fiction and non-fiction writings were so influential in the Arab world that many

intellectuals believed he should have been awarded the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature.¹⁸ (That year, the prize went to another fellow nominee, the Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz).

The poetics and politics of Arab human rights

‘Abd al-Rahman Munif was born in 1933 in Amman, the son of an Iraqi mother and a Saudi father. He lived and studied law in Baghdad and Cairo in the early fifties, where he was active politically. (By 1955 he was expelled from Iraq for having participated in student demonstrations). He obtained a degree in law in Cairo and spent three years, 1958-1961, earning a doctorate in oil economics in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Upon his return to Iraq, he becomes a member of the Ba’ath party, quitting in 1963 due to its increasingly harsh policies. During the same year, his Saudi citizenship is also revoked. He settles in Damascus to work as an expert in the Ministry of Petroleum, and then leaves for Beirut in 1973, where he works as a journalist and starts manifesting serious interest in literature. Due to the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, he moves to Baghdad, working as a consultant for the OPEC and as editor-in-chief of the magazine called *Al-Naft wa tanmyia* (*Petroleum and Development*). The Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) drives him away again from Baghdad. In 1981, he leaves for France, where he completes his *Cities of Salt* quintet (1984-89), considered by many critics his *magnum opus*. He moves back to Damascus with his family in 1986, where he continues to reside until his death in 2004.

Munif’s intellectual integrity has gained him much respect, especially among the younger

¹⁸ The two M’s—Mahfouz and Munif—became the patriarchs of Arab literature. Mahfouz’s Balzacian reconstruction of family life in Cairo from the beginning of the twentieth century to the rise of Nasser, won him the Nobel. Many Arab critics (though not Munif) felt that it was the Saudi who merited the award, but his savage and surreal satires of the Royal family their entourage and the oilmen, had made him contraband within official culture.” (see Tariq Ali, “Farewell to Munif: A Patriarch of Arabic Literature” Counterpunch. 3 Feb. 2004. Web. 3 Oct. 2012)

generations of Arab intellectuals. Although deeply committed politically all throughout his life, Munif turns from political activism to literature.¹⁹ He thinks that his generation “was burdened with an immense load of dreams and desire for change, but what political parties offered was mere slogans rather than political programs. The individual “had a sort of dream to become a part of the movement of history, only to discover that those parties are not the appropriate medium for his mission.” Asked by Iskandar Habbash what he thinks the role of the intellectual in the Third World should be, Munif declares,

I am convinced that the intellectual is a fundamental partner in the process of change and enlightenment, and while he must have a critical position, he should abandon the position of incitement or propaganda, and instead should engage in a broad dialogue—whether with himself and his ideas or with the ideas of others—in order to define the proper strategies. In other words, the intellectual can neither be a substitute for the political party nor its mouthpiece. (Habbash n.p.)

In what follows, I delineate the ways in which this vision translated literarily for Munif and his audience.

‘Abd al-Rahman Munif’s best known work in the English language is *Cities of Salt*, categorized as “petrofiction” and taught in the American universities in various departments of English for its relevance to the two Gulf Wars and the implications of oil industry, or the petro-capitalism on the world political scene. A lesser known, though much appreciated fictional work is the novel *Endings*, translated in English by Roger Allen. In the Arab world, his political essays

¹⁹ In the same interview with Habbash, Munif justifies this move, “My great gamble was in politics, but after I experimented with political activism, it became apparent that the available political methods were insufficient and unsatisfactory. As a result, I started the search for a formula to connect with others and to express their concerns and the concerns of the historical period and the generation.”

continue to be highly influential almost one decade after his death.²⁰ More recently, his lifetime contribution to the subversive “Uprising of Words” that paved the way to the Arab Spring or the Arab Uprisings of 2011 was signaled by various critics.²¹ Numerous studies, articles, conference papers in Arabic have been dedicated to Munif’s role as author of historical novels and political and cultural essayist in the Arab letters.

His novel *Sharq al-Mutawassit* [*East of the Mediterranean*] has been translated into French (“A l’Est de la Méditerranée,” Paris, 1985), German, (*Östlich des Mittelmeers*, Basel, 1995) Italian (*All’Est del Mediterraneo*, Rome, 1993) and Spanish (*Al este del Mediterráneo*, 2001). It is published almost every two years in various capitals of the Arab world such as Tunis, Baghdad, or Amman, with most of the editions appearing in Beirut. Reviewing the French edition (to date, no English version exists), Roger Allen notes,

The French translation is both accurate and readable: it captures well both the meaning and spirit of the original. Munif’s style is very individualistic and so that is no small achievement. The novel is an important one, both for its subject matter and for its master of the novelist’s craft. Its appearance in translation is therefore most welcome. (Allen, WLT 514)

Munif opens his narrative symbolically with an “Excerpt from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and strategically selects seven of its thirty articles for citation,

Article 1.

- All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

²⁰ Ammiel Alcalay translated one of Munif’s essays in his anthology of essays titled “Memories of our Future.” City Lights Publishers, 1999. Print.

²¹ Milich, Stefan. “An Uprising of Words.” Trans. Katy Derbyshire. *Qantara*. 13 Jan2012. Web. 10 Jun 2012.

Article 2.

- Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3.

- Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 5.

- No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 10.

- Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him

Article 12.

- No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 14.

- (1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.
- (2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

(The Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

A series of rhetorical questions arise from Munif's listing of these legal articles prefacing a work of fiction engaged in tracing the deeply subjective experience of arrest, prison, and torture of one prisoner of conscience. Are these paratextual elements articulated in a decidedly non-fictional language more poignant in representing the stakes of what makes or breaks an

ordinary life? In Arabic, do they aim to instill a pedagogical, educational reading for Arab audiences? Or, is this novel written in Arabic, though addressing France and the UN Geneva headquarters Arabic inviting a contrapuntal reading of the East-West geopolitical realities of human rights?

Munif's selection of the above seven articles reveals a critique of the vagueness of this international declaration.²² There are historians who argue that France's democracy, Russia's international socialism, and Germany's National Socialism, formed and fashioned the history of the two last hundred years and established the "Centuries of the G"- guillotines, gaols, gallows, gas chambers, and gulags. Concrete political and economic contexts and social global suffering were the factors that brought about the need for articulating an international code of rights. The general and abstract phrasing of the UDHR, Munif infers, is seen by those oppressed and situated far away from the world center of refined legal linguistics as an erasure of the particulars, stripping down the individual in favor of the aggregate. Munif's gesture to speak, fictionally, in the court of international opinion and law, to bring forth personal stories and testimonies towards making legal claims for human rights is part of an international literary movement signaled by scholars Schaffer and Smith,

These acts of remembering test the values that nations profess to live by against the actual experiences and perceptions of the storyteller as witness. They issue an ethical call to listeners both within and beyond national borders to recognize the disjunction between the values espoused by the community and the actual practices that occur. They issue a call within and beyond UN protocols and mechanisms for institutions, communities, and individuals to respond to the story; to recognize the humanity of the teller and the justice

²² As widely known, the UDHR became necessary at the end of WWII, after a second world war carried primarily by the greatest world powers during the twentieth century, alongside smaller countries.

of the claim; to take responsibility for that recognition; and to find means of redress.
(Schaffer, Smith 3)

Through his citation of the seven specific UDHR articles that prefaces his volume, Munif destabilizes, possibly inadvertently, even further the East-West borderline that geopolitics promote. He is well aware that alongside many Western, Latin American, and East Asian countries, several Arab countries had voted in favor of the adoption of the Declaration. “For obvious reasons of censorship the state east of the Mediterranean is not mentioned by name; it is meant to stand for any Arab state, but clearly refers to the first instance to Iraq” (Badawi). Iraq, the country whose political abusive regime is suspected to be represented in his novel, was one of signatories.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted in 1948 and all subsequent Conventions and Covenants, have signaled to the imagined international community as a whole, to the nation-states within that imagined community, and to individuals and communities within those nation-states, a collective moral commitment to just societies in which all people live characterized by dignity, equality, bodily inviolability and freedom. These instruments of the United Nations position the victims of rights violations as potential legal claimants in the international arena. (Schaffer, Smith 2)

Nonetheless, Munif decides to follow the universalizing model of the UDHR by positioning the action of his novel in a widespread space with no concrete geopolitical markers. No names of cities or places in the Arab world are mentioned in his prison novel. The generalizing impulse and the repeated absence of markers ultimately lead to the questioning of the narrative’s claims or authenticity. However, the public reception of this work is indicative of

a deep trust in Munif's artistic rendering of a deeply subjective and inspiring political prison experience; since the publication of the first edition in 1975, every two or three years a new Arabic edition of his book appears and is quickly exhausted.²³

'Abd al-Rahman Munif: fictionalizing prison

'Abd al-Rahman Munif's remarkable *panache* in writing a fictional prison memoir that conveys the feeling of an authentic autobiographical narrative is worth investigating. In spite of his intense political activism and stripping of his legal rights by various Arab governments, Munif has never spent time in prison. Nevertheless, he sets out in his book to build the portrait of an anti-hero, an Arab political prisoner who is tortured externally and internally and remains suspended in both his pain and aspirations. Perhaps Munif is an exception among the writers who have not experienced prison directly yet chose to fictionalize it. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, former Gulag prisoner and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, denounced the never-imprisoned authors for not having understood at all what prison meant for the political prisoner. Solzhenitsyn's argument is that these writers invariably miss the mark when they attempt to narrate prison experience, the value of suffering, or its authenticity. In *The Gulag Archipelago* he writes, "All the writers who wrote about prison but who did not themselves serve time there considered it their duty to express sympathy for prisoners and to curse prison. I...have served enough time there. I nourished my soul there and I say without hesitation: Bless you prison, for having been in my life" (Solzhenitsyn 616-617). Although primarily meant in the sense of ridding the self of ideology and a return to more basic human values and implying a process of unlearning about the world and learning about the self, these lines attracted much controversy. Philip Boobbyer, author of *The Stalin Era*, is only one critic ironically commenting on this

²³ Hafez, Sabry. "An Arabian Master." *New Left Review*. Feb. 2006. Web. 14 Oct. 2012.

quote: “And from beyond the grave come replies: It is very well for you to say that -- when you came out of it alive” (Boobbyer 185). ‘Abd al-Rahman Munif is an Arab author whose fictionalized prison memoir -- *East of the Mediterranean* (1975) -- and its longstanding reception contradict both Solzhenitsyn and Philip Boobbyer’s arguments at the same time.

How does Munif overcome both Solzhenitsyn and Boobbyer’s challenges in his narrative art and how successful is he? A structural analysis of his novel reveals that the prison experience he explores is neither organized around a political struggle, neither a well-delineated historical moment. The title - *Sharq al-Mutawwassit/East of the Mediterranean*, a recurrent syntagm throughout the novel - offers the only geographical specification suggesting the delimitation of a vast space standing in apparent opposition to the West. This representation of the West does specify, though, three visible markers, the cities of Marseilles, Paris and Geneva, as signs and signifiers of freedom of expression and upholding of human rights, with Geneva present only as an uncertain and unfulfilled abstract dream. Munif’s “East,” by contrast, is rather a metaphorical paradigm for a larger, non-delimited space peculiarly unified by an absence of freedom or basic rights. Munif extends his metaphor of “East of the Mediterranean” to encompass the entire Arab world, (including the Maghreb, which is commonly referred to as the West of the Arab world, or the West of Mediterranean), to indict all Arab repressive political regimes blatantly disregarding the rights advocated in the UDHR. Faced in fact with an excess of geographical or historic-political markers, the reader quickly notes that the entire novel is structured around an extended psychological battle with a moral idea, namely that of a tragic and paradoxical recoup after the fall from innocence of a victim who agrees, under enormous pressure, to collaborate with its aggressors. Munif’s victim stands for a category that well supersedes the realm of political prisoners, namely that of entire societies forced into submission and collaboration by multiple

republics of fear.

The protagonist of the novel *Sharq Al-Mutawassit* is Rajab Isma'il, a political prisoner who finds out after five years of imprisonment not only that he is terminally-ill, but that unless he receives immediate medical attention, death is imminent. Upon hearing the news from the prison doctor, he secretly decides, instead of awaiting death in prison, to do everything possible to get out and spread the news about the inhumanity of the oppressive regimes in the Middle East to the entire world. His jailers offer him the possibility to go abroad to France and take care of his diseased body on the condition that he signs confession papers renouncing politics and testifying about his former activities and comrades. With his body failing his spirit after five years of torture in seven prisons, he signs the papers. Rajab reaches France and writes the report, but several events make him change his mind and, following the advice of his French treating doctor and his instinct, Rajab returns home, surrendering to certain death. Less than a month later, he is thrown out of a black car, completely blind, in front of his sister's house. He dies from torture, having continued his fight and redeemed his conscience. Against Rajab's last wishes of having his papers burned, his mourning sister sends his report to Geneva.

Aware of the difficulties of reconstructing limit experiences and crises of consciousness related to the political prison that he never personally witnessed, Munif experiments in *Sharq al-Mutawassit* with two authorial subjective voices, one male and one female, both declaredly bent on the impossibility of claiming or attaining any objectiveness in the description of their experiences. Rajab the brother and Anisa the sister appropriate the "I" and offer two versions of the same events, the first reporting from the inside of prison on the intimacy of this experience, and the other from the larger prison outside. The duality of voices and the balanced alternation of narrative perspectives (Rajab writes chapters one, three, and five, and Anisa writes chapter two,

four, and six) emerge as a narrative ordering structure characterized by a considerable degree of verisimilitude. “Impersonal narration may, in fact, encourage the very subjectivism that is supposed to cure” (Booth 83). Moreover, the first-person male and female narrators speak for each other and against each other, all while speaking for and against many others they incorporate in their passionate storytelling. This Bakhtinian polyphony of voices is deployed by Munif throughout the novel first, to undermine the authority of any one single perspective (like the one that structures of power force on their subjects), and, second, to convey the large-scale victimization of the population outside prison. It can be argued that this mode of storytelling allows for greater objectivity and authenticity; multiple narrative voices can be interpreted to stand for larger categories. Rajab the prisoner can safely speak for the category of all political prisoners in Iraq or any other Arab country east of the Mediterranean while Anisa testifies to every Arab woman’s pain of witnessing the imprisonment of a brother and a husband.

’Abd al Rahman Munif’s (1933-2004) novel *Sharq al Mutawassit* ‘East of the Mediterranean’ (1975) demonstrates how two different voices (Rajab’s and his sister’s Anisa’s) can eventually merge into one conclusive voice, totally controlled by the author’s ideological viewpoint (the declaration of human rights quoted at the beginning of the novel makes it explicit Munif, 1975:5). On the other hand, a novel narrated by the traditional third person omniscient narrator can genuinely express a plurality of equally independent voices, (even if it focuses on one character, as in Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*). (Caiani 32)

Betrayal and Self-Betrayal

One of the most poignant tropes that Munif deploys through this double authorial perspective is the multifarious trope of betrayal. Series of visible and invisible, conclusive yet inconclusive

self-betrayals, collective betrayals, filial betrayals, and even authorial betrayals punctuate the trajectory of several consciousnesses arrested in more ways than one. All are marked by the age-old, unsolved conundrum of the moral experience and its codes, namely that “experience is moral,” while reasoning about a moral experience would be ethical, as psychology professor Arthur Kleinman, argued in his Stanford lectures of 1998. It is intriguing to see if this differentiation can be applied in the case of the main characters in this novel and how.

Even before his release, Rajab reflects on how betrayal of his physical body led to a betrayal of his senses, which, in turn, determined him to sign the confession, an implicit betrayal of his comrades and his cause. Rajab is crushed by the awareness of these several layers. Not only that he must search his conscience for signs of self-betrayal, he must also withstand his cellmates’ inquisitive eyes. The day and especially the night before Rajab is released from prison are nightmarish: the cellmates’ intense scrutiny at once depredatory, at once hesitant, throws him in turmoil. The depth of their disappointment is expressed in their sad, intense, piercing, resigned, furious, or menacing looks that rhetorically ask how comrades should address one of themselves who falls from grace after five years of exemplary dignity under torture. They all know the consequences of Rajab’s surprising immoral gesture: more people arrested and the torturers’ invariable shameful “party” (a savage torture session thrown to celebrate the betrayal of the departed by exhorting the remaining prisoners to also sign collaboration papers).

The awareness of these follow-up torture “parties” lasting for days at a time after one prisoner’s release complicates everything: allegiances shift to such a degree that, compactly, cellmates attempt killing the departing one regardless of his previous exemplary resistance. Rajab and his cellmates survey each other’s breathing patterns well into the night; his cellmates watch for the right moment to suffocate him, while he weighs his chances of alerting the guards

before they succeed. Their looks toward him become bestial in nature, shining intensely in the night: “I continued to fix them. Why do their eyes shine so intensely? These are not the eyes that brought me calm every summer and winter; no, these don’t resemble those at all. At this moment, they resemble those of the jailers: suspicious, insidious, foe-like in nature” (Munif 34). The excuse that Rajab invokes for his undeclared yet sensed betrayal, the bestiality he had to endure for years at the hands of his torturers that left him dying remains insufficient for his former friends.

The depictions of torture in prison as described by Rajab are gruesomely realistic, and, by all accounts, paint a sadly accurate picture of the reality in many Arab countries during the dark days of the sixties; at least, a disarming number of Arab novelists have seemed to share the same dark vision of that decade. (Allen, WLT 514)

With his body and mind telling him that he has paid every reasonable due and that his experience of pain and need for it to cease is deeply moral, Rajab’s afterthoughts find this choice of stopping pain unethical.

Mothers and Sisters of Resistance

The path of critical inquiry into Munif’s trope of betrayal goes through the subtle difference between the discursive basis of the maternal and filial resistance. Rajab’s mother, the voice urging him to not give up and sign the required “confession,” often invokes the difference between this passing world and the life after death, therefore a moral religious imperative when upholding the moral principle of causing others no harm. The words of Rajab’s mother are not far from the Kantian law of “the starry skies above us, the moral law within.” She advises him, “from birth to death, life is short. I advise you my son, not to hurt anyone, and remain

courageous” (Munif 52). This exhortation seems to represent a rather Romantic idea of a moral imperative, or a belief in a higher divine order.

The son, on the other hand, seems to have a different reasoning base for his political practice, more external, established in the concreteness of a nexus of human solidarity and honor codes in a given place and historical moment. His motivations seem to be more secular and anchored in a social context. Whenever the idea of resistance or betrayal comes into his remembrances of the past centered on himself or his fellow comrades, the strength to resist the repressive system is ethical, but not necessarily religious. Even after Rajab returns to die in prison, this motivational distinction does not seem to have become clear for him. In another sense, in the beginning, the mother is more the subject of theory rather than the subject of the practice of repression, as her son is. Gradually though, as time passes and the mother claims her rights as a prisoner’s mother to visit, to protest, or to ask about the location of prisoners and becomes herself subjected to physical and mental violence, a slight inversion occurs.

When Rajab exits prison, the concreteness of his mother’s death is antithetical to his praxis of theoretical justifications for his gesture of leaving prison. One of the distinct features of *Sharq al-Mutawassit* among other prison fictional accounts is that it reveals the complex aesthetics of the flowing transmutations within the practice, the theory, and the discourse of resistance. All those subjected to maltreatment and torture are marked by the constant movement between the practice and the theory of the resistance and subjected to the mercy of an imbricate shifting between an advancing and receding commitment to each. In Rajab’s case, the interaction between these two different resistance strategies, secular and religious, prove successful and unquestioned while the mother lives, yet with her disappearance, this solid moral and ethical scaffolding crumbles. The dynamic of mother-son relationship sustains the practice of resistance

through a mixed rhetoric of motives and provides the son with ontological and experiential validity. Once this equilibrium is disrupted though, Rajab succumbs; resistant practice without his mother's theorizing stance of positing the referential moral points outside the worldly environment does not seem to function anymore.

The experience of the outside after five years in the inside seems to have transformed Rajab into a disembodied mind that leaves behind the relevance of his excuse for the weakness of the body. This attitude may well be regarded as an utopian endeavor from the outside, but for the former political prisoner the almost lost materiality of the body is replaced by a gain in the materiality of gesture: by returning to prison to offer the body's last breaths to expire under torture, he offers a concrete measure of his principled will to return offering in exchange his disappearing diseased body. For an instance here, the corporeal loses ground, while the immaterial is given a regulatory ideal. His gesture becomes recuperatively religious, although curiously Christ-like or Judaic in nature, rather than Islamic, with the prisoner offering his body as a price for a corrective mission. Rajab recuperates unwittingly the religious impulse that punctuated his mother's existence and dictated his resistive philosophy albeit still unacknowledged till the end. He cannot unmake the harm already done, but some theorizing ability though, comes back determinately to him; he finds again the strength to offer coherent abstract moral justifications for his gesture. While before making the decision to return, his mental world was colored with tactile, visual, and aural impressions and confuse attempts at understanding, in the symbolic act of returning to his country and to the prison he knows will kill him, mother and son's ethics of resistance is again reunited in the materiality of the body.

From her own moral point of view, Anisa, Rajab's sister, is in a more complicated spot. In the chapters she authors, she mulls over the implacable distance that settles between her and

her brother gradually but firmly after his release from prison. Observing his calm, but deeply sad and withdrawn behavior, she slowly starts evaluating her own. She remembers her recurrent, carefully-staged insistences that Rajab sign the papers to leave prison in order to have a normal life and is saddened that her brother's torment outside prison is greater. When she inquires about his reclusive pain, he answers, "the prison is within" (Munif 107). Her memories conjure moments of their mother declaring in front of other members of their family that for her imprisoned son, "dignity is essential. If he loses it, he has nothing" (Munif 81).

Rajab's psychological torment is transferred slowly to the sister, who, at the end of the novel, asks herself: "Have I saved him or have I killed him?" Her narrative position in the novel is exceptional, proposing a formidable contrapuntal reading to that of her brother the prisoner. If Rajab starts his narrative by dwelling on his painful physical and moral unraveling and evolves toward the end of the narrative towards paradoxical possibilities of redemption, Anisa traverses an exact reverse itinerary. Unabated in her constant exhortations to convince a tortured brother to sign the papers and not waste away his life for impossible dreams, after his death, her thoughts become increasingly marked by self-doubt and guilt. The inverse, though constantly evolving ethical trajectories of daughter and son are bridged by their aged mother's indomitable stand, the oracle voicing absolute truths to a human community at risk. Nonetheless, all three protagonists, Rajab, Anisa, and their mother, struggle with the same aporetic moral conditioning signaled by French philosopher Jacques Derrida in his *Gift of Death*, namely that the commitment to another (God, the self, or a singular other) comes into contradiction with the commitment either to one's immediate family or to the collective other. Upon entering prison, the prisoner of conscience believes himself to be the individual standing for the collective, for the greater good of his community. Later, however, during the singularity of solitary confinement and sessions of

torture, a prisoner witnesses in disbelief the materiality of his tortured body and the exposed loneliness of his individuality.

Peripatetic Vulnerability

Rajab's peripatetic psychological and physical journey is marked by a profound commitment to political struggle. However, his itinerary is short-circuited and constantly marred by two aspects: first, the torment of betrayal materialized in the collaborative consent that Rajab signed after five years of torture and the ravages of leukemia, and second, the search for a new identity. The inner psychological torment of the already tired and weakened former prisoner only increases after liberation, when he must come to terms with several previous identities. His socially and culturally formed identity is that of the head of the family after his father's death, after the older brother cowardly relinquished this position abandoning his mother and siblings. Upon growing up, Rajab takes over the role with much moral conviction, favoring reason over tradition in his family decisions and becomes much respected and loved for doing that. (For example, he marries off his sister without requesting a dowry, based on the ethical imperative that a good man deserves a fair treatment and not absurd monetary impositions). After his arrest and imprisonment, he must deal with a socially assigned identity; in his mother's and his comrades' eyes, he is the unwavering hero, the courageous mind and body unwilling to compromise with the enemy. Through his thoughts, the reader gets to know him retroactively, in the position of a tortured body tamed to withstand and ignore torture and value justice, and personal and collective resistance.

Another identity that he must come to terms with is the new version of himself after the body and, consequently, the mind betray him, causing his betraying of others; he must now face

a fallen idol consciousness. Unfortunately, no social interaction after his liberation from prison can help him develop a newfound sustainable version of self. The fallen hero struggles endlessly to justify his choice, with his inner soul-searching efforts failing one after the other. After becoming “free,” he mirrors himself in others (in his sister’s eyes, in his interactions with passengers on the ship’s bridge, or passers-by in Marseilles. After having chatted “like excited birds” about “the sea, song, and voyage,” with two other passengers on *Akhilus*, the ship taking him to France, Rajab later asks himself, “why join them in the salon? Why interrupt their vagabond thoughts while they’re walking in Rome or elsewhere?” (Munif 121) Contrastively, his spirit “overflows with questions” that cannot bear to witness any posing. “I know nothing and want to know nothing” (121). Thus, Rajab has neither enough time or opportunity to acquire a true or a false new identity; he is unable to identify new values to cling to. There is no meaning in his moves outside former social referential points, those of his imprisoned comrades and their principled, self-sacrificial world. The world outside proves to be more of an illusion and a void than the one inside.

Neither the passengers of *Akhilus*, (the ship premonitorily symbolizing superhuman strength and infinitesimal, yet fatal vulnerability), nor the French doctor advising him to transform his pain into hate so that he could give meaning to his suffering and further his political cause contribute significantly to his new social or moral profile. On the contrary, the suspicious attitudes of the diasporic Arab students’ towards him in France, the unsuccessful meeting with a prostitute, or the newly-formed friendship with Abu-Jafar, disinterested in politics because his countrymen were too backward anyway, all serve to further his conviction of looking back to prison time as the only one emanating valid principles for an active meaningful existence.

The French dimension of suffering and redemption

Rajab, the novel's protagonist, lives mentally suspended between his Arab country and a Francophone space symbolizing for him the Western world capable of intervening and changing the lives of the suffering Arab populations. Commenting on the complicated rapport between France - a former colonial power yet also land of freedom and asylum – and the political refugee seeking shelter and larger support for his cause, Roger Allen remarks, “For Rajab, a politically active intellectual and writer, present time is a voyage on the boat *Achilleus* plying between the Middle East and France. [...] However, he has some words of warning for the citizens of Paris about this generic place to the East of the Mediterranean,”

You, people of Paris, if you brought your books to the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean, you'd spend your entire life in prisons. You'd rue the day you ever wrote, you'd disavow everything. Above all, make sure you never even think about political parties; the slightest allusion to them would be assumed to be a conspiracy, subversion. Your words would cost you your entire life, to be spent in desert jails, where you'd catch tuberculosis or typhoid; and then you'd die. (Allen 44)

Only in France, while writing his report for the International Red Cross, after seeing his struggle and that of his countrymen through the eyes of the Western other, he comes to understand that he had chosen the wrong way to make his death count. This is when Rajab decides to use himself as a last weapon against cruelty, realizing that the West (France or Geneva) has nothing to offer him; he enacts the words of the French doctor who shared with him his own WWII experience and the loss of his family and youth at the hands of Nazis,

Men do not know failure. Know that I am the sole survivor of my family. They killed my

two brothers, then my mother and, finally, my wife. I was a prisoner of war and I escaped. From the moment when I got my hands on a rifle, I did not put it down till the end of the war. You must fight with a fierce hatred. Hatred is the best teacher. Your suffering must transform into hatred, the only way to triumph. [...] Your country needs you. You are only at the beginning of your journey. (Munif 220)

The French doctor's words are the first ones to cancel his consuming impetus of testifying in Geneva: "I know who you are fighting against and why, and I think you have a duty to fulfill" (Munif 221). After hearing this dictum, and learning that, with each new day, members of his family left behind are imprisoned and persecuted, Rajab understands that the legal world of refined human rights articles moves much too slowly for any timely change or help. Heeding the advice of the French doctor, he sails back home surrendering to death with a peaceful heart.

Paradoxically, in his exilic journey to France, he has found home in a vision validating the self, the immediate others (his family) and the collective others; this home comes to signify, for both Rajab and Munif, a special brand of east-ethics. Perhaps the fact that this east-ethics has come in the novel via a French doctor's sympathetic and experienced voice holds a certain significance, positively complicating an always uneasy margin-periphery postcolonial encounter.

Mission Impossible Accomplished

The ending of the novel is best summarized in Sabry Hafez' words, "However, despite the nightmarish atmosphere in most of Munif's novels (save *Qissat hubb majusiyyah* [Magian Love Story] and *Sibaq al-masafat al-tawilah* [Long-Distance Race]), there is always a glimmer of hope and a strong belief that while it may be possible to crush man, it is impossible to defeat him." (Hafez, CWW 369) M. Badawi declares *East of the Mediterranean* to be Munif's very '*cri du coeur*' (cry from the heart), "a most powerful indictment of the methods of torture employed

by a police state, a remarkably vivid account of the destructive effect of political tyranny on the lives of innocent human beings, while at the same time being an eloquent expression of man's unconquerable spirit."

In 1991, Munif published a sequel to *Sharq al Mutawassit*, titled *Al'an, huna, aw Sharq al Mutawassit Marra Ukhra* [*Here and Now: East of the Mediterranean Revisited*], whose action takes place in Prague this time and whose protagonists are political prisoners (one can be speculated to be Rajab's nephew, 'Adil, Anisa's son).²⁴ Two Arab protagonists, former prisoners of conscience, are recuperating in a hospital in Prague where they dialogue and reflect on the meaning of prison, freedom, and death with Czech patients and doctors, themselves having just been freed from a long-standing communist regime in 1989. Nothing much seems to have changed for the next generation; Rajab's nephew, like his uncle, feels that he carries the prison within him and the Prague hospital is more of a prison than the prison itself.

These works shaped Arab public understanding of the depth of the political crisis in the Arab world from North Africa to the Persian Gulf states, where his books are banned, but still widely read. Munif eloquently and powerfully depicts the suffering of the Arab individual – the individual; not the group, not the tribe, and not the political party -- at the hands of the military and intelligence apparatus. Munif's contribution lies in his ability to transcend the narrow political agendas of various Arab opposition groups that have allowed themselves to be used as tools in the service of various Arab governments.

(AbuKhalil 702)

By having gone against the grain of the Egyptian novel, modeled before him on the realist third person narrative model, Munif successfully experimented with the stream-of-consciousness style

²⁴ In *Sharq Al-Mutawassit*, the married name of Anisa, Rajab's sister is not given, but her little son's first name is: 'Adil. At the end of the novel, 'Adil is depicted as building make-believe bombs to free his father from prison.

that presented his characters self-recording the complexity of their genderized speech thoughts. Introspective political affects of pain, hesitation, doubt, fear, confusion, guilt, and hopelessness convey the problematic ability of prisoners of conscience to report on their difficult position, that of speaking truth to power under duress, agonizingly searching for personal and collective redemption. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* and 'Abd al-Rahman Munif's *East of the Mediterranean* are no different in their aims and outcomes. Not unlike former prisoner Solzhenitsyn, Rajab assumes his prison and even his death in a clearly-defined positive way. Though one fictional and one real, both prisoner-protagonists remain convinced that prison has changed their moral and ethical reasoning in the most fundamental and meaningful of ways.

Unsurprisingly, numerous writers complement or take Munif's political aesthetics in the Arabophone and Francophone literatures further. From all over the east of the Mediterranean, there is much to impart about the geographies of scars constantly shifting between an imagined East-West axis. Like Munif, Moroccan author Abdellatif Laâbi will testify about contested histories and geographies from an exilic position. As literary critic Edward Said once said, "Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it's not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, forms, images and imaginings" (Said 6). For the two writers discussed in this chapter, 'Abd al-Rahman Munif and Abdellatif Laâbi -- two prolific award-winning authors, cultural theorists, and activists who produced remarkably cathartic and anti-heroic *oeuvres* -- the fight for human rights matters because the forms of receiving, expressing, and overcoming social suffering (or not) matter. These two writers' aim is to build new worlds that endow the subjects inhabiting the east of the Mediterranean with the capacity to position and reposition their identities in the direction of more dignified alternative histories.

A Moroccan “fool for hope”: Abdellatif Laâbi

If Iraqi-Saudi ‘Abd al-Rahman Munif has written a fictionalized prison novel in which he masterfully employed the stream of consciousness from a double male and female perspective, a decade later, the Moroccan Abdellatif Laâbi will take narrative subjectivity to a different level. Confronted, like all prison literature writers with the dilemma of scripting something more than just another prison memoir, Laâbi takes the innovative risk of writing about his lived prison experience of eight years in a second-person lyrical narrative. Like Munif, in spite of having been politically active and persecuted for his Marxist beliefs, Laâbi is preoccupied to transcend specific political agendas in order to forcefully indict the generalized oppression and violence, and, in doing this, to also give voice to the female Other. Unlike Munif, he decidedly avoids describing the minutia of torture, focusing instead on the metamorphosis of self or the workings of the multifarious ego-versions of the *Is* that help a human being survive and redefine his visions of himself and the collective.

Abdellatif Laâbi is the 2009 Goncourt recipient for poetry. He is a Moroccan poet, novelist, essayist, and translator who chose to produce his fiction work in French. Born in 1942 in Fez, his name remains forever linked to his 1960s literary and political activity as founder and co-editor of *Souffles*, the avant-garde journal that spurred the cultural awakening in the Maghreb. According to the prologue written by Laâbi in the first issue of the journal,

Something is brewing in Africa and elsewhere in the Third world...No one can foresee what this ex-prelogical thought will give to the world. But when the true spokespersons of these collectivities really begin to hear their own voices, it will amount to a dynamite explosion in the old humanism’s rotten mysteries. (Rosemont and Kelley 173)

For such pronouncements, *Souffles* is banned in 1971 and Laâbi arrested one year later.

Sentenced to ten years in prison, he will serve more than eight and be freed after intense international activism on his behalf. In 1985, three years after the publication of his prison memoir, Laâbi is forced into exile to France, where he currently resides. Part of a generation of imprisoned Moroccans from all social categories or convictions opposing the autocratic rule of former king Hassan II (1961-1999), Laâbi is representative of a generation of intellectuals who used a Marxist platform to confront the monarchy. In her authoritative study on Morocco's political prison writings, titled *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco* (2005), Susan Slyomovics writes,

Since Morocco's independence from France in 1956, thousands from the student and intellectual communities -- of every political persuasion, Marxist, Islamist, nationalist, Sahrawi, feminist, Amazigh/Berber activist -- were arrested, held incommunicado at various sites, tortured, and tried en masse in waves of political trials for "plotting against the state. (Slyomovics 2)

Laâbi's prison experience is recorded in *Le Chemin des ordalies* (1982), translated into English with a French title, *Rue de Retour*, (1989). The book's history is representative for the trajectory of much of the Maghrebian Francophone writing addressing taboo topics under the authoritarian Arab regimes. Moroccan writers published such works in France in the post independence years and had to wait for the death of Hassan II in 1999 to have their works appear in print in Morocco. Mapping the itinerary of Laâbi's book, Susan Slyomovics remarks on the sinuous circuit the book followed,

Abdellatif Laabi's own searing novel of his arrest, torture and imprisonment, published in Paris in 1982, was made available in Morocco only in 2000, thanks to Casablanca's Éditions Eddif and financial support from the French embassy in Morocco. Laabi's 1982

title, *Les chemins des ordalies*, literally, "the ways of ordeal," more approximately, perhaps, "trial by fire," would become its Moroccan subtitle, superseded by *Le fou d'espoir* (A Fool for Hope). (Slyomovics 5)

In 1989, Laâbi's novel will come to know an inspired English translation "under the unfortunately unmarketable, all too foreign title (at least to Americans)" by Readers International (Slyomovics 5). The novel aimed, according to Laâbi, not to add to an already canonical genre, but to regenerate it. Literary critic Viktor Reinking, the book's translator into English, aptly introduces the book to American audiences,

Rue du Retour charts Laâbi's itinerary from the chaos of oppression to the cosmos of hope. One of the essential revelations to spring from this prison experience is the sustaining, expanding quality of love, and the magical ways in which people become bonded to each other. (Laâbi ix).

Laâbi's writing style in this novel betrays his passion for poetry, says Laura Restuccia in her article, "*Prison, sortie de prison et liberté: les troubles d'un nouveau-né*" ["Prison, Release and Freedom: The Troubles of a Rebirth"], since, in his view, poetry is the real laboratory of literature, the place where language renews itself and becomes resistance against forgetting. "This novel is a love song and belief where prose and poetry are confounded, as do past and present" (Restuccia 23). Laâbi dedicates his prison memoir to two of his fellow prison inmates, Miloud Achdini and Hassan El-Bou, who lost their sanity to torture. The opening poem, titled '*Awdah* ["Return"] offers a lyrical glimpse into the dehumanizing torture that Laâbi and his companions endured.

Finally, the exile ceases
The hands with their long burns of waiting
Happiness like open veins
And the round which never stops unwinding itself

To the furthest reaches of the dream
There
Without embellishments
Without addition of comfort
My eyes encrusted in each wall
Each bench spattered
By the blood of a scream
there
site of the ordeal
Marked by this twilight
Which lashes me
And lashes me yet (Laâbi, *Rue du retour*)

Although Laâbi reflects on how relieved he is that his horrific experience is over, commenting, “finally the exile ceases,” the vivid, violent word choice he uses throughout this poem highlights the ways in which he is still haunted by his memories. Laâbi remembers, “The hands with their long burn of waiting / happiness like open veins,” alluding to the torturous acts performed on him in the Moroccan prison of Kenitra Central. He painfully reminisces about how he was electrocuted through his fingernails, and how every time this inhuman act was performed, he received “burns” on his “hands” while “waiting” for freedom. The savage imagery evoked from “open veins” depicts a slaughtered body, one that is slowly dying as blood seeps from its veins. The image of a blood-spattered bench mimics Laâbi’s own personal experience in the torture chamber, when a wooden bench, “the most innocuous bric-a-brac,” is turned “into a formidable instrument of suffering,” describing waterboarding episodes (Laâbi 26). Laâbi closes this introductory poem with a haunting chorus of how the “site of the ordeal” (the room where he was tortured) “lashes me / and lashes me yet” (3). A clear repetition of physical violence concludes this recollection, emphasizing how Laâbi, the poet and political activist, is ineluctably trapped in reliving this torment.

One of the book’s most prominent features is its second-person narrative form. In the opening pages, Laâbi writes, “Time. Don’t let it be lost on you, the profoundness of the

transformation” (Laâbi 3). While “time” heralds the subject of his direction, the second sentence poses an important question: is he addressing the reader or himself? By using a second person narrative structure and adjusting the chronological order to mirror his own sense of shifting identity in prison, Laâbi constructs a beautiful memoir, filled with insightful glimpses into his changing notions of truth, justice, and love, albeit through the lens of suffering. In doing so, Laâbi examines the binary lives of freedom and prison, and explores their effects on his identity as both worlds collide upon his release. Throughout the work, the “you” form of address shifts from addressing the dissociated and analytical former self of Laâbi the prisoner or the present self of a released Laâbi, to addressing his wife Awdah, the Moroccan women as a gendered collective, his fellow prisoners, and, finally, the entire country. The reader is lured into consecutive sympathetic identifications with all these identities, since “you” may address her as well; by engulfing the reader’s own identity, Laâbi’s philosophical and lyrical prose transfers crises of consciousness from smaller to ever larger categories of oppressed subjects, with multiple distinct identities collapsed into just one: the subject in the subject of human rights.

The Palm at the end of Laâbi’s mind

*The palm at the end of the mind
Beyond the last thought, rises
In the bronze décor...
(Carl Stevens, Of Mere Being)*

After surviving his eight-year prison term for having committed “crimes of opinion,” Laâbi finds it imperative to better understand who the Moroccan subject of the human rights and how to share with others the destruction of man. To recuperate the memory of his defeated rightless imprisoned being, Laâbi makes recourse to the symbolist imagery that provided him

with an alternative survivalist model inside the dehumanized prison world; he chooses to speak about himself and his various states of mind in prison by transferring them onto a palm tree. After his release from jail, confronted with the trauma of having to adapt to an ordinary life, Laabi questions his newfound human freedom, turning his mind toward a more authentic one, “It is the palm which fascinates me. It’s beautiful isn’t it?...that freedom. That of the tree. Of thought. Undefined” (Laabi 11). Despite the hopelessness of being confined to a single space for years, Laâbi asserts that he, like the palm, had to change in prison in order to survive, “Stagnation is meaningless. Everything moves and changes...The old can put itself forward in new guises...Germination is by definition invisible” (Laâbi 159). Much like the palm, Laâbi manages to germinate his rebirth in a novel territory.

Part of the natural world, the palm lives inside and outside the harshly-regulated prison schedule, and only bows to the natural time or rhythm. Positioned in the middle of the courtyard where the prisoners take their surveilled daily walks, the palm is standing watch over the prisoners. Although the courtyard Laâbi describes is a veritable panopticon, with one impressive palm centrally located as a watchful tower, the prisoners perceive the palm as exercising a blessed watch and caressing them with a protective gaze. The palm also watches the jailers, not only the prisoners, recording all their horrific deeds, becoming thus a repository of history, a record-keeper of all the abuse and injustice carried within those walls. The palm absorbs the prisoner’s pain, filters it and then generates a breathing atmosphere, a hopeful one. The “large watchful palm tree” stands high above the heads of the prisoners, signifying its power and leverage, higher and taller than the gaolers, and seemingly as immutable as them. But its power is very different than that of the oppressors; it neither interrogates, nor tortures. Its power is of a natural order: nature, having a cyclical way of dying and regenerating cyclically, advances hence

the idea that if there is a cycle of withering away (as prisoners under torture do), there is also a cycle of life coming out in full force in the re-grown branches of the palm trees.

Though free from torture and confinement, his thoughts cannot help but wander back; he will be connected forever with the tree that taught him so much, especially how to re-think notions of freedom, hope, and rebirth,

The palm is back in place. The wind rustles through its rough fronds. It's the same tree you gazed at every day as the yard was emptying, and you managed to evade the warden's eye, so that you could stay behind for a few minutes, just for that encounter.

Palm versus prisoner, palm/prisoner. Every possible variation. Because there was a sort of conspiracy to commune. Each held a mirror up to the other. Silent secrets reflecting silent secrets. The sap circulated from one body to the other. The wind stirred both your manes. Yes, in certain circumstances a tree can grow a man. (Laâbi 6)

Recalling a moment face-to-face with the palm, he remembers this intimate, highly symbiotic itinerary, that of the sap circulating from the palm's body to his body and of the wind going through the palm's mane and through his, causing their simultaneous growth "Yes, in certain circumstances a tree can grow a man" (Laâbi 6). Laâbi feels as though he is the one who has been planted by the palm. The tree growing into a man symbolizes the peak of Laâbi's mental awareness; later, he will credit the citadel of his confinement for this growth, "The mane of the palm is spread by the gentle breeze of the citadel," where Laâbi's mind is represented through the mane of the palm and the "gentle breeze of the citadel" stands for the education achieved through his time spent there (Laâbi 11). The spreading of the mane parallels the expansion of Laâbi's mind and inner world attained in prison. Rescuing tortured bodies and souls, the palm tree helps men re-grow their broken spirits, helping them grow through the crown of their heads

while it displays his free-waving fronds. The anthropomorphic tree transfers his characteristics to Laâbi the prisoner, who, even in those instances when the tree is not explicitly mentioned, likens himself to it, “the notes run through your veins, dissolving into the sap which irrigates your body” (Laâbi 21). By coalescing the identity of the palm with his own, Laâbi constructs the perception that the tree is inseparably immersed in his being.

Stuck firmly to the ground, the palm’s freedom is limited to that of a prisoner. While part of the prison and never getting a release, the palm is not part of the prison system, since it does not follow the mechanical order of a repressive apparatus, but his own natural time and regulating principles, regenerating each Spring. In this sense, the palm is an intruder, helping prisoners construct a sense of life outside the imposed schedule of their prison. Prisoners like Laâbi look up to the palm, perhaps because they sense the palm tree to have two series of recorded memories: one would be the memories of the jailers’ deeds as exemplary of what unspeakable acts have been perpetrated and condoned under the reign of Hassan II in Morocco, and the second, the memories of all prisoners that have passed through the Kenitra Central prison, telling their life stories, their sorrows, their aims, their thoughts about suicide and renunciation to the palm tree or to each other. In this sense, the imprisoned palm tree is a hidden historian, an extraordinary archive that keeps prisoners’ pasts alive and meaningful.

While the relations between jail and prisoner are usually seen as prisoner versus jailer, analyzing the palm -- “Palm versus prisoner, palm/prisoner. Every possible variation” -- can bring a new element to this equation (Laâbi 6). Can the jailer be a prisoner as well? And, if the palm is a prisoner, could it be possible that it is a prisoner of all the pain it has been exposed to, a prisoner to all the suffering that he must witness, work through, and archive? Alongside the prisoners, is the palm, in that sense, tortured as well?

On the very day of his release, holding on to his strong visions of the palm, Laâbi fantasizes,

All of a sudden, everything was in turmoil. I was walking towards the palm or rather it was coming towards me. And suddenly it caught fire. There was only a cloud of smoke where it had been. And through this smoke you appeared to me. You were being reborn from the ashes of the tree and of woman. You were taking shape, swathed in a purple shroud which you were pulling and tearing at with the same kind of intensity which used to transfigure you when we merged androgynously, one body, panting with the delirium of life. And the shroud was being carried off in a sheet of flame, your arms were opening... (Laâbi 3)

Walking into a new, supposedly-free life can be more than just overwhelming for Laâbi, it can feel like swimming into the current. The tree is coming towards him; it has finally broken free. However, it catches fire, and still cannot escape its enclosure. Similarly, Laâbi cannot escape his time on the inside. He sees “only a cloud of smoke where it had been.” The tree cannot just be gone after having been everything to him for the last eight years. There is smoke that will forever linger in his sight, on the tip of his tongue, and in the back of his thoughts. “And through this smoke you appeared to me. You were being reborn from the ashes of the tree and of woman” (Laâbi 3). His vision depicts the destruction of this tree, which, in this specific instance, can symbolize the end of a prison sentence. Moreover, the image of his wife Awdah emerging from his beloved palm’s ashes alludes to the revival of life and love that undergo ultimate metamorphoses before their hard-fought-for rebirth.

The palm tree is an appropriate symbol for Laâbi’s *Weltanschauung*, for its subsistence relies on the sun - the very trademark emblazoned on the cover of *Souffles*. The fiery potency of

the sun is a recurring motif in *Rue de Retour*. *Souffles* respires the ideological flame of social justice, and the consequences of having promoted *Souffles* turn to ashes. “And suddenly it caught fire...and the shroud was being carried off in a sheet of flame, your arms opening...” The shroud, symbol of the Muslim burial sheet represents in this instance death being carried away majestically by the cathartic fire, that of the rebellious political cause. Although seemingly the fire caused irreparable destruction (*Souffles* will be banned and Laâbi imprisoned), the aftermath leads to rebirth and an even greater metaphysical and political awareness, “It is then really a pilgrimage: a quest and its objective, a circumvolution around certain places where memory is reborn from ashes” (Laâbi 130).

His wife comes out from the ashes of the palm tree, yet the reader’s pregnant feeling is that Laâbi wants her to rise from the ashes of all women who have been oppressed before. The palm tree will return surreptitiously in the narrative, when Laâbi tells his wife, “Awdah, you are here. Your heart beats against my palm” (Laâbi 65). The superposing of meaning evokes both the palm tree and Laâbi’s palm holding his beloved’s breast and heart at the same time as sole weapons against dehumanization. Not only is the relationship between the prisoner and the palm tree synergistic, but sexual undertones pervade it, “you were being reborn from the ashes of the tree and of woman...we merged androgynously, one body, panting with the delirium of life.” With lurid imagery, Laâbi depicts an inseparable fusion with his visions and finds a way to overcome one of the most grueling punishments – sexual deprivation – rendering it powerless and suggesting the presence of wife during these sexual encounters.

Betrayal and Self-Betrayal: A Political Prisoner’s Dilemma

Laâbi’s poetical and moral dilemma is revealed in his comparison between the result of dying

and that of living, two equally discomfoting experiences. To die leaves one in “anonymity.” The sacrifice one makes wipes out over time, blending with everyone else’s contribution and defiance. Therefore, Laâbi suggests that the only way a prisoner can save himself from dying - either physically under torture, or psychologically under the weight of giving up and collaborating - is to conquer “death by death.” Laâbi brings a new viewpoint to torture and prison, by seeing it as yet another opportunity to be recognized, to have his beliefs heard. To conquer “death by death,” paradoxically means to speak once dead.

To die. Not to speak. The man tries to turn the dilemma around, to recover its human facets. To conquer death by death. To forget, collapse, detach his body, have done with all material connections, kill every individualistic hope. To die, to keep one’s word, to reintegrate and annihilate one’s body in course of time, in the immaterial body of the people, in the hieratic course of time, in the wounded song of the word. To live again in this way as a fragile germination in the flux of anonymity. (Laâbi 41)

In this passage, Laâbi grapples with his sense of duty as a human being not to betray his fellow humans under the pain of torture. The only true solution, Laâbi finds, is through death, when someone can no longer speak. In Laâbi’s mind, death separates the soul from the material world and the feelings associated with it. He acknowledges that dying destroys one’s “material connections [and] every individualistic hope,” but that eventually these individualistic concerns are less important than fighting for the larger cause one believes in, and in doing so, making the world a better place by addressing universal concerns. Attempting to fix the world’s problems will ultimately fix one’s own; Laâbi argues, one gets “to live again...as a fragile germination in the flux of anonymity” (Laâbi 41). All this contemplation about the significance of death emphasizes the value of the connection of his soul to both his own body and that of the

collective, with whom he shares the injustice and oppression.

What Laâbi poetically describes here is the radical tension between the militant power his voice and his limits as a human being. The mechanism of survival in prison is based on the forgetting of one's former self and life and the rules they were governed by. Under torture the materiality and individuality of the body becomes more palpable than ever and thoughts about collective suffering and social injustice do not help ease the horrific physical pain, on the contrary. Nonetheless, Laâbi chooses neither option he analyzes. He neither speaks, nor keeps silent. Instead, he finds his own way of living. Death creates the guarantee of silence and the respect for the pact of honor; it also destroys the individual threshold for pain and suffering as body and soul are released from the obligation to feel. Yet despite this inhuman, detached feeling, this type of death retains a genuine sentiment. In his death, anonymous to those with freedom, Laâbi allows others to maintain their freedom. And while Laâbi does not die, the thought comforts him; death manifests itself as hope, so that he can cope with the torture being dealt to him by "the hounds."

To speak/to die. The contemplation of death and the will to resist and not succumb to the thoughts of death proves that the worst the interrogators can do is to give prisoners the freedom of death. Because the nature of Laâbi's jail experience is at its worst, truly horrific, and at its best, heartbreakingly sublime, this style of lyrical, almost hypnotic narrative is the only way for him to mediate the incomprehensible. Laâbi is not exempt from every trauma writer's challenge, that of the impossibility of writing the unspeakable and the requirement to slowly invent a personal linguistic of pain. Exploring the boundaries of individual and collective justice in a highly self-reflective poetic way, *Rue de Retour* examines the capacity of the human under duress to learn and resist in unimagined ways. On his website, Laâbi inscribes under the rubric

“Biography” his newfound credo, “I would like to add one last thing to “my prisons:” I will not go as far as to thank my jailer, but I confess that, without him, the freedom that I earned would have remained for me quite an abstract notion”²⁵ (Laâbi n.p.).

Laâbi, poet of Moroccan women’s rights

Knowing that his survival will take more than his own abilities, Laâbi looks for and finds hope in the love for his wife, whom he renames Awdah. Although in real life Laâbi’s wife is named Jocelyne, in his poetic narrative Laâbi calls her repeatedly Awdah. In Arabic, *‘awdah* means “return.” A host of significations lie behind this concept. Return to what or to whom? Return to how far in the past or future? The invocation of Awdah may well mean the return to the feminine, gentle, non-violent, nurturing, and equally sensuous part of self; or the return to togetherness and humaneness, to love as saving grace as opposed to the indignity and suffering of bestial torture propagated by male torturers. Laâbi’s romantic desire can be interpreted as a return to lyricism, to a world of beatitude as opposed to the concretely drab atmosphere of prison life. Or a return to the innocent world before torture, that of idealistic collective visions and tolerance. Laâbi may also understand return in the sense of a return from *vita contemplativa* to *vita activa*, from the passivity in prison to the regaining of an active political role in the Moroccan civil society after release.

Awdah gives him life by resurrecting him after each torture session that kills his will to live. During Laâbi’s eight and a half years of political prison, Awdah is a protecting goddess to him, a higher power whom he loves, prays to, and depends on to guide him through ‘the infinity of pain, through the suffocating passage of a repeated death.’ So that he can speak for all

²⁵ “J’ai envie d’ajouter une dernière chose sur “mes prisons”. Je n’irai pas jusqu’à remercier mon geôlier, mais j’avoue que sans lui la liberté que j’ai gagnée serait restée pour moi une notion assez abstraite” (Laâbi, Abdellatif. *Biographie*, n.d., n.p. Web. 12 Jun. 2010. <http://www.laabi.net/Biographie.html>)

anonymous suffering, past and to come” (Laâbi 38-40). His love for Awdah is more powerful than any other force, even the forces of the oppressors, who “reared up like a beast and tried to release into our hearts the barbs of doubt, and the poison of loss.” Laâbi counters all these with a force no torture could strip away, “each hard blow brought us closer together...a whole person, marked out...that we belonged to each other.” With his wife the force behind this union, Laâbi wishes in each imagery or letter to merge androgynously with her and borrow her body to breathe. Each blow strengthens their identifying bond, countering the force of prison’s dehumanization. In turn, during his every struggle inside, she adapts to the comradeship and accepts to carry his consciousness outside prison so he can live. The jailed and tortured Laâbi speaks directly to “Awdah,” either through letters or in his prayer-like thoughts.

The use of the second-person singular ‘You’ recurrent throughout the narrative proposes as main interlocutor his wife, but also different interlocutors, such as the author-prisoner’s self, his father, fellow Moroccans, or the country entire. Still, all these dialoguing partners remain grouped behind Awdah, his sole channel to the outside world. Laâbi’s deep dependency on her love is the vital factor that helps him return to life with the self still intact. The prison tries to impose on Laâbi a new identity as number 18 611. Yet receiving his wife’s letters and “open(ing) (them) hungrily,” he returns back to a sense of self “forgetful of (his) number.” He unswervingly confesses to the reader and his wife, “you are my umbilical cord, you are the voice and the body of my slow, slow resurrection,” admitting that he has died, and was being constantly re-born through Awdah. She defines him, becoming his new source of life, inner, spiritual life, and also physical life. Furthermore, he declares, “our union...is (an) inexhaustible power.” Their inseparable union does not lie merely in romantic love, but lies in the right to love. Sustained by this love, Laâbi fights for basic rights denied to him in prison, for recognition from

the world for him and others. Through the written communication with his wife, he reveals himself “as I truly am. I don’t spin fantasies to enhance my correctness or my “normality”. My life is not for sale.” He does not try to conceal his weakness as a prisoner. In fact, he proclaims his fears, his loneliness, and his neediness. As he re-enters the outside world, he finds security by mak[ing] himself ‘very small in [his] wife’s hand.’ Awdah plays the role of the protector, guiding him and watching over him, as she “pulls [him] firmly back to let a car pass.” Even in his return to the world, he surrenders all control and places his full faith in Awdah, telling himself, “you allow yourself to be guided by your wife without seeing or understanding anything.”

The infusion of power from this love enables him to let go of his past, like a purification process after salvation. At the end, their union wins the battle, because “my heart is intact, even if it has been seriously ill-treated by imprisonment and dampness.” Yet he must be cleansed in order to come back to the world. After rejoining his wife, he tells her directly “I want you.” Because he succeeds in fighting for his vision of reuniting with her, he repeatedly uses the phrase, “away with,” to strip away from what he does not want to define him. “Away with prisons. Away with icy night ... Away with primordial nightmares... Away with insane visions...” He is actively letting go of the old prison life. Laâbi repeatedly uses the phrase, “I offer you,” as an act of worship to his wife. “I offer you my fullness... I offer you my wounds and my sorrow... I offer you my death... I offer you my song... I offer you my intact heart.” This act of offering is to say, I am living my life for you so I give all of me to you. This purification process ends with him willingly surrendering himself, “Take me. Take all these things in me. Don’t stop at the parts, the fragments. Pass your hand over the scars and stitches, resolder me, rejoin me. Energize my body and soul. Then make me whole.” Religious-like, Laâbi

finds a god, or a goddess for this matter, a creator to make him anew. The psychological transference mediated by love saves him from dehumanization, cleanses him from the unimaginable experiences in prison, and makes him whole again.

His woman is a co-creator of new worlds, “We have truly re-learned the skills: love, care, clarity, intelligence. All this was necessary for counteracting separation and exile” (Laâbi 66). Laâbi and his wife live in parallel worlds, one in the stagnant prison environment, the other in the ever-moving and unforgiving outside world. To stay together and to survive, they must meet at the in-between points of these worlds, but to do so, they must first redefine love and care; those methods of comfort work differently when one world is congealed. The atrophy of time and senses in prison can destroy the connection between the worlds, so Laâbi and wife must carefully reassess the language they use to navigate the loss of time, space, and meaning. By stating that he has successfully re-learned these skills, Laâbi implies that they had to be forgotten in order for him to survive in prison. By forgetting and re-learning with his wife, he smuggles into prison a sense of normalcy, at least in love.

In *The Unavowable Community* (1983), French writer and philosopher Maurice Blanchot analyses the community of lovers through the lens of Georges Bataille’s theory of the negative community,

How not to search that space where, for a time span lasting from dusk to dawn, two beings have no other reason to exist than to expose themselves totally to each other -- totally, integrally, absolutely -- so that their common solitude may appear not in front of their eyes but in front of ours, yes, how not to look there and how not to rediscover ‘the negative community, the community of those who have no community’? (Blanchot 46)

For Blanchot, the distinction between traditional community and elective community comes

down to the fact that “the first has been imposed on us without our liberty of choice in the matter: it is *de facto* sociality, or the glorification of the earth, of blood, or even of race.”

(Blanchot 46) The community of lovers is “elective in the sense that it exists through a decision that gathers its members around a choice without which it could not have taken place” (Blanchot 46-7). Laâbi and his wife elect to form a poetic intimate community standing against and possibly changing traditional communities in Morocco, societal or carceral.

Blanchot defines the community of lovers as an unavowable community, noting that “no avowal may reveal it, yet it does carry an exacting political meaning, opening unknown spaces of freedom.” In “*Chroniques de la citadelle d’exil*,” Laâbi declares in a letter written in prison to his wife, “You are this promise of cataclism and celebration, you are the hope at the gate of the delirium. My freedom is You.”²⁶ To survive prison, Laâbi and Awdah-Jocelyne build a world within a world; their world is one of singular love, resistance, and contestation. In order to mean, it must assert its radical singularity “The community of lovers no longer cares about the forms of the tradition or any social agreement.” Blanchot asks, “is it a question of the love (happy or unhappy) that forms a society within a society,” or, “is it a movement that attracts the beings in order to throw them towards each other, (two by two, or more, collectively) according to their body or according to their heart and thought, by tearing them from ordinary society?” (Blanchot 47). Why is love like this strong, in spite of it severing of ties with the rest of the world, all the while seemingly cocooned in it? Why does Laâbi, as opposed to other inmates, survive to tell his and their stories? Blanchot’s theory says, “love may be a stumbling block for ethics,” because it is well known that “love has never known any law” (Blanchot 40). Love may well be “a return to the wilderness,” unsettling any social relationship, invoking a precreational chaos, “the

²⁶ In the original French text, “Tu es cette promesse de séisme et de fête, tu es l’espoir à portée du délire (...). Ma liberté, c’est toi.”

outside, the fundamental unhooking. (For the Greeks, according to Phaedrus, Love is nearly as ancient as Chaos)” (Blanchot 40). Blanchot gives his verdict on the power of love,

the community of lovers – no matter if the lovers want it or not, enjoy it or not, be they linked by chance, by ‘l’amour fou’, by the passion of death (Kleist) – has as its ultimate goal the destruction of society. There where an episodic community takes shape between two beings who are made or who are not made for each other, a war machine is set up.

(Blanchot 48)

Laâbi and Awdah-Jocelyne, his French wife, have waged war and survived it. Laâbi’s memoir stands as one of the best documentary proofs supporting Blanchot’s theoretical analysis.

Moreover, Jocelyne Laâbi wrote her own memoir, as an engaged testimony to those post-independence years in a Morocco that transformed her into a prisoner’s wife.

When the men possessing what Dante has called ‘the intelligence of love’ speak out, they speak for women’s rights, careful not to overstep their agency but to support their right to self-representation. Saved through the feminine, protected by the feminine, and advocating for the feminine to speak itself, Laâbi declares,

Awdah: You see, I speak so inadequately of you and the others. I feel like a clumsy usurper in describing this splendid conduct of the women on the other side of bars.[‘’]

Awdah, how can I put words into your mouth? I feel I don’t have the right. It’s time we gave up calling upon women to speak and then speaking in their place. Awdah, will you speak? (Laâbi 57)

He urges Awdah to speak about herself, about the torture of separation, their children and their ordeal, “but also of all women, mothers, wives, sisters, all part of us” (Laâbi 51). Awdah, because she is a wife of a prominent Moroccan political prisoner, must speak for the nameless

faceless others that all Moroccans know or must about

Yes, my dears, so dear, you come from far off, from those depths of musty kitchens, of faded washing and of non-being to which you had been sentenced by the courts of men and by the century-old tradition of sexual division. From anonymity and beatings. From the conspiracy of fateful nights. From the reign of brute force. From terror set up as human Reason. (Laâbi 54)

This passage from *Rue du Retour* evokes the words of another fellow Moroccan author, Abdelhak Serhane, who concludes his essay, “*L’Amour Circoncis*” (1996)[“Circumcised Love”], with a poem by Lebanese poet Nizar Qabbani, which says,

Revolt! I like you revolted! Revolt against an Orient of the harems..of the pillows...and incense! Revolt against history and conquer the great illusion; don’t fear anyone. Sleep is the tomb of eagles. Revolt yourself against an Orient that wants you just a mattress on a bed.²⁷ (Serhane 1996)

In prison, Laâbi learns what it feels like to be forcibly silenced and feels for the plight of women - he writes to his wife, “It’s terrible to have to repress life within oneself” (Laâbi 74). He calls to Awdah to make the stand, “Pick off the scabs of silence. Talk to release happiness. I don’t know if you understand me” (Laâbi 74). The Moroccan poet dedicates to women’s conditioned existence and devotion entire pages, indicting himself for not having listened well enough,

I heard you, my dears, so dear. And often I failed to make distinctions among this collective body, to hear each separate voice, to see each face in its singularity. How had each woman come to be there, arrived at this complicity of heart which defied all pseudo-

²⁷ In the original French version, “Révolte-toi! Je t’aime révoltée. Révolte-toi contre l’orient du gynécée...des oreillers...de l’encens. Révolte-toi contre l’histoire et vance la grande illusion; ne crains personne. Le sommeil est le cimètiere des aigles. Révolte-toi contre l’orient qui te voit une ripaille sur le lit.”

laws about age, ideologies, solidarities of objective interests. (Laâbi 56)

Under her real name of Jocelyne Laâbi, Awdah will write her own engaged testimony to those post-independence years in a Morocco that had transformed her into a prisoner's wife and oppressed so many women and men.²⁸ In her 2004 book, titled *La Liqueur d'aloès*, she recounts the formation of the first underground organized movement of the political detainees' families in Morocco. For the first time in Morocco's history, the families of political detainees demanded and obtained their rights, changing the pattern of physical and psychological abuse they had suffered at the hands of the police until then whenever they attempted to make contact with their loved ones. Among the rights they obtained were the right to the monthly package destined to the prisoners to reach them unabused and the right of children to see their imprisoned parents in a separate quiet room, instead of the inhuman visitor's room, too traumatic for them.

Considered by the political prisoners' families more or less protected from the police because of her French nationality, Jocelyne Laâbi is entrusted by them with becoming the link between the prisoners inside and those still operating clandestinely, and also with the treasury of funds donated by "friends, sympathizers or organizations such as Amnesty International" (J. Laâbi 127). After the arrest of one of the underground activists, Abraham Serfaty, Jocelyne is arrested and interrogated for five days by the Moroccan police in Casablanca and only freed after the French government's direct intervention. In 1978, as the Moroccan government had relaxed somewhat his repressive policies after a decade of violent reprisals, mothers of political prisoners were invited to speak before college students about their pain. In 1979, the group of families of political detainees organized a manifestation for which it enlisted the participation of other more visible groups, such as the Moroccan Labor Union. The families also participate in "the preliminary meetings and then the founding of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights,"

²⁸ Jocelyne Laâbi's account in French is titled *La liqueur d'aloès* (see Works Cited)

pressing for the distinct rights of the imprisoned men and women, dead or alive, and the rights of their families (J. Laâbi 199-201).

And like Plato, who indicted literature through literature (in his famous *Republic*), or Wittgenstein, whose famous percept stipulates, “Whereof one cannot speak, there one must be silent,” yet ended up talking in order to remain silent, Laâbi does speak for and write the woman, ending by being more than ‘perfectly bilingual,’ as he claims himself to be, ending up by speaking yet another language, speaking Feminine.

“A Fool for hope”: remembering the future

After having imparted the horrific experiences of political prison, Laâbi writes that he is still hopeful for a number of reasons. Although he does not emerge from prison unscathed, he does retain a sense of optimism, proving that his captors did not succeed in beating him into ideological submission, “You know what you are and you proclaim unequivocally: A FOOL FOR HOPE. From this came action. You speak to those who can still hear the cry of man” (Laâbi 178). Several proclamations are made here by Laâbi. The phrase “you know” announces that he has come to terms with his prison experience and his identity has been reshaped. No longer the shapeless individual floating in between the realm of prison and the outside world, Laâbi exhorts himself with “you proclaim yourself unequivocally,” indicating that he is ready to broadcast that he is here and knows who he is. By proclaiming himself a fool for hope, since hope has become, against all odds and after eight years of imprisonment, his identity, Laâbi describes the very outcome of this struggle.

Throughout his prison term, he persisted in his fight for social justice and maintained the hope that Moroccans on the outside would continue his fight as well. Upon his release, however,

he realizes that he was somewhat foolish: everything that he and other political prisoners fought and suffered in prison for has been relegated to the past by the outside world. Similarly to countless political detainees before him, Laâbi painfully realizes that one man's hope cannot revolutionize a country. With this final line, Laâbi draws a conclusion to his image of himself, one of radical singularity and polarized identity, by holding on to a different sense inner pride; he still entertains a commitment to hope against all odds, renouncing being prideful for his served years in favor of a true self instead, that of a fool for his and other people's hopes. Hope, while offering the promise for growing limitlessly, postpones indefinitely that promise, containing thus both a certain and uncertain proposition. While logical comparison between initial intent and outcome turns dismal, and while hope can surely play one for a fool, it does also offer a sense of dignity. Laâbi's last words in the book are still a plea, a cry for continuity and survival. Assuming the position of a fool ultimately translates for Laâbi as the ability to look for paradoxical, yet-untested ways of finding hope where its presence is not obvious. The use of second person "you" in the very last line of the narrative, is yet another encouraging appeal to every reader to unequivocally become "a fool for hope" despite what one could presently be.

Re-energized after his release, during his forced exile to France, Laâbi continued to speak for those who could not and to hope for those without hope in his many poems, books and translations. One of his prescient, premonitory, prophetic poem, titled "Tomorrow, the Upheaval" ("Demain, le séisme," 1985) well anticipated the Arab Uprisings that started in Tunisia in January 2011 and sent shockwaves all throughout the Arab world,

The enemies of my people
almost murdered the poetry in me

so much did I scream scream scream
so much did I bleed bleed bleed
scream and blood had become my poetry

but now
I want it to be a spark
that might ignite
the whole plain
I want it to be muscular, a weapon
I want it to be streets and squares
I want it to be millions of throats
pouring our hatred
of oppression. (Laâbi, Abdellatif. *The World's Embrace: Selected Poems*)

Munif and Lâabi's entire literary *oeuvres* indubitably spurred and maintained the subversive actions and hopes of their countrymen. As authors and activists who forcibly left behind contested histories of pain, they continued to speak from their French and Arab exile about modes of being-with-self, being-with-others, and being-for-others that advanced the unboundedness of a world permeated by widespread respect for basic human rights. Their political aesthetics goes beyond protest and utopia. If the last century's avant-garde movements such as surrealism or science fiction have offered us hyper-realities, the cosmopolitan multiethnic human rights literature of the French metropolis propose augmented (versions of) realities constituted from the multiple sub-realities underlying oppressed worlds that invite responsibility and participation in their betterment.

Chapter Three

East-European “Theses and Antitheses in Paris”²⁹

*“We will torture you and we will kill you
And we will laugh
Then we will be killed and be laughed at...”³⁰*

The “meanness” of anti-totalitarian writers

In 2009, Herta Müller, a German-Romanian writer, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for having depicted “*with the concentration of poetry and the frankness of prose, the ‘landscape of the dispossessed.’*”³¹ According to an article in *The Guardian* newspaper, the permanent secretary of the Swedish academy, Peter Englund, “advised readers new to Müller to start with her novel *Herztier* (published in English as *The Land of Green Plums*),” which he said “many considered to be her best novel.” Müller is cited in the same article as having said that she wrote this book “in memory of my Romanian friends who were killed under the Ceausescu regime,” and that she “felt it was [her] duty.”³² In September 2009, during a visit to Romania, Müller offers a spirited televised public interview at the Romanian Athenaeum in the capital city of Bucharest. Herta Müller repeatedly confronts her interviewer, Gabriel Liiceanu, one of the leading Romanian intellectuals of the day, about their conflicting memories as writers regarding their country’s recent past. National and international media followed the event, with numerous

²⁹ “Theses and antitheses in Paris” is the title of the Romanian broadcasting programme designed by and hosted by Monica Lovinescu, Romanian-French literary critic and human rights activist, at the *Radio Free Europe*, from 1950 to 1989.

³⁰ Caraion, Ion. “At The Putrid Sea.” *The Walls behind the Curtain. East European Prison Literature, 1945-1990*. Ed. Harold B. Segel. 2012. Print.

³¹ “The Nobel Prize in Literature 2009 - Press Release”. Nobelprize.org. 8 Oct. 2009. Web. 5 Nov. 2009.

³² Flood, Alison. “Herta Müller takes Nobel prize for literature.” *The Guardian*. 8 Oct. 2009. Web. 5 Nov. 2009

articles quoting Müller's inspired and categorical statements. At Liiceanu's question, "Why are you so bitter?" Müller later answers, "Yes, I am mean. There is nothing I can do about it."³³

Paul Goma is another self-styled "mean" Romanian writer. In the book *Gherla*, his prison-memoir, he articulates the same feeling in a dialogue with a French friend, who wonders about his irreducible stand against the totalitarian regimes that imprisoned and tortured him and his family. Goma tells this French resident friend, "Of course that I am mean. And unjust" (Goma *Gherla* 99). With the same decisiveness as Herta Müller, he indicts all those who, in the post-communist years, are not as mean as they should be in indicting the communist crimes; Herta Müller addressed philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu and their audience at the Athenaeum, stating that only a few Romanian intellectuals such as Doina Cornea and Paul Goma had protested publicly against the communist dictatorship, only to be left standing alone by the rest of the civil society in Romania. "I was expecting more of you to get angry back then!"³⁴ Müller retorts. Today, the very intellectuals that claim to have "resisted through taking refuge in culture"³⁵ while evading politics (dissent or protest) conveniently advocate inaction; by imposing forgiveness and forgetting, the *resistant-kulturniks* propose the non-punishment of former torturers, the condemnation of lustration laws, and a continuous historical and moral amnesia.

Eastern Europeans in France after WWII

European capitals such as Paris, London, Vienna, Rome, or Madrid became places of refuge for the East Europeans fleeing political persecution in the former Soviet Union or its

³³ Marius Ghilezan, "I was waiting back then for more of you to get upset." *Observator Cultural*. 1 Oct. 2010. Web. 5 Nov. 2010

³⁴ Idem; The title of Ghilezan's article is a direct quote from Müller's public interview.

³⁵ Goma devised a sarcastic term for naming this type of individual: "resistant-kulturnik" a calque on Russian-inflected words such as *apparatchik*; interestingly enough, the term entered Romanian critical vocabulary.

satellite states before and after WWII. Paris and London occupied a privileged place among them, because Great Britain and France had no imposed quotas and relatively few selection criteria for immigration, compared to other countries such as the United States, Austria, or Italy. Stéphane Dufoix' clarification regarding the choice of France for the Hungarian, Czechoslovak, and Polish émigrés after WWII is applicable to the Romanian and other East European exiles as well. Dufoix notes that pre-existent links with France

direct or indirect ones, and that *francophilia*, characterized by the knowledge of French or a previous voyage to France [were] an essential element. The image of France as a country of freedom and revolutions is very strong for students, academics, and writers. For these three populations, 'the myth of Paris' is the echo of a literary history for which Paris is a place of hospitality, of intellectual freedom and asylum. (Dufoix 44)

Paris became a hotbed of East European exiles in the twentieth century also due to the prevalent cultural and political influence that France had exerted in the previous century throughout the entire Europe.

East European dissidence in Paris during the Cold War has been better documented by political or sociological studies than literary ones. Efforts have been recently made to assess the cultural contribution of East European exilic communities.³⁶ In Romania, for example, an Institute for the Memory of the Romanian Exile was founded in 2006. Groups of Facebook users are currently signing petitions and collecting funds for the transferring of the Radio Free Europe's Romanian archives from the Stanford University's library, where they are currently housed, to Romania.³⁷

³⁶ John Neubauer et al., eds. *The Exile and Return of Writers from East-Central Europe: A Compendium*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. 2009. Print.

³⁷ This Facebook advocacy group is united under the banner "Free Europe, [back] home!" [Europa Libera, acasa!]

This chapter takes a closer look at the literary testimonies of several moments of crisis traversing the totalitarian East after WWII: the political purges of the fifties, the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, and the unexpected reverberation of the Czechoslovak Charter '77 movement in the satellite countries of the Soviet Union. Although Russian and Polish anticommunist émigrés were present in France before WWII in greater numbers than other East Europeans, they are joined by political refugees from all throughout Eastern Europe after the Soviets forcibly impose their domination and ideology in Eastern and Central Europe after WWII. Around 1950, East European intellectual exiles form nuclei around Radio Free Europe in Paris and Munich, *Radio France Internationale* in Paris, and BBC World Service in London; later émigrés will tend to gravitate toward these consecrated centers of gathering and dissemination of information after their arrival in the West in the seventies or eighties.

From a cultural standpoint, before 1975, East European intellectuals in Paris tended to edit and publish literary or political newspapers mainly in their maternal languages and thus accommodate the literary or activist production of the respective language speakers only. Romanian and Czech intellectuals in Paris founded publications in French, the language of their host country, serving thus both a French and multinational audience, and aiming at a greater literary collaboration. The Czechs founded the bulletin *L'amitié franco-tchécoslovaque* [The French-Czechoslovak Friendship], the cultural periodical of the association carrying the same name since 1949. Nonetheless, Romanian exiles take this idea further and, in 1975, found and publish a literary and political periodical in French that accommodated not only Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Bulgarians, Hungarians, and Russian authors in exile, but also French writers, historians, and poets. This publication appears in Paris under the name *Les Cahiers de l'Est* and

is edited by Romanian writers Dumitru Tsépeneag and Sanda Stolojan.³⁸ Contributors to this journal are Eugène Ionesco, Adam Michnik, Virgil Mazilescu, Michel Deguy, Petr Král, Marek Nowakowski, Stanislaw Baranczak, Peter Brook, Georges Banu, Alfred Radok, Václav Havel, Jan Grossman, Liviu Ciulei, Virgil Tanase, Paul Goma, Andrzej Wajda, Roman Jakobson, Czeslaw Milosz, Witold Gombrowicz, Lea Balint, Aleksander Wat, Janusz Kowalewski, Jan Kott, Danilo Kiš, Monica Lovinescu, Dieter Schlesak, Dumitru Tsépeneag, Octavio Paz, François Fejtö, Andrei Siniavski, Antonin J. Liehm, Pavel Kohout, etc.

An influential intellectual association in France that spanned across language, ethnicity, and even political convictions of its members was C.I.E.L., or *Le Comité des Intellectuels pour l'Europe de Liberté*. François Fejtö, a Hungarian historian exiled in France, mentions in his book titled *Mémoires de Budapest à Paris*, [*Memoirs from Budapest to Paris*] published in 1986 that in 1978, a number of intellectuals with various political leanings but firmly opposing any form of totalitarianism formed a group that became “important and unsettling” within the French intellectual landscape (Fejtö 291). Among the founders, Fejtö mentions the following figures, “[Eugène] Ionesco, d’Ormesson, R. Aron, J. Ellul, Le Roy Ladurie, J.M. Benoît, L. Israël, P. Chaunu, J.-F. Revel, P. Sollers, L. de Sciascia, J.-M Domenach, F. Arrabal, A. Besançon, P. Goma,” etc. (Fejtö 291).

The secretary general of the association was the young writer A. Ravennes, who organized national conferences on topics such as the defense of human rights; French intellectuals face to face with the totalitarian mind; the state monopoly of the TV broadcasting; ten hours about Poland; socialism in the French experience. (Fejtö 291)

Approximately a decade later, in 1984, Antonin Liehm founds one more literary journal in French called *Lettres Internationales* (1984-1993), “an all-European magazine, reconciling the

³⁸ After 1989, this periodical will continue under the new name *Les Nouveaux Cahiers de l’Est*

East and the West” (Dufoix 107). The declared goal of these associations and publications was to make the host country “the recipient of certain forms of political actions,” and “to persuade as many well-intended people as possible about their fight, to ensure the popularity of a movement and to accomplish the task crucial for all exiles: to spread the truth against the [great] communist lie” (Dufoix 57).

The French Left

François Fejtö (1909-2008), the Hungarian-French historian and journalist exiled in Paris (1938-2008), gives special attention in his memoirs to one of the leading French intellectuals at the time, Jean-Paul Sartre, whom he admired so much that he had dedicated to him his 1952 study, *A History of the People’s Democracies*, a critique of the communist regimes. Fejtö relates how Sartre confessed to him in 1956 that he had not opened the book given to him four years earlier. That same year, after the publication of *The Khrushchev Report* condemning Stalin’s crimes. Fejtö reflects,

For my part, it had been sad to note how Sartre was getting closer to the communists exactly at a time when in Prague the sinister process Slansky was going on, the Great/Red Terror in Russia and the popular democracies was reaching its climax, and when the massive deportations of Moscow Jewry had started...What blindness for a thinker otherwise so subtle! (Fejtö 232)

Sartre will lament later not having consulted Fejtö’s book, *A History of the Popular Democracies*, describing it as “the only work susceptible to inform about these countries -- so close, and, for ten years so mysterious” (Fejtö 232). When the Hungarian Revolution is crushed by the Russian invasion of Hungary in November 1956, many Western Marxist intellectuals

were taken aback; both de Beauvoir and Sartre expressed their indignation against articles in the French newspapers such as *L'Humanité* and *Libération* that presented the Hungarian uprising as a “Fascist putsch” and the revolted workers remnants of the former bourgeoisie. Sartre gives an interview in *L'Éxpress* condemning the Soviet repression and proposes to Fejtő a special issue of *Les Temps Modernes* dedicated to Hungary; he even writes a letter-introduction to Fejtő's next book, called *The Hungarian Tragedy* [*La Tragédie Hongroise*]. Fejtő prepares the special issue and describes Sartre's contribution, still disappointed by the French philosopher's inflexible pro-communist stand,

Sartre's thinking evolved. He still deplored the Soviet intervention; he was scandalized, he protested against it, but reaffirmed his adhesion to socialism *as it was incarnated in the USSR, in spite of his leaders*. Once again, the great man, fearing to play the game of the right, preferred to play the game of Moscow. He was happy to notice that the Soviets (...) were pardoning his verbal infidelities. (Fejtő 247, author's italics)

As the social and political communist order came to know successive phases according to the succession of the Soviet leaders, affecting thus the various forms of communism in the satellite countries, so the ideological inclinations of the French Left evolved from deeply Pro-Soviet and communist to becoming more nuanced and, mid- and late seventies, even hostile to the repressive policies of the Soviet Union. Fejtő's opinion is that Sartre, de Beauvoir, and their friends resented finding themselves in the same camp as “Camus, Raymond Aron, and other notorious anti-communists, who, for them, belonged to the human species of *bastards*” (Fejtő 247, author's italics). Fejtő mentions also the open support of Louis Aragon for the brutal and bloody Soviet repression of the Hungarian uprising (he published an article in this sense in *L'Humanité*) and his companion writers grouped around the CNE (*Comité National des*

Écrivains), including Elsa Triolet. This open support came after the distressed Hungarian writers had already written their Western counterparts appealing for help to no avail. Among the writers associated with the CNE, some dissented,

but the majority did not dare react, as they would fear police reprisals like the writers from Eastern countries. Their behavior (...) illustrated the fact that the communists succeeded to discipline, to terrorize their troops, even without a police apparatus. The moral terror can be as efficient as the physical terror. (Fejtö 248)

For good measure, Fejtö gives also the example of those French intellectuals who needed no explanation about the causes or objectives of the Hungarian revolution, such as Albert Camus. Fejtö also names Manes Sperber, “who alongside Aron, Camus, and Ionesco fought against a totalitarianism presenting itself differently” (Fejtö 249).

Paul Goma: “A Romanian Solzhenitsyn”

Paul Goma was born in 1935 in Romania, in the village of Mana, located in the eastern part of Romania called Bessarabia. After the Soviet occupation of Bessarabia in 1940 and its annexation by the Soviet communist empire, Paul Goma’s father, Eufimie, a teacher in Mana, is deported by the Soviets to Siberia. Bessarabia becomes a Soviet republic and its citizens subject to forced Sovietization, which implied, among others, the imposition of Russian language, the burning of books in Romanian, and persecution of anyone promoting Romanian cultural values. From Siberia, Eufimie Goma returns not to Bessarabia, still occupied, but to mainland Romania, where he is absurdly imprisoned by the Romanians as a Soviet prisoner (after WWII, Romania itself had become a Soviet Union satellite country with a significant Soviet military presence enforcing Soviet policies). After many trials and tribulations, (camp internment, the danger of

deportation to the Soviet-occupied Romanian territory of Bessarabia, etc.), the Goma family will succeed in remaining in mainland Romania and will move around in several Transylvanian cities. As a child, Paul Goma goes through the experience of occupation, refuge, imprisonment of his parents and interrogation by both Soviet and Romanian communist authorities, and school expulsion. A lifetime of literary work will immortalize them all.

During his high-school years, Paul Goma has his first brush with the political police (the infamous Romanian *Securitate*) for having spoken in class about the anti-communist partisans in Romania; he is expelled and banned from all high-schools in the country. After many failed attempts at re-enrolment, he will eventually finish high-school and get himself admitted to the University of Bucharest in 1954. As a university student, Goma is arrested and imprisoned for having expressed his support for the (anti-Soviet and anti-communist) Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and for having asked inconvenient political, social, and economic questions during a Marxism seminar. Literary critic Mihai Radulescu, author of *The History of Romanian Prison Literature* recounts the event, the academic participants, and their reactions,

In 1956, he is judged by Iorgu Iordan, Al Graur, Ion Coteanu, Tismaneanu, Radu Florian, M. Novicov, at a meeting where two political security officers in civilian attire were present, for various statements made during the Marxism course, regarding: the unjust character of the 1939 Russian-Finnish war; the non-existence of the „Moldavian” language, a name given to the Romanian language spoken in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova; the agricultural quotas discouraging for the producing farmers the collectivization as an economic error; the Soviet troops in Romania as occupation troops; and the futility of the [forced] Russian language study in our country. The Romanian Academy member Iorgu Iordan, supported by the correspondent member of same

Academy, Ion Coteanu, asked for his immediate arrest. Marxism professors Tismaneanu and Florian opted for expulsion from the university. (Radulescu 382-3)

Although, according to his investigator, the student Goma would have gotten two slaps and a moralizing session in “normal conditions,” the Hungarian uprising had rendered the situation in the entire Eastern European bloc especially tense; the student Goma is arrested at the request of his own leftist-Marxist professors and will serve time in prison (Goma, *Gherla* 22).

Consequently, Goma receives an exemplary prison sentence meant to serve as a stark warning “to the other rascals, to know what’s awaiting them and not dare make a move.” Sarcastically, his interrogator says, “you won’t refuse now to sacrifice yourself a little, for the well-being of your fellow students...” (Goma, *Gherla* 23). Goma will be sent to prison in April 1957 without knowing his sentence. He starts his sentence at the Jilava Prison, near Bucharest, to be sent later to the Gherla Prison, one of the most infamous torture centers in Romania. He will serve there two years, and then complete a thirty-six months period of forced domicile in a remote destitute settlement populated with former detainees. After his forced residence sentence is over in 1963, he makes attempts to re-enroll and complete his university education, but has to start his studies all over. In 1965, at the age of thirty, he is re-admitted as a first-year student but two years later, harassed by the political police to become an informer, he is forced to give up his studies again.³⁹

Paul Goma starts writing fiction and publishes a short story. After the Prague Spring of 1968, he adheres to the Romanian Communist Party to affirm his solidarity with what was a unique gesture within the Eastern communist bloc: the public opposition to the Soviet Union’s invasion of Czechoslovakia, and affirmation of the sovereignty of a nation-state. Nicolae

³⁹ Aggressively-pursued recruitment of former political detainees as collaborators after release was the practice of the day in communist Romania.

Ceausescu, Romania's communist leader at the time, constantly feared, like all communist leaders of the Soviet satellite countries that he would be assassinated by the Soviets; in 1968, during the Prague Spring, he firmly believed that the Soviet Union would invade militarily and occupy other satellite countries and Romania as well. His own predecessor had barely ridden Romania several years before of the Russian military troops. Ceausescu's public condemnation of the Soviet brutal aggression against a sovereign nation brings about such an infusion of energy into the civil and political life in Romania, that Romanian writers and others want to enroll in the brigades formed for the defense of their country against an eventual Russian invasion, but only members of the Romanian Communist Party are accepted, and, consequently, many joined. Their disillusion will be swifter than that of the Cuban intellectuals who returned to Cuba and joined Castro's revolutionary efforts in 1960. Three years later, Ceausescu, by now a fully-recognized dictator, reveals his draconic style of leading the country, after a few initial years of apparent liberalization meant only to ensure the legitimacy of his rule.⁴⁰ In this atmosphere, Paul Goma continues his writing and publishing efforts in earnest. His first novel, initially entitled *Cealaltă Penelopă, cealaltă Itacă* [*The Other Penelope, the Other Ithaca*], and then changed to *Ostinato*, [*Ostinato*] is a fictional account of the carceral space in Romania of the 1950s as Goma had experienced it.⁴¹ The book is censored by the publishing house and ultimately banned from publication anywhere in Romania. Goma announces publicly at the Writer's Union that he will publish abroad if he is prohibited from publishing in Romania. He smuggles the book abroad with great efforts and has it published simultaneously by Suhrkamp (West Germany) and

⁴⁰ Nicolae Ceausescu came to power in 1964. One of his first measures, positively received by the population, was the freeing of the political prisoners jailed after WWII by the former Stalinist regime of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej). Recently installed in power barely three years earlier, he was, like all communist leaders of former satellite states afraid that he would be removed and assassinated Ceausescu died in 1989 executed by his own *camarilla* in a summarily after a communist-style organized show trial.

⁴¹ From the Italian "ostinato" ("stubborn")

Gallimard (France) publishing houses in 1971 in German and French translation, only two days apart.⁴² As a result, he is expelled from the Romanian Communist Party and all his subsequent publishing attempts in Romania become futile.

In 1977, Goma writes a public letter of solidarity with the Charter '77 movement of Czechoslovakia (later in the year he will found the Movement for Human Rights "Paul Goma"). Goma writes an open letter to the dictator Ceausescu, and opens a list of signatures to support a Declaration of Human Rights for the Belgrade Conference. As a result, for the second time in his life, Paul Goma is arrested, imprisoned, and tortured by the Romanian political police *Securitate*, which, under international pressure, will release him and finally force him into exile abroad. In November 1977, Goma and his family leave Romania for France where they still live today.

Stripped of his Romanian citizenship and vilified by Romanian authorities, his life in France will remain marked by the merciless surveillance of the *Securitate*: two documented assassination attempts are made on his life in 1981 and in 1982, along with kidnapping and poisoning attempts on his son. To date, his Romanian citizenship has not been restored. Having refused the offer of a French citizenship by the French state in 1979, Paul Goma's status continues to be that of a political refugee in France. All of his books, except his first short story collection, have been published abroad in French, German, Dutch, Swedish, and other languages, and appeared in their original language, Romanian, only after 1989. According to himself and his critics, Goma has published more than fifty books and produced also a considerable amount of journalistic writing. He remains mostly known for having been what a Romanian writer, Miron Radu Paraschivescu, and Goma's German editor at the Suhrkamp publishing house will name him: "a Romanian Solzhenitsyn."

In 1971, Goma's first novel, entitled *Ostinato* is published by Suhrkamp in West

⁴² The book carries the same title in its German translation, *Ostinato*. The French title is *La cellule des libérables*.

Germany and by Gallimard in France, in German and French, respectively. The themes treated by Goma in this book are centered on prison and human rights abuses in a totalitarian state, but also on the fate of Romania's ethnic Germans' deported to Siberia by the Russians at the conclusion of WWII. The book is presented at the Frankfurt Book Fair in both French and German editions. An Italian version would have also been present, if not for the Romanian security agents' intervention to Rizzoli, the Italian publishing house, to stop the distribution of *Ostinato* that had already been translated and printed in Italian.⁴³ The book provoked such uproar at the Frankfurt Book Fair that year, that the official Romanian (communist) delegation canceled its presence at the fair protesting loudly against the inclusion of Goma's book.⁴⁴ The German publisher placed Goma's book in the empty exhibition stand reserved for Romania after the delegation's departure, displaying it under the heading, "Book banned in Romania." On the cover, stood written in German, "Ein rumänischer Solzhenizyn" [A Romanian Solzhenitsyn]⁴⁵

In the prestigious German journal *Der Spiegel*, from February 28, 1972, journalist Siegfried Lenz writes, "Ostinato in Italian means "stubborn." In music, it defines a motif that is repeated continuously (*basso ostinato*) and as the title of Paul Goma's novel, it represents the stubborn repetition of the contrapuntal music motivating a detainee's life."

The Genealogy of a word

⁴³ Goma received this information from Dr. Unseld, director of the Suhrkamp publishing house, and from Claude Gallimard in 1972. The Italian translator is Marco Cugno, a professor at the University of Torino, who thinks that under the pressure from the Romanian state, Goma's book in his Italian version was not published by Rizzoli (Sipos 77)

⁴⁴ To impede the publication of the book, official telegrams were sent from Romania to its ambassadors in Cologne, Rome, Paris, Brussels, urging them to take measures in this sense.

⁴⁵ Like Solzhenitsyn, who smuggled his *Gulag Archipelago* about the Russian gulag to France, Goma smuggled his prison novel about the Romanian prisons abroad. His police file indicates that in 1970, the police searched a Marie T. Kerschbaumer, doctoral student in Romania, and found introduced between the pages of her doctoral dissertation the pages of Goma's novel *Ostinato*, and confiscated them.

In his writings and interviews, Romanian writer Paul Goma insists on not being labeled a communist “dissident.” Instead, he wants to be considered a writer, because the word “writer” for him encompasses everything, “opponent, dissident of a regime; shortly, someone who aspires to be normal”⁴⁶ (Sipos 3). His words are echoed by Herta Müller, who, in September 2009 made a similar public statement, “In Romania, I did not feel I was a dissident. I wanted to live normally. At the postal office, at the factory, I was treated like shit.”⁴⁷ Both these persecuted anticommunist writers insist that their aim was not to do politics, but to tell the truth as they saw it by living under a totalitarian regime. Goma explains how the “dissident” term had been tactically coined by the Western media post-WWII, in an effort to protect the Russians revolting against the Kremlin from another potential Stalinist wave of terror. The ulterior consecration and mythologizing of certain dissident figures by the media in historical or literary textbooks has led audiences to believe that the person who opposes, or dissociates from an ideology has a clear view of his political objectives and goals.

Nonetheless, Goma, citing Vladimir Bukovsky’s rejection of the Latin term “dissidence” clarifies that he writes about what was not normal in a dictatorship, be it an economical, political, social, national, or identity issue. He stated repeatedly that what he wanted was to live normally and to believe that normality was possible and necessary. In his own words, he is neither “a historian, nor a sociologist, or politician” seeking the change of political orientation or re-organization of political power.⁴⁸ Goma’s entire work is a literary testimony about the abuses of power that he, his family, friends, and even enemies experienced in Romania under successive

⁴⁶ During an interview with Mariana Sipos, the author of *The Destiny of a Dissident: Paul Goma*, (2005), Goma protests the label, considering it a misnomer.

⁴⁷ Marius Ghilezan, *idem*.

⁴⁸ Paul Goma, *The Color*, “Introduction.”

political regimes. These abuses had large implications at all levels of the Romanian society in the second part of the twentieth century. French historians Jean Chiamia and Jean-François Soulet offer their opinion,

“Opposition” is a clear term, but in popular democracies, ambiguous and inexistent in totalitarian countries. On the contrary, we can consider contestation, reformism, revisionism, resistance, or dissidence. (Chiamia 9)

The term “dissidence” remains susceptible of suggesting just a disagreement or divergence from a particular point/topic, rather than an active engagement supposing confrontation and fighting. Vladimir Bukovsky prefers the term “resistance,” but “on the basis that the word *résistance* in France is linked to the armed actions during WWII, Bukovsky agrees on the term dissidence. (Soulet)

***Gherla*, or the Authentication of Testimony**

Paul Goma’s prison memoir carries the name of the Gherla Prison where he served his first sentence between 1957- 1958. Fourteen years later, in 1972, Paul Goma takes a trip to France. He writes *Gherla* in Romanian on the French soil, in Paris, in few days – the first version. He finishes a second version in January of 1973 (still in Paris). In June 1973, Goma returns to Romania where he does not have publishing rights anymore. He modifies the format even further: from a dialogue between two interlocutors, the book becomes what he will later call, a “dialogued monologue” after the removal of the interviewer’s lines in the fourth and last version. In October 1976, *Gherla* is smuggled out of Romania and published in French by Éditions Gallimard and also broadcast in serial form by the *Radio Free Europe* in Paris.

The book opens with an account of Goma’s time spent in the prison of Jilava, where he

awaited his trial and sentencing before being taken to Gherla. The Jilava Prison had been built by the French in Romania and had parts named with French terms, such as *réduit* [“shrunk”]. Inside the “Reduit” was Goma’s cell.⁴⁹ *Gherla* is written in its entirety as an extended dialogue-interview between Goma and a friend in France, from where all questions are missing and can only be guessed from the long explicatory but also lively and prompt answers given by Goma, the former political prisoner visiting Paris. The French friend, a painter living a comfortable life in the free world is at times sympathetic, at time incredulous, but wants to know Goma’s past as a jailed anticommunist in Romania. The book-interview represents Goma’s best attempt at conveying to an unnamed interlocutor symbolically standing for the entire West, or the free world, his direct experience in the communist prisons, as well as his coeval awareness of the potency and fragility of his traumatic testimony before the world.

The inquisitive French friend questions Goma’s memory at times and meets a versatile, self-ironic witness in Goma’s authorial persona. Aware of the predicaments and critical analysis that his memorialistic prose will be subjected to, Goma deals with his interviewer’s susceptibility by universalizing the nature of testimony anywhere. In his view, any witness is doomed to a double bind: although the direct testimony of the eyewitness is often the only source of information each time documents are inaccessible or have never been produced, the same testimony is suspected of being distorted, revised, augmented, or mythologized. This is why, as an answer to the potentially problematic reception of his prison account, Goma offers the extended interview format as a framing device for his testimony; in a sort of a Classical *elenchus*, or Socratic method of questioning, Goma has discovered his own way toward the thorny issue of the authentication of testimony. Once he has already set up a disclaimer that

⁴⁹ “Reduit” is a Romanian term which signifies, according to the Explicatory Dictionary of Romanian Language (DEX), “a fortification of limited dimensions, with autonomous character and framed within another fortification, also possessing fire and subsistence means for prolonged periods” (<http://dexonline.ro/definitie/reduit/paradigma>).

every testimony is tainted by creativity, emotion, and language, he affirms that his own was no exception.

Like any storyteller, he is aware that the oral version of his remembered past that he shares with the French interlocutor will never be identical with the next one, as the threads of one's memory do not answer to the rules of rigorous scholarly inquiry, but rather to the re-lived experience with each instance of a re-telling, in which background and focus elements constantly interchange their places. The very last answer he offers to the French friend questioning his pseudo-oral testimony is a humorous one, "I was just on the verge of proposing to you [to listen to], let's say, the eighteenth version...[of my imprisonment]..." (Goma, *Gherla* 19) Thus, Goma dismisses the idea that it is a protagonist's duty to check for accuracy; instead, the tortured protagonist's duty is to testify, to make sure the voice of the abused and the dimension of the abuse enter public sphere and from there, hopefully, public consciousness as well. Goma's duty as a human rights writer is to remove the sounds of silence from within, starting by denouncing the fear of those who knew exactly what happened, but chose silence, namely the victims. Like the Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa, he believes the legitimacy of an evil regime is ensured not only by an unprecedented repressive apparatus and extreme ideology, but also by the complicity of its victims. In an interview given for the Romanian television in August 2005, Llosa says,

I think that Ceausescu is an equivalent of Trujillo, an emblematic dictator, not only a person who has imposed an extremely authoritarian regime, but at the same time, on a personal level, he is a personality of a special type, with manias, perturbations and deformations of character typical for all the dictators who accumulate absolute power and get dehumanized, transformed into monsters. But what is terrible is that to their

transformation into monsters contribute not only their partisans and servants, who adulate them, but even their victims. (...) It is something that I wanted to show in my novel, *The Feast of the Goat*, this terrible and tragic way in which an entire people abdicates from its right to resist against to inhuman, so cruel and degrading as a totalitarian dictatorship is.

(Sipos 11)

Answering the unnamed interviewer's questions in *Gherla*, Goma explains why no prisoner ever thought about escaping from the Romanian communist prisons. In his reply to the French interviewer clueless that the entire country was only a larger prison, he clarifies,

Where the hell to go? What for? To put in prison other ten-twenty people, just because they showed you a way, they gave you a glass of water, they gave you shelter for a night? And they did not denounce you? You well know that our law punishes harshly the non-denunciation - because the foundational key to our multilateral society was and remains the denunciation, which is a necessity, an obligation. The non-denunciation is a crime.

(Goma, *Gherla* 48)

Denunciation of a fellow citizen, this extremely pervasive psychological form of social coercion, was a phenomenally-efficient mechanism of control characteristic to the communist countries of the USSR and the Central and Eastern Europe.

At a certain point in the book, Goma relates throughout many pages (with considerable digressions, following his non-linear memory) one of the harshest torture sessions that he endured at Gherla prison. He describes the various stages of psychological torture and explains how screaming under torture was not only a sudden uncontrollable reaction of a body in pain, but also an instinctual strategy of the detainee to establish a link with his own,

with the cellmates back in their cells...something like this, because that howl gives you

the impression that you are not alone. Then, you shout because you know yourself stronger than those who beat you...Don't laugh, this is it. The uniformed psychologists would have realized the "social function of the detainees' yelling," and from here the isolation..." (Goma, *Gherla* 149-50)

After listening to Goma's relating of several instances when he protested against the harsh mistreatment and individual abuse toward himself and other detainees by the guards, his French interviewer asks him if he had ever tried to start a prison revolt. Goma answers,

hell, no, I never tried to urge anyone to revolt for the sake of revolt, to "organized revolt," for the sake of non-behaving. I tried only to remind people about one thing they should try to forget, if they had known it: that dignity is not an abstract concept. Neither is it free or detrimental. To have dignity means not to accept the blows without complaint, without trying to avoid them. (Goma *Gherla* 101)

This insistence that Goma has on basic notions that are part of what he considered normality will be recurrent all throughout his writings. Part of being normal is to try, to never give up the effort to bring about even minute manifestations of normalcy whenever one is exposed to the abnormalities of a system.

One of the most intense moments of this East-West conversation takes place when the French interlocutor opines that Goma is describing one of his worst torture sessions seemingly "too slow and with an appetite" (*Gherla* 219). Goma retorts,

Looky there! To say that I'm telling it with an appetite! I'm a masochist! Way to go! Of course, we, the eight thousand [prisoners] at Gherla, we were damn masochists, because what is a detainee but a stinky insolent masochist, who begs, and provokes...what he deserves, namely that, which he, as an ass that he is, names sadism. We, the masochist

detainees were pushing ourselves in the face of [our torturers]...⁵⁰ (Goma, *Gherla* 219). Goma's sudden sarcasm betrays the deep disappointment common to all tortured prisoners that the outside cannot believe the horror inside because it cannot stand to listen to the sheer magnitude of torture: the concreteness of details turn either annoying or disturbing. Goma's sarcasm could be interpreted also as a writer's dissatisfaction with the sudden impression that the free-world resident friend facing him is chasing only the quick sensationalist facts, disregarding the impact of torture on the prisoners who share it. In his sarcastic rebukes, Goma infers that the friend seeks a linear rendering of his prison experience, while he, Goma the writer, the victim, and the witness, can only remember and testify to torture according to the sinuous meanders of his memory, neither ordered, nor succinct, "In two words? How to say it in two words? You can't bear it anymore and you want me to finish in...two...Alright, look, in two words, I shat myself...Exactly what you heard. In two words,..” (Goma, *Gherla* 219). From Goma's next reply, the reader deduces that his interlocutor has protested against his crude wording. Goma frankly declares, "I don't have another! I have to name a reality, no? You try telling more...delicately, in Romanian, what I just said directly: I shat myself – thing that happened during the third session of 'up.'⁵¹ I felt that I couldn't anymore, that it wasn't possible anymore, that..." and Goma's elliptical sentence simply breaks here (Goma 219). Later, he will ask whose ears are scratched by the wording of his memories, the memories of a detainee who has not only been savagely beaten, but had been humiliated in the most debilitating manner, "what good is a

⁵⁰ Goma, who possesses a linguistic inventiveness throughout the volume, transforms the names of his torturers in common nouns, accomplishing a double feat: one, to indicate that the likes of the torturers cannot achieve the full status of a human being, that of carrying a proper name like anyone else, and second, to indicate that this social category was a social class in itself and Romania was heavily populated with the likes of Goiciu and Istrate not only in prisons across country, but also in the society at large.

⁵¹ Goma describes being lifted yet another time on a crowbar that inserted under his both flexed knees, just above his arms clasping his knees; in this completely locked body position, he is beaten senselessly with various objects while hanging down for hours in a row, until his senses fail him and his body becomes a giant bloody wound.

human who shat himself, anymore?" (219)

The Truth of Memory: Subclass History

Ways of authenticating the truth of prison come sometimes from unexpected sources. Personal, historical, and political facts and dates may lack credibility or verifiability for a political prisoner in a jail atmosphere punctuated by fear, snitching, broken will, betrayal, and confabulation, all skepticism-breeding factors. However, one of the biggest surprises that awaits former political prisoners after liberation is that the oral political prison histories are not only accurate, but are, in fact, the only truthful history circulating in a country where no other free sources of information exist in the public space. Goma himself declares this to be one of the strangest aspects of the political prison culture, about which he confesses to have not fully understood at the time,

As it is known, in prison, the culture, the information, because it is orally transmitted, it is...folklorized until it becomes unrecognizable. It's natural: to the often distorted "reception," -- especially if the information comes through the wall -- is added also the desire of the detainee to model an event, a piece of news...to his advantage. This is why, in prison, there were many versions of literature, philosophy and politics, with some being the opposite version of those known from before, from books. (*Gherla* 140)

According to Goma, (historical) truth can be separated in two realities: the truth of the inside and the truth of the outside, with one version more suspect than the other for a political prisoner.

Only with the passing of time one version can be validated over the other,

But still,..there were some things that...When I heard them, I treated them with the lucidity of a skeptic. Of one who realized the differences, often essential, between the

truth of the outside and the truth of prison. Thus, I did not believe a word from the stories about Yalta, for example. To our astonishment, about ten years later, when in Romania published books and documents linked to those events started to penetrate... I found, that in Romanian prisons around the year 1956, things were known that had barely seen the light of day in the West... I don't know exactly when the first news about the Yalta Conference were leaked (I am talking about the disclosure of those secrets), but, I repeat, Romanian prisoners found out about those secrets approximately in '56.⁵² No, even earlier, much earlier, in '49, from the Serbians, but no one had paid attention to them.

(Gherla 140)

Even more incredibly, the truth originates from a vexingly complex inside-outside tandem, in this case from the Serbian political prisoners detained in Romanian jails; outside their own country, the Serbs are incarcerated in another communist country, inside the same large carceral space of the Eastern bloc,

The fugitive anti-Tito Serbians (jailed in Romania after the quarrel between Tito and Stalin) were telling about the territorial allotment at Yalta -- they were detailing even the percentages that have proved to be exact -- from Randolph's mouth, in the summer of '43. Those Serbians had arguments with their Romanian cellmates who would not believe the Serbs who were saying that Churchill had proposed the percentage to Stalin, who did nothing else than approved, not wrestled out. Romanian prisoners could not accept this version about Churchill -- he had been for sure blackmailed, forced to accept the percentage, proposed by the Russians, of course. The Romanians could not believe -- yes,

⁵² The Yalta Conference, held in February 1945, brought together American President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Great Britain's Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet Union's dictator Joseph Stalin for the reorganization of post WWII Europe. One of the major controversies about the conference's outcome is the domination of the conference by Stalin, who deftly moved to declare Eastern and Central Europe under the Soviet sphere of influence from then onward.

the English may be the 'perfidious Albion' but still, could not be compared to the Russians. And the American was the good giant. (*Gherla* 140-1)

Goma relates the varied reception of this political news that was common knowledge in prison and a taboo topic outside: some older detainees were finishing their bedtime prayers by saying about Roosevelt, "And punish him, oh, God, *the Paralytic*, don't let him rest even in his grave, for he has sold us like cattle" (*Gherla* 139). Others, thinking they knew better, "were cursing *the Paunchy*, namely Churchill, for being the really guilty one" (139). The world of prison, with its prison-truths turns out to be, in Goma's description, an alternative space of memory and history. This space is created from various micro-worlds that generate their own histories, countering the official lore. In exposing the many forms of memory that the story of the political prison generates, Goma has succeeded in offering a range of contrapuntal readings of forgotten micro and macro national, regional, and international invisible, yet very painful histories.

The portrait of the communist jailer, interrogator, and torturer

A glimpse at the names of the writers brought together in the critical volume *Literatura română sub comunism* [*Romanian Literature Under Communism*] written by Romanian literary critic Eugen Negrici (2007), reveals that none of these writers has offered descriptions of the Romanian communist interrogators and torturers in their cultural, social, political, and psychological dimensions. Inspired portraits can be found in various prison memoirs written by authors not included in Negrici's study, such as Ioan Ioanid, Lena Constante, Nicolae Steinhardt, Nicole-Valéry Grossu, etc. Yet none of them surpassed Goma's brilliant verbiage in capturing so vividly the brazenness, the obtuseness, the illiteracy, the idiocy, and the inhumanity of a communist interrogator or torturer. While every prison memoir has a unique and important story

to tell and stand often as imperative documentary testimonies against a Dictatorship of Lies, some are more adroit literarily than others to offer the full extension of the psychological and social profile of an interrogator of that era. No other writer has at his disposition the impressive array of sarcastic terminology and linguistic registers that Goma combines, invents and re-invents to describe what or whom he opposes in a communist society. Goma will go even further, turning the wooden language on its wooden users.

Perhaps above everything, Goma's prose in *Gherla* and other books is a model of oral literature. As he once declares in the book, he may or may not remember everything in matter of interrogation or debriefing accurately but can masterfully sketch the schizoid personalities of torturers and investigators. Torturing is not a job, an activity, or a pleasure; torture is a role. The actor plays himself and plays others, represents himself and represents others, substitutes his psyche to that of others, that of others to his own, and then culminates by insisting to transfer it to his victim. The Torturer-in-chief at Gherla, named Goiciu, was known to be a personal favorite of the country's president, and thus, untouchable by any law or by eventual enemies. This bond gave Goiciu a free hand in inventiveness: whatever torture method he conceived was implemented. So Goma sets out to deconstruct the linguistic profile of one of the most notorious torturers: his greatest pleasure was to chat mindlessly, to have a monologue with two of his selves, in front of the audience, "he wasn't, evidently, expecting answers, but God forbid you hinted that his rhetorical questions were of no interest to you! One could confront Goiciu – with words, with the "attitude" (what would follow after, was another story). But not shut up." (*Gherla* 126-7). Each sadistic guardian has a different psychological make-up that the detainees try and may or may not succeed to unpack,

Goiciu was a noisy one, an agitated one, and ultimately, an anxious guy, like all paranoid

individuals who try to remove their anxieties with words. Spoken ones. Spoken as loudly and as many and for that long. He was afraid of being lonely and this is why he never stayed at home but two to three hours out of twenty-four, and alone with himself not even a minute. He was in need of agitation, movement, words. Also, the words of others. He interpreted the silence of another, partner or adversary, as disapproval. In this regard, Goiciu had a female structure: "Say something, say anything, but I implore you, don't be silent!" The paranoid that he was, the other's silence seemed to him a come-back, a confrontation. A disapproval that he, Goiciu, had no way to... disapprove. Nothing with, because he completely lacked the habit of silence. He liked to know and to check constantly that the detainees feared him. Active fear -- this is what calmed him, kept him in a sort of balance. He liked, sometime, even the detainees' courage. Because he interpreted this courage as...fear manifested as "noise," as he was calling it. This "courage" was bringing him the promise of supplemental pleasure -- to humiliate, to beat up, to... (Goma, *Gherla* 127)

Innate sadism or insanity in male torturers is known to be a criterion for their selection for the job. But every detainee, while serving time, wonders about the motivations of those less naturally-inclined to behave sadistically to be overzealous. In communist societies, social mobility was generally a great incentive used by the party activists to obtain the collaboration of almost anyone for almost any purpose; also, the offer of enticing financial stimuli were an important way of cultivating allegiance from those compensated way beyond their expectations in the creation and maintenance of a repressive system. In *Gherla*, Goma does the inventory of the prison guards, motivated by former poverty and current salaries, four-times higher than that of an average factory laborer. Certain bonuses would double that salary, in addition to the

bonuses for dangerous and difficult work. Goma also mentions an “Order 50,” issued immediately after the war by a communist minister increasing all pay and compensations, supplies, and perks to army and police officers and soldiers in exchange for their obedience and execution of every new army commanders’ orders.

Concretely, Goma details the case of Ancateu, a fellow inmate whom he came to know as a storage guard at the Jilava Prison during his first incarceration in 1957. Before Jilava, Ancateu had served as a full security guard at the Salcia concentration camp reserved for those who were caught in the possession of precious metals, especially gold. After word had reached the Western press that at Salcia inmates were killed like flies, the ‘Center’ applied, according to Goma, “the usual Stalinist method,” namely that of staging a show trial for “crimes against humanity,” to sentence the jail’s director, the political communist representative, and a few guards (all of whom, of course, had acted according to the directions given by the same ‘Center’). Thus the communist power hoped to silence the West, by giving the impression that what was happening in the Romanian prisons was not happening at the orders of the Center, but was only a matter of insubordination, severely punished whenever spotted. The same was done in two other infamous concentration camps (The Canal and Pitesti). This was the process through which Ancateu, a former security guard became detainee at the Jilava Prison where he was still privileged to work in the storage room or kitchen. But in 1959, while Paul Goma was serving his forced residence sentence in a God-forsaken ex-detainee village, a recently-freed prisoner of conscience informs everyone that Ancateu, the former sergeant (at Salcia concentration camp), turned detainee (at Jilava concentration camp) for abuse of power, was now staff sergeant managing the storage of personal effects (at Gherla Prison) (Goma, *Gherla* 147). Ancateu had shared that “a few months before, he had been given his rank back, was even promoted, had been compensated with his

regular security guard salary for all his detention period and even an additional amount for damages, “and he had been offered...his job back” (*Gherla* 147). But having learned his lesson, Ancateu, without refusing to be re-hired in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, opted for a job in the administrative sector, to work in the storage depot. The system of torture, followed by false accusation and punishment of the very instruments of the regime was nothing more than a constant, periodically-run state sham, or a well-perfected, impertinent state con. After a short period during which political heat subsided, the state instruments who had abused their power were rewarded and promoted.

East-ethics of radicalization

After the publication of *Ostinato* abroad, additional series of measures are taken against Paul Goma by the *Securitate*. In 1971, for example, framed meetings at the Writers’ Union take place, during which his colleagues are instructed to criticize his publishing abroad and his often summoning at the political police headquarters. In 1972, Goma is accused by Dumitru Popescu-Dumnezeu that by publishing abroad “he placed in the hands of the enemy abroad a weapon with which to hit our country,” and by Dan Zamfirescu, for having committed the “unpatriotic gesture of a country-seller” (*Goma Writings I*, 17).

In September of 1973 in Bucharest, Paul Goma writes a letter addressed to German writer Heinrich Böll, the president of the International PEN Club.⁵³ Goma details the utter deprivation of human rights enacted by the Romanian communist authorities: the right of free speech, the right of free association, the right to obtain and use a passport, the right to strike (free worker’s unions), and the right to be informed (a free press). Because Böll is a fellow writer, Goma

⁵³ Goma notes that Heinrich Böll never answered his letter, in spite of having personally received a translated copy, while another had been published in press. (*Goma, Writings I* 56)

details for him the taboo topics officially censored in Romanian writers' manuscripts, prison; the brutal collectivization of agriculture; the operations of political police and communist activists; the situation of the Saxon (German) communities in Transylvania; the comportment of the 'allies' toward the Romanian population after August 23, 1944; the organized plunder after the armistice; the imposition in Romania of the [Soviet] forms of administration, internal and external policy, culture, education, economy, defense –and even orthography!; Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, the Chinese-Soviet conflict. Prohibited were also: the love... too loving; the death...too deadly; the sadness...too sad; the daily hardships; the bureaucracy; the corruption; the incoherence of the official laws, decisions, and dispositions; the social inequality. (Goma, *Writings I* 52-3)

Goma continues his long letter to Böll by underlining that Romania is a country signatory of the Human Rights Charter and had participated in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.⁵⁴

From a much later perusal of his secret police file after the fall of communism, Goma will find out the devious strategy used by the political police against him, which included measures such as: the gradual exclusion of Goma to the margins of society; his firing from his editorial job (and staging of character assassination as a writer); prohibition for bank loans; the initiation of penal procedures according to the article 166 of the Penal Code (for propaganda and actions dangerous to the state's security).⁵⁵ In 1972, when Goma is allowed to go abroad to Paris, the measure plan against him includes not only the searching and confiscation of written

⁵⁴ At this conference, the Helsinki Accords were signed by thirty-five states, including Canada, the US, and all European states (except Albania and Andorra) in Finland in July 1973, in an attempt to improve human rights conditions in the communist countries and improve East-West relations as well. Communist countries signatories of the Helsinki Accords were very concerned about their external image, and fiercely concealed internal repression.

⁵⁵ Romanian historian Iuliu Cracana publishes a study recording these procedures from Goma's secret police files.

materials from his apartment, but an entire strategy of introducing in his luggage substances specific to intelligence agents' work, so that the warnings secretly sent in advance by the Romanian intelligence to the French and German intelligence services claiming that Goma the writer is an agent in the service of a foreign power would be found true; the publishing of articles unfavorable to Goma in the foreign press; his framing as drug trafficker -- the Interpol would be informed of Goma's visit to France as just another occasion for him to further his drug trafficking; providing the Interpol with evidence to obtain the arrest and condemnation of Goma abroad; the stripping of Romanian citizenship while Goma is in Paris for actions that affect his country's interests (proofs: the interviews he gave, the publication of his novel *Usa* [*The Door*], etc.)

Not only Goma's family home is searched in his absence, but that of Goma's father-in-law, and of his sister-in-law as well. Female informers are instructed to start influencing Goma's friends (sometimes via sexual relationships) to pressure him into renouncing to write about controversial topics. One such informer, supposedly a very close friend, obtains a copy of a future manuscript from Goma for her exclusive perusal, but quickly provides the secret police with a negative politicized review of the book. "Gradually, the great majority of his friends started to distance themselves from him and thus the myth of the insufferable, ill-natured/repugnant Goma was created. The others had become, almost all, informers" (Sipos 265). Jobless, banned, excluded from the Party and the Writers' Union, Goma will work in a sculptor's workshop. Goma's police file contains a posting at this point that the isolation measures against him had succeeded: marginalized, alone, he has only one other friend writer left. In this situation, Goma expresses his solidarity with the Charter 77 movement by writing a letter addressed to Pavel Kohout, one of its founders; the letter is read live by *Radio Free Europe*

on February 9, 1977.

The Color of the Rainbow '77

In April 1977, twenty-one years after his first arrest, Paul Goma is arrested for the second time. He immortalizes this second prison experience in the novel entitled *The Color of the Rainbow '77*, published in French by the Éditions du Seuil in 1979, under the title *Le Tremblement des hommes: peut-on vivre en Roumanie aujourd'hui?* [*Humankind's Earthquake: Is Life in Romania Possible Today?*] (*The Color* henceforth)⁵⁶ The account of his second prison term is written by Goma in a different style than the one he used in *Gherla*. The first part of *The Color* details the period of letter-writing and smuggling activity of Goma, his family and friends, followed by the collecting of signatures conducted under the continuous surveillance and harassment of all signatories by the political police. After the fall of communism in 1989, Romanian historian Stejarel Olaru, specialist in the history of the Romanian intelligence services and political police, sends Paul Goma selections from his secret police file. Goma adds a solid compilation of these to all future editions of the book, under the title *Cod: Barbosul. Din dosarele secrete ale Securitatii 1967-1977*, [*Codename: The Bearded Man. From the Secret Police Securitate's files 1957-1977*], the eponymous secret codename used by the secret police agents for him throughout the years.

In January 1977, Paul Goma writes a letter of solidarity with the Charter '77 of Czechoslovakia and an open letter to Nicolae Ceausescu, the Romanian president-dictator at the time, asking him to sign a similar letter of solidarity with the Charter 77, and reminding him

⁵⁶ The title *Le tremblement des hommes* was inspired, as Goma says, by French journalist Bernard Guetta, who had written an article in *Le Nouvel Observateur* with the subtitle: "Romania, in 1977 came to know two earthquakes: the earthquake of the land on March 4, and the earthquake of men through the Goma Movement." (*Writings I* 22)

about his previous position protesting the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. In January of 1977, a group of Czech intellectuals and 242 signatories publish a critique of the Czech communist government accusing it of blatant disregard for human rights; because they are impeded by the police to take the text into the Czech Parliament for public debate, they send the Charter's text to be published abroad in the Western press and broadcast by the *Radio Free Europe* and *Voice of America*.⁵⁷

Paul Goma's two letters, smuggled abroad via foreign diplomats in Bucharest, reach France and, in a similar manner, are read publicly by the *Radio Free Europe* station in Paris in February 1977. The news about Goma's campaign for collecting signatures on a text demanding respect for human rights in Romania is broadcast as well. Goma explains in *The Color* how instrumental this radio station was in transmitting messages not only via an East-West axis, but also in coordinating occasional East to East messaging.⁵⁸ Goma's refusal to identify his 1977 human rights movement with any color of the political spectrum was the reason behind the title of his book, which suggests the irrelevance of a political orientation vis-à-vis the collective suffering under totalitarian systems.⁵⁹

Goma's police file (according to the historian Iuliu Cracana) notes that between 15 February and 15 March 1977,

176 people phoned Paul Goma (71 from the capital city Bucharest and 95 from the rest of the country). Another statistics included in his file indicates that 43 individuals signed Goma's open letter directly, 28 via phone, 2 by correspondence and 33 congratulated

⁵⁷ See H.Gordon Skilling, "Charter 77 and Human Rights in Czechoslovakia." London, 1981 Print.

⁵⁸ Often, citizens living in the same city in Romania would not contact each other directly for fear of police surveillance, but would communicate via a foreign radio station. Goma notes that in February 1977, "for ten days, this American radio station became a Romanian national station."

⁵⁹ Goma's political leanings have always been and remain leftist.

him. The police file contained charts where the signatories are classified according to age, nationality, educational and professional background, geographical areas, etc.

(Sipos 266)

Another chart details that out of the 430 people who did not sign but expressed their support, 336 wanted to obtain permission to leave the country. “The great majority did obtain it, to defuse the conflict and prove to the West that the protests were useless” (Sipos 274). Several volumes contain information about hundreds of ordinary people who expressed their solidarity with Goma’s courageous actions.

Field agents were immediately dispersed to start the retaliations against the signatories: intimidation, arrest and torture, job firings, show trials within workplace during Party meetings. Many signatories are forced to retract their signatures and declare their disavowal publicly. Abroad, via diplomatic channels, Romanian diplomats (undercover agents) insist that the engagement of German newspapers in the “Case Goma” was going to affect negatively the family unification process (the Germans who wanted to emigrate from Romania to the Federal Republic of Germany), informers are instructed to influence German ambassador Balken Richard and cultural attaché Lang Halmuth, so they would in turn convince their government in Bonn about the ill-timing of the press campaign through the Radio Free Europe station. Two or three psychiatrists are scheduled to visit Paul Goma at home pretending to have come to sign the Open Letter, but actually to assess his vulnerabilities, and if that would not prove efficient enough, the report says “we will then find different methods to annihilate him” (Sipos 269). Agents are sent to his home to threaten and beat him (several times a huge boxer champion will wrestle Goma, who describes these scenes in *The Color* using irony and self-irony, since one time he was helped to escape from the boxer’s hands by the stay-at-home women in his building). Potential

signatories are arrested and made disappear even before reaching Goma's apartment, already surrounded by tens of plaincloth agents.

A few days before Goma himself is arrested, several of his friends who stayed with him and his family daily to protect him and the signatories' list against physical abuse are arrested (under the absurd accusation-interdiction that no more than two people are allowed to associate at any point)⁶⁰. Goma is arrested on April 1, 1977, immediately after the Romanian dictator Ceausescu holds meetings with the Internal Police minister and several members accusing them for not having done everything necessary to neutralize and isolate Goma. From then on, at their orders, the agents will spread the idea that Goma is a social parasite, an alcoholic, and a fascist working for the American espionage.

Arrested, tortured, and drugged by the Romanian *Securitate* officers, Paul Goma will be freed on May 6, 1977, as a result of intense Western media attention, spearheaded by the *Radio Free Europe* in Paris. Having been imprisoned before, Goma is aware that his treatment inside the political jail depends on the actions taken outside by foreign radio stations, major newspapers, and the PEN Club. Foreseeing his torture and possible death, Goma writes his will before being arrested and sends it abroad under provision of being made public after three weeks from the date of his arrest. The text of Goma's will aims to pre-empt any doubt that he would ever agree to collaborate with his torturers in any regard and to instruct his audience not to believe that he would willingly sign any papers during his arrest, acknowledge any fault, or ask Ceausescu for a pardon.⁶¹ After his arrest, his wife and son are evicted from their apartment and taken to another part of the city by political police agents.

⁶⁰ This accuse is a reference to the prohibition of right to assembly.

⁶¹ Paul Goma is well aware of these police techniques and makes every effort to pre-empt them. Nonetheless, his police file, opened after 1989, contains a fake request, allegedly made by Goma during his arrest, and presented as a reason for Goma's ulterior release.

Goma's goal of "unforgetting" during his second prison time is more alive than ever. Once arrested, he recognizes the interior of a communist prison,

Oh, the interrogation rooms... I tell myself. The numbness, the indifference, the wish for rest - like my worries about the others have disappeared: now I must be alert to see to hear, to register all that that I see, all that I hear, all that I feel. I must memorize, I must store. IN ORDER TO WRITE AFTER I GET OUT.⁶² (Goma, *The Color* 191, author's capitals)

He continues, talking to himself, "I'm content they arrested me. It would have been worse if they'd have left us alone, it would have been a sign that little they cared about us and our power (!) of the powerless. It would have been even worse for them to put me on a plane and have me shipped in a gift box to the West" (Goma, *The Color* 190). On the contrary, he is announced that for the Goma Movement for Human rights he has been sentenced to death. The investigators torture him in various ways, which include the tearing off of his beard, and the inducement of a medically-supervised blood pressure for a prolonged period, in the hope that Goma, weakened and dizzied by headaches and heart palpitations would sign a recantation of his deeds and a request for a presidential pardon from Ceausescu. As assessed by two medical doctors during his detention, Goma's blood pressure was raised to the levels of 210-270, which caused him several cardiac crises. By the time he is freed, he can barely walk, in spite of the last-minute medical cosmeticization of his condition via additional shots and oral medications. One year later, Goma finds the inner resource of describing his interrogation sessions in a particular half-humorous, half-grave style that provokes reactions of explosive laughter intertwined with deep indignation and revolt from his audience. His book stands as a proof that, opposition, for an oppressed

⁶² Goma refers here to his friends, supporters and signatories of his open letter arrested before or after him, whose fate in the hands of political police preoccupies him.

subject who is smart enough, experienced, and visionary, is more than possible; it is the only way towards a normal sense of self.

Departure for France and Surveillance on Foreign Soil

Upon multiple public protests, manifestations, appeals, and press articles published in France, the Romanian government devises a strategy to release Goma temporarily in order to quell the unwanted negative publicity. On April 21, 1977, The French Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Romania launches an *Appeal* for Goma's release, "Among approximately six hundred signatories are: Ionesco, Aragon, Sartre, Calder, Daix, Domenach, Pierre Emmanuel, Fejtö, Garaudy, Le Roy Ladurie, Macciocchi, Maximov, Claude Mauriac, Nekrassov, Pliusci, Sollers, Tigrid, Todorov, etc." (Goma, *The Color* 270). On April 28, 1977, *Le Quotidien de Paris* publishes two articles, "There is dissidence in Romania, too" and "Goma makes a case for memory," along two of Goma's texts, "First Letter to Ceausescu" and "Why do Romanians leave Romania." The American Pen Club protests against Goma's arrest; among the signatories are "Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, Francine Duplessis-Gray, Kurt Vonnegut, Alain Ginsberg and Henri Carlisle" (Goma, *The Color* 271). The New York Committee "Truth for Romania," through Professor Brutus Coste, protests to the U.S. President Jimmy Carter against Goma's abusive imprisonment. More manifestations take place in Paris, at the Eiffel Tower, and before the Romanian Embassy in Paris. The *Appeal* for Goma's release from prison appears in *L'Humanité* and *Le Monde*. On May 9, 1977, Marie-France Ionesco, daughter of Eugène Ionesco, finally succeeds in contacting Goma to find out about its status; heavily drugged by the political police, Goma had been delivered in a semiconscious state to his wife and father-in-law on May 6th.

Released from prison under the growing Western pressure, Goma has no career, no friends, and no means of subsistence. The police try to force him to emigrate, but Goma refuses to leave the country. A few months later, he receives an invitation from the French PEN club to visit France, but because the secret police provides him only with a photocopy of the invitation, Goma is unable to use it for obtaining a passport. After two months and a meeting with police General Nicolae Plesita (his torturer at the Rahova prison in the early 1977, and who, in the meanwhile, had been promoted for this very feat), Goma obtains the original invitation. On September 23, 1977, he uses it to apply for a passport for him and his family, threatening with a hunger strike in case of an unfavorable answer. He leaves the country for Paris on November 20, 1977. In January 1978, the Minister of Interior Teodor Coman proposes to strip him of his Romanian citizenship, fact quickly accomplished via a presidential decree.

Upon Goma's departure from Romania, *Securitate* General Plesita promises him that "the long arm of the [communist] Revolution" will reach him and his family in France (Goma, *Writings I* 20) Plesita, medaled personally by Ceausescu for having tortured Goma, threatens him that he will receive a sign as soon as he sets foot on the French soil. This first sign is the assault on Monica Lovinescu allegedly perpetrated by two Palestinian agents hired by Ceausescu's *Securitate* to beat her and ensure the permanent loss of her ability to speak; Monica Lovinescu was the editor-in-charge with broadcasting the program "Theses and Anti-theses in Paris" from the microphone of the *Radio Free Europe* in Paris, and who had been instrumental in his release from prison and arrival in France. Lovinescu, a literary author, critic and journalist who had fled communist Romania in 1948, was one of the most important journalists associated in the Romanian consciousness from the 1960s onward with *Radio Free Europe*, tirelessly exposing the Romanian dictators' abuses. Already highly inconvenient to the Romanian *Securitate*, she

becomes Ceausescu's personal target after she starts campaigning in Paris via all means possible for the release of writer Paul Goma, the Romanian Solzhenitsyn. More documentary details about Monica Lovinescu's vicious beating and the connection of her aggressors with Carlos the Jackal, the infamous international terrorist, are found in the memoir written by the *Securitate* General Mihai Pacepa titled *Red Horizons*, Paul Goma's *Writings I and Journals*, in Monica Lovinescu's journal *La Apa Vavilonului*, [*At the Babylon's Waters*], and also in historian Marius Oprea's study *The Banality of Evil: A History of the Securitate*.⁶³ Luckily, Monica Lovinescu is saved in time by her neighbors from the hands of her two aggressors, but is badly hurt and hospitalized. This is where Paul Goma visits her upon his arrival in France.

In order to ruin Goma's reputation before his supporters in France, rumors were spread by the secret police that Goma was and continued to be an agent of the Romanian political police infiltrated in the midst of the Romanian and Eastern European exile community. Writers in Paris who had sustained him, like Dumitru Tsépeneg, had to be made believe that despite having "initiated the dissident movement in Romania, now Paul Goma profits and obtains all benefits" (Sipos 277). At least ten articles were sent to the exile and foreign press unmasking Goma as an agent; open letters were sent to *Newsweek*, *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Der Spiegel*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*; the producing of manuscripts supposedly written by Goma in which he disclosed *the role assigned to him* within the political exile community; the elaboration of letters of unmasking and protests against Goma as written by intellectuals and students for the *Radio Free Europe* and the Ambassador Arthur Goldberg, the head of the American delegation for the Belgrade Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe; the launching of rumors that Goma, with the help of his Jewish father-in-law, "maintained contacts with highly important

⁶³ Ion Mihai Pacepa defected to the West in 1978, by surrendering to the American Embassy in Bonn. *Red Horizons* is the title of the book he wrote about his years of service in the Romanian *Securitate* after his defection to the US.

Jewish figures, being employed by the Israeli secret services, fact justifying his Jewish support” (Sipos 278). The police “measure plan” includes Goma’s portrayal as an adventurer who, in search of cheap popularity, becomes the instrument of reactionary circles that use him for all sorts of propaganda against his own country. Among the arguments devised by agents to sustain this idea: the lack of Goma’s talent as a writer and non-appreciation in France; the lack of support from the exilic community in Paris; additional rumors are spread that,

aware of his diminished popularity, he adopted the tactic of the émigré priest Virgil Gheorghiu, who, from time to time, declared that communist agents had tried to kidnap him. Also, Paul Goma started to declare that he received death threats from people who spoke Romanian very well; within foreign journalists’ circles, especially the French ones, it will be transmitted (...) that Romanian intellectuals do not pay any attention to C.I.E.L. because the Romanian section had been placed under Goma’s leadership, a mediocrity. (Sipos 280)

The second wave of intimidation comes about in October-December of 1978, when Paul Goma takes a trip to the US. Twice in New York (and many times later in the Parisian subway) he is threatened in Romanian by unknown people that he believes to be political police agents telling him, “If you don’t keep your mouth shut, we’re gonna apply the Bulgarian umbrella on you.”⁶⁴ On December 10, 1978, Paul Goma will participate in the Amnesty International Meeting, on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, meeting where the liquidation of the Goma Movement for Human Rights and the violent

⁶⁴ The expression “the Bulgarian umbrella” refers to the famous case of Georgi Markov, the Bulgarian novelist and playwright who defected from Bulgaria in 1969 and worked for the *BBC World Service*, *Radio Free Europe* and the *Deutsche Welle* abroad. For his constant opposition and criticism indicting Bulgaria’s Stalinist regime, Markov is believed to have been murdered by the Bulgarian secret police in collaboration with the KGB agents on Sep 7, 1978. While waiting at a bus station to go to his workplace, namely the BBC radio station in London, he is quickly injected in the leg with a ricin-filled pellet by an undercover agent who poked him with the tip of his umbrella. Three days later, Markov will die at the hospital.

suppression of the miners' revolt in Romania are given special attention.

In March 1979, Seuil releases *Le Tremblement des hommes* [*The Color of the Rainbow* '77] (translated by Alain Paruit). In the presence of Eugène Ionesco and Fernando Arrabal, it is during the book's launch that Goma announces the founding of the first Syndicate of the Free Workers in Romania (after those created in Poland and the USSR) that demands full syndical and human rights, without exception. The syndicate's core "has been formed by signatories of the Movement for Human Rights from the Spring of 1977," reports the AFP (Agence France Presse) on March 5, 1978. Goma continues to be threatened directly, by phone or in press, either in France or abroad, in Italian (*L'Umanità*) and Greek newspapers. During the summer of 1979, Ceausescu's agents abroad have discredited not only the writer Paul Goma in various ways (questioning his Romanian identity, labeling him either as a fascist, a Jew, or a homosexual, but also trying the same character assassination technique on Eugene Ionesco, labeling him as alcoholic or decrepit, and *Radio Free Europe* journalist Monica Lovinescu a "bitch."⁶⁵

In November 1980, Goma attends the Madrid Conference on Human Rights, where Romania is thoroughly criticized for widespread rights abuses. The press conference dedicated to Romania and organized by M. Korne and Paul Goma is cancelled due to anonymous bomb threats. On March 3, 1981, Paul Goma receives a book-bomb by mail that will be defused by the French police at his house; the operation will burn the face and hands of the bomb squad leader, a Frenchman called Calisti. Similar book-bombs were received by another Romanian in Paris, Nicolae Penescu (Goma's co-participant in the Madrid Conference) and the Romanian journalist Serban Orascu in Cologne, Germany (both hurt in the explosion). Another assassination attempt on Paul Goma's life by the hands of a Romanian intelligence agent sent by Nicolae Ceausescu is

⁶⁵ Goma clarifies that "The Bitch" is the title of a derogatory article dedicated to Monica Lovinescu and written by Ion Lăcrănjă, a Romanian writer subservient to the communist party.

uncovered when the agent, named Matei Pavel Haiducu, refuses to follow the order and contacts the French intelligence. The French counterintelligence agents allow the scenario to unfold according to the plan, so that they can obtain proof of a foreign secret service orchestrating covert assassinations on their territory. In a dramatic live scene, a clumsy French agent “accidentally” knocks down Paul Goma’s drink poisoned by the Romanian agent Haiducu. A scandal erupts between the French and Romanian intelligence agencies and its waves quickly reach both countries’ leaders at the time, François Mitterrand and Nicolae Ceausescu, as well as Charles Hernu, the French Minister of Defense.⁶⁶ Paul Goma will detail this life experience and his temporary collaboration with the French intelligence services in deterring the assassination attempts against him in the novel, *Soldatul Câinelui*, [*The Dog’s Soldier*], a detective story written in a jocose style. (The book is published in French by Hachette under the title *Chassé-croisé* in 1983). One of the memorable quotes in the book is when Goma reflects on being fortunate to survive a murderous Romanian intelligence service for years, “You wanted to shut me up. In your structural imbecility (...) you pushed into my mouth, instead of a gag, a megaphone” (Goma, *Soldatul* 37). Indeed. Goma’s megaphone blasted the secret police’s deeds into posterity.

In 1981, Goma’s book *Les Chiens de Mort* (translated by Alain Paruit) is released by Hachette. The original title of the book is *Patimile dupa Pitești* [*The Passion of Pitești*] (published in French by Hachette under the title *Chasse-croise* in 1983) and represents Goma’s attempts to render the most horrific prison of all in Romania, which Goma did not get to experience, but had heard about from other prisoners at Gherla prison. He makes it his mission to make known, even via a semi-fictional account the shocking experimental torture that destroyed humans and transformed them in anti-humans, or hollow men in one of the most atrocious

⁶⁶ See Tofan, Liviu. *The Fourth Hypothesis*. Bucharest: Polirom. 2011 Print.

communist labs. Two other testimonies appeared before 1989, that of Virgil Ierunca and Dumitru Bacu, ex-detainee from Pitesti, the concentration prison, with many more personal testimonies, documentary evidence, and scholarly studies appearing after the fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

In 1984, Goma, a French resident, also prepares for Éditions Hachette in Paris a collection of East-West *Dialogues* with prominent writers such as Eugène Ionesco, Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Raymond Aron, Boris Souvarine, Elias Canetti, J.F. Revel, Milovan Djilas, and also texts by Czeslaw Milosz, Jan Patocka, Leszek Kolakowski, Ludvig Vakulic, Jaroslaw Durich and also the Romanians Oana Orlea, Rodica Iulian, Augustin Buzura, Ștefan Bănuțescu, Bujor Nedelcovici, and Nicolae Manolescu. Hachette will close its *Foreign Books* department and Goma will try to move the collection to the Albin Michel publishing house in Paris. In 1985, Albin Michel decides not to accept the publishing of the entire collection, but only a selection of a few titles. Only two have appeared: Czeslaw Milosz -- *Les pays d'Ulro* [*Ulro's Countries*], and Bujor Nedelcovici -- *Le Second messenger* [*The Second Messenger*].

Goma's police file reveals that, from 1971 to 1984, his phone was continuously tapped and the conversations recorded. Although Goma has been in exile in France since 1977, the Romanian political police has followed him on the French soil for eight more years by tapping his phone, having him followed and photographed, sending him book-bombs, paying assassins to kill him by poisoning, and ordering the kidnapping of his son.

Fear, Betrayal, and Self-Betrayal

Of capital importance to every dictatorship novel writer is to highlight the depth to which fear penetrates the souls of ordinary people in a totalitarian society. Goma begins with exposing how

the most sacred of ties, those between parents and children are violated and contorted by an absurd, terrorist system repressing every oppositional gesture toward the political establishment's ideology and image,

There were parents who not only did not defend their children in the accuser's stand, but repudiated them in public, in the media, (well, yes, they were coerced to do it, but if a person does not want to do some crap, he doesn't do it!), to keep their poor job, the miserable dwelling, the damned freedom. Children who repudiated their parents facing the communist youth flag, and, in written, in the school's newspaper, I am not even mentioning. (*Gherla* 135-6)

This communist policy of family members informing on each other was a Soviet import, especially that of child informers. The case of thirteen-year old Pavlik Morozov was well-known in Russia and all over the communist bloc; in 1932, the Russian press spread the news of a thirteen-year old boy, Pavlik, who had allegedly denounced his father to the authorities and whose extended family had killed him as revenge. The propaganda story made Pavlik a martyr to the Soviet cause; a cult of the brave child-informer was born, with songs, plays, and symphonic poem and opera surrounding it. Generations of Soviet children grew up with his moral model, which spread to the rest of the communist countries via the common methodologies employed by their respective political police agencies. Decades later, dissidents and researchers alike exposed the story to have been a devious fabrication of the Soviet intelligence propaganda.

After discussing the brainwashing of a child in a communist society indoctrinated to serve the Party first and foremost, and the elimination of the parents or children who did not adhere to communist revolutionary ideas, Goma explains the tragic psychology of a Romanian ordinary citizen. A foreign journalist visiting Romania in the midst of the political scandal stirred

by “The Goma Movement for Human Rights” in 1977, honestly declares that, although visiting Romania for the third time, he does not understand what is going on, and nothing of the Romanian psychology. Goma explains by offering a historical context to his psychological profiling of the ordinary citizen,

What can the mature Romanians understand today from words like *democracy*, *freedom*, or *freedom of speech*? Nothing. These are mere words, which, in their current usage, designate the opposite: unfreedom, tyranny, and silence. They came into the world during the war and lived their childhood under the Russian military occupation. Their adolescence was ‘protected’ by the Great Stalin’s shadow, and that of the Little leader—the indigenous one; they came of age during a time when their parents, relatives, older acquaintances were collectivized with the club and the rifle, and were digging the Canal [extermination labor camp], but many of them ‘matured’ after their elimination from school for social origin.⁶⁷ (Goma, *Writings I* 112)

In yet another interview with German-Romanian journalist and writer Dieter Schlesak in 1972, Goma explains how he had described in one of his books the ordinary Romanian living under a communist regime. His thesis in *The Door* contends that each catastrophe, fear, mistrust, and trauma brings ‘biological mutations.’ There is a prison that the individuals build themselves voluntarily inside, forced on them by the multiple traumas that they have suffered. In *The Door*,

Four women are suddenly noticing that they are locked inside a mountain chalet. No one knows how [it happened]. But from this moment they appropriate the psychology of a detainee and act accordingly: they draw lots to allot beds, they choose a guard for the cell (a cell leader), establish a schedule for killing free time, ‘rules of functioning,’ etc., as in

⁶⁷ “Unhealthy social origin” was the formula used by the communist authorities to remove from schools anyone who had intellectual, middle-class, or upper-class ancestry. By contrast, the favored “healthy origin” was represented by the low working or non-working classes, the proletariat, the destitutes, the poor.

a real cell. (Goma, *Writings I* 67)

The locked room will not only awaken the cellmates' sexuality and storytelling about past exploits, real or imaginary ones, but will trigger a confessional mode of acknowledging past self-betrayals with one of the women telling how she has helped the process of collectivization in Romania during the Stalinist period. Goma shares his opinion with the German journalist that "prison and freedom are inside us, not outside. It is important that there are people (and they are not a few) who remain voluntarily in continuous detention. In order to free a human, the source of self-detention must be removed" (Goma, *Writings I* 68).

Goma will note in his journal titled *Writings I* how, at Gherla, the wave of the younger political detainees was criticized and rejected by the older political detainees, who were saying, "We are the real ones who resisted, because we refused, repelled communism, while you, by signing petitions, and asking an illegitimate power what you asked, you legitimized it!" (Goma, *Writings I* 306). Goma insists that this was the first generational misunderstanding vis-à-vis the available resistance strategies: the old prisoners understood that complete opposition was the only solution and kept following this line, while the students of '56 nuanced this opposition by formulating claims of precise nature, "Ultimately, to claim meant *an action*." (*Writings I* 307, author's italics). Resistance strategies correlated with detention status; older detainees were imprisoned not for what they *had done*, but for who they *were*. Goma's analysis of prison life is often sociological, offering an insightful perspective on how subgroups form and re-form in punitive environments,

If solidarity had become in our prisons a crime -- punished as such -- the detainees carry a good part of that guilt themselves. Oh, it is not an accusation, each human is *one*, knows his strengths, his weaknesses, especially the threshold beyond he cannot carry on

with his strength anymore, Thus, not an accusation, but observation: the detainee is the guardian's accomplice -- not only for listening blindly to his orders (woe! if he doesn't); and not because when a cellmate asks for one of his rights -- a right, which, is almost always, everyone's right -- he (cellmate or detainee) refuses solidarity with the one that 'knocks on the door.' But because he goes further ,not just to becoming a snitch, but he stops on an intermediary miserable step: he does not have the normal courage to remain what he is: a detainee, thus in total opposition with the guardian, instead he blackmails his cellmate, his brother in suffering who dared ask for a right ('to knock on the door'): Do you, my colleague, my friend, my brother, have the heart to ...ask what should not be asked, well, to provoke Mr. Guardian, to anger Sir Captain, so that, afterward, the animals to punish us all, and not just you? Isn't life in a cell hard already for us to poison it more ourselves, *knocking on the door for some little nothings?* (Goma, *The Colors* 139)

Goma's effort to capture a faithful portrait of the fellow detainee starts with a depiction of the silence and powerlessness of the detainees moved from one wing of the prison camp to another, from an isolation room to the investigation room, from the torture room to the fake exuberance of the torturers and security or intelligence officers.

Writing in non-Romanian for non-Romanians

In his journal *Writings I*, Goma meditates about what has happened to him since 1966, when, at the age of 31, he had finally seen his first book at the printing press becoming necessarily estranged from him in print form. A more gradual estrangement creeps in, when Goma, the human rights author, says "The first translation in the West naturally encouraged me to continue... writing in Romanian for Romanians. And, as the books in non-Romanian for non-

Romanians were piling up, in parallel with the feeling of total freedom, (I had begun *to forget* that a censorship still existed in the world) another one was growing inside me (...) which I was trying to keep away and not name it, fearing that the name would bring it into being. Shucks, yeah. I write in Romanian and publish in non-Romanian.” (Goma, *Soldatul* 23).

Romania’s literary establishment politics after the fall of the communist regime in 1989 find Goma a perpetual outcast who still lives in France from where he keeps writing an acerbic prose against whatever he perceives to be unjust in matters of local, regional, or international politics. He is once again marginalized by his former colleagues and friends, as “uncomfortable” or “contumacious.” The Romanian exile community is fractured as well, with some returning after the fall of the regime, believing in the goodness of the new order. Goma is among those who believe, like Herta Müller, inside or outside Romania, that the communists or neo-communists are still in power and have retained all their privileges, with none of them brought to justice for former abuses. As of today, Goma’s Romanian citizenship and property rights have not been restored to him in spite of a petition addressed to the Romanian government and signed by more than three hundred Romanian citizens, among which cultural and scientific personalities as well as ordinary citizens. He remains an *apatride*, or a stateless political refugee in France, from where he continues to publish and self-publish while collaborating with various publishing houses, journalists and writers interested in his work in Romania and Bessarabia, his native place.

Francophone Exceptionality: Women’s Prison Literature in French

Women’s prison novels written in French by women from Eastern Europe during or after the Cold War era is a sub-category of prison writing whose very existence needs to be highlighted

and granted appropriate critical attention. In Romania, women's prison literature from the Cold War has carved its own niche within the post-communist literary landscape; well-known authors such as Adriana Georgescu, Elisabeta Rizea, Lena Constante, and Anița Nandriș-Cudla offered their detailed perspective on the suffering of women political prisoners in the communist prisons inside and outside Romania. Romanian women's prison literature written in French and published in France since the 1950s until the late 1990s is a largely unacknowledged surprise, or irregularity in the field of French letters. This irregularity is due to the fact that these women's writings (as explained in the first chapter of this book) cannot be easily categorized as "Francophone," or at least not in the postcolonial acceptance of the term. Rather, these women writers are part of a world culture that has been traditionally seen until WWII and the advent of the communism as Francophile and Francophone at the same time, without any colonial implications.

The labeling of these women authors as "Francophile writers" would not do justice to their already uneasy categorization by literary historians as authors belonging only partially to Romanian literature (their works being written in French), and not at all to the French literature. At home with their bilingual identities after being educated in French either in Romania or France, several women authors of prison literature from Romania chose to write in French and publish in France before or after 1989. Some scripted their memoirs while residing in Romania; others did so during their voluntary or forced exile to France. Thus, it can be said that they belong as much to the French letters as they do to the Romanian ones. Moreover, these women writers of prison memoirs in French represent all those cultural traditions that their upbringing, life experiences, and writing efforts considerably touch upon: French, Francophone, Francophile, and, of course, Romanian. By extending the perspective, they are also representative authors of

anti-Soviet literature, Cold War literature, women literature, or human rights literature. In short, their autobiographical fiction belongs to a world literature transcending norms of geo-political or linguistic territoriality.

The notable women who wrote their political prison memoirs in French after having served time in communist prisons in Romania are the following: 1) Nicole Valéry-Grossu, *Bénie soi-tu, prison* [*Bless Be Thy, Prison*]. Her book was published in French by Édition Plon in Paris; after the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Romanian anticommunist revolution of 1989, the book was successfully adapted for an eponymous movie directed by Nicolae Margineanu in 2002⁶⁸; 2) Madeleine Cancicov, *Le Cachot de marionettes: Quinze ans de prison. Roumanie 1949-1964* [*The Puppet Dungeon: Fifteen Years in Prison. Romania 1949-1964*], published by Critérium in France in 1990; 3) Adriana Georgescu-Cosmovici, *Au commencement était la fin* published by Hachette in Paris in 1951 (translated into English in 2003 under the title *In the Beginning Was the End*); 4) Oana Orlea, *Les années volées: dans le goulag roumain à seize ans* [*The Stolen Years: in the Romanian Gulag at Sixteen*], Éditions du Seuil, 1991; 5) Alice Panaiador, *La traversée du feu* [*Fire Crossing*] was published by the Éditions Pauline in France in 1979; 6) Lena Constante, with *L'évasion silencieuse: Trois mille jours dans les prisons roumaines*, written in French and published by Éditions La Découverte in 1990 (translated into English as *The Silent Escape: Three Thousand Days in the Romanian Prisons* in 1993).

Lena Constante, *The Silent Escape*

Lena Constante (1909-2005) is a Romanian artist and painter, who specialized in stage design, tapestry, and folk art. Immediately after WWII, her profession brings her close to Elena

⁶⁸ Nicole Valery Grossu's title, *Benie soi-tu, prison*, is borrowed from Solzhenitsyn, who strongly believed prison time meant a fundamental positive moral change for him, helping crystallize his inner commitment to denounce large-scale human rights abuse.

Pătrășcanu, the wife of the popular Minister of Justice at the time, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu. In 1945, Elena Pătrășcanu, a set designer, founds a puppet theater for children in Bucharest and asks Lena Constante to assist her with the project in her quality as stage designer. When Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu is targeted to be purged by the communist president-dictator of Romania, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1947-1965), he is arrested on trumped-up charges and jailed in secret and complete isolation for the duration of the show trial's preparation. This preparation involved the rounding up of a considerable number of innocent people to testify against Pătrășcanu and, in true Stalinist style, ensure his death by execution verdict. Lena Constante is among those arrested for the crime of having been close to Pătrășcanu's wife. Her best friend and future husband, Harry Brauner, an ethnomusicologist and folklorist, is arrested as well.⁶⁹ Unaware of the identity or the number of the arrested, nor the reasons for these arrests, Lena Constante tells herself, "this meant accusing one or all of the other defendants. Accuse them how? Accuse them of what? Why accuse them?" Not until four and a half years later, will she find out that the number of the accused who were supposed to denounce each other by agreeing to the show trial's mapped script was eleven.

Lena Constante's prison memoir, *L'évasion silencieuse: Trois mille jours dans les prisons roumaines* was written in French and published by Éditions La Découverte in Paris in 1990. The English version, translated by Franklin Philip has appeared in 1993 under the title *The Silent Escape: Three Thousand Days in the Romanian Prisons*. The book received French and Romanian literary prizes: the prize of the Francophone Writers' Association and that of the Romanian Academy's "Lucian Blaga." This autobiographical novel depicts the incarceration of Lena Constante, condemned in 1948 and sentenced to twelve years in prison, with more than

⁶⁹ Harry Brauner is the brother of Victor Brauner, the well-known Surrealist painter and sculptor who was part of André Breton and Gheorghe Brâncuși's circle in Paris

eight in solitary confinement. Her interrogation, lasting five years, takes place during the very period when show trials were conducted in line with the Soviet ideology and directions, all throughout the Eastern European bloc between 1948-1954; the Soviet Union itself had known a period known as the Great Purge before WWII, during which Stalin had pursued and killed all his political opponents and his most faithful companions who had carried the executions at his order, all in a concerted effort to erase all traces of his crimes.

Constante's memoir is unique because it describes the lengthy agony of an innocent young woman transformed overnight into a political prisoner forced to live in total isolation for eight years, with no other human contact other than that with her interrogators, torturers, and jailers, mostly male. In this sense, her experience is a highly genderized one, in which the male oppressors "depersonalize her individuality, torture her body, deprive her womanhood of sexual and maternal instincts, destroy her belief in truth and right. Thus, the battle that Lena Constante wages against the communist regime is also a battle against her male persecutors" (Brînzeu 150). Because of her resistance against and survival of hunger, disease, rape attempts, voyeurism, savage genderized torture, and utter loneliness, her exceptional testimony fills an important gap in the archive of women's carceral space of Romania and of the women's human rights abuse throughout the East European space post WWII.

Constante's prison memoir begins abruptly, "I have been sentenced to twelve years in prison. The trial lasted six days. The preliminary investigation, five years." Alone in a cell after her trial, Constante reflects on the torturous absurdity of her sentence, that of spending an additional seven years in a prison,

where each hour inexorably had sixty minutes, each minute sixty seconds. One, two, three, four, five seconds. Six, seven, eight, nine, ten seconds, a thousand seconds, a

hundred thousand seconds. I have lived, alone, in a cell, 157,852, 800 seconds of solitude and fear. Cause for screaming! They sentence me to live yet another 220,838,400 seconds! To live them or to die from them.” (Constante 1)

The woman prisoner counts every second of an ordeal she must go through for having committed no crime and for her resistance against the repeatedly brutal request to sign false statements incriminating others. The news that she has to serve seven more years in solitary confinement after the five already served shatters her mind; Lena Constante will lie unconscious on her mattress for the following three days. Her prison treatment is extreme before and after the trial, and follows a dramatic process of “dehumanization and defeminization” (Brnzeu 152).

She is pushed toward becoming an object. The cause is first and foremost the severe regime of incarceration: she is not allowed to sit or lie on the bed. She cannot speak, shout, sing, laugh, or cry. She can only stand or walk. In silence. Sometimes walking means making only four steps, because the space of the cell is too narrow. Four steps and the wall are followed by other four steps and the wall in a maddening circle. The prisoner is not even taken out for fresh-air strolls. (Brnzeu 152)

Torture suffered by Constante takes various forms of verbal, physical, and psychological abuse: beatings, whippings, forced walking and running for hours at end, Stalinist-style harsh interrogation, her hair pulled out, forced sleep on bare cement floors, inducement of states of exhaustion and near-death under medical supervision, sleep reduction to two hours per day only, incarceration of her family for blackmail purposes, rape attempts, contracting of tuberculosis, etc. Her otherwise monotonous life is interrupted only by the variety of these forms of torture,

She is followed, harassed, and hit from all sides, forced to humiliate herself, lie, accuse and perjure herself in a terryfying sequence of inquiries and investigations. Sometimes

her legs and back are whipped until blood flows. She cannot cry, she cannot wash off her blood, she cannot sleep. She can only walk on her sore feet, ten hours a day until she is unable to sit, lie, or stand. Sometimes, for longer periods of time, she is put into damp basement cells, full of rats, in which she can do nothing but vegetate. (Brinzeu 152)

Constante declares that she has not lost her sanity during her eight years of solitary confinement because of the memories of her past and an education permeated by the acquisition of French books by her father and her siblings from the publishing houses Garnier and La Nouvelle Revue Française; also, she recounted her Parisian scholarship in 1933, when she savored the Parisian cultural scene, her work at the World Exhibition in Paris of 1937, and her later visits to France and Italy. By summoning and revisiting these places and the French language, Lena the prisoner discovers imaginative sources of psychological resistance to occupy her time and keep her mind active; the very first mental exercises she practices in prison are the memorization of some Romanian verses spotted on newspaper bits used as toilet paper that she translates into French in her mind.

Akin to the American writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) -- a short story in which a woman sequestered by her family according to the societal norms at the time describes her gradual mental deterioration as she watches for lengthy hours the wallpaper donning her walls -- Lena Constante describes her slippage into madness while having to wash the floor of her grimy cell floor with an infested, filthy rag.⁷⁰ Where she first saw cement, upon closer examination, she starts distinguishing pebbles, "a whole seedbed of little pebbles," which stares back at her with clearly-formed eyes and heads,

Abruptly, two pebbles look at me with a gaze of stone. Under these two eyes, a mouth

⁷⁰ A further similarity lies in the timeframe needed for the two women's mental degenerative states: Gilman's heroine goes mad after a period of three months and Lena Constante mentions her maddening process as having taken place during the 120th day of her solitary detention.

grins sardonically. Nearby, another face emerges from the depths. One fused to another, the heads become organized, harmonized. To the left, to the right, above, below, large, small, impassive or grinning, beautiful or frightening, the heads swarm, proliferate everywhere. Here and there the animals worm their way in. (Constante 49)

Lena cannot drive away the heads, which stay with her day after day, under her feet, creeping out and invading the whole cell to a crescendo triggering her mindbreak. Moreover, these heads, they begin to crawl. Each spot on the wall is their sanctuary. The cell is filled with them. Heads all over. Everything causes them to be. The slice of black bread, the rag-handkerchief. Hundreds of times I throw this crumpled rag on the bed, each time to decipher there a new head, a new profile. (Constante 49)

To escape from this “madness of heads,” Lena’s flash of inspiration tells her to express it into words, “to give the illusion the reality of words” (Constante 50). She says, “without a pencil, without a paper, without experience, I timorously slunk, step by step, into a world that did not belong to me, poetry” (Constante 50). She starts remembering the verses of French poets Baudelaire, Father Bremond, Valéry, Mallarmé and Verlaine that she had memorized in her youth and strives to understand the rules of rhythm, stress, and versification. From each and all of these poets, she learns a concrete skill, such as word inversion, alliteration, imagery, or freedom of expression. When the French verses lose their meaning from too much repetition, Lena starts creating her own verses in French. She is pleased after she has “managed four or five poems on the theme of the heads” (Constante 50). Because she cannot see all these verses written, she thinks about setting them to music and chooses “The Songs of the Singing Madwoman” to support them. Lena declares that, although she is no poet or composer and “absolutely lacked critical judgment,” she continued to make up poems and was pleased with them. “I felt only the

advent of a miracle. I had finally found the key to escaping” (Constante 51).

The resoluteness that this creative process brings about for her is inspiring “I went to a great deal of trouble. I worked. I abolished the prison. My fear. Myself.” (Constante 51). Whenever she is tortured during interrogation sessions to confess to imaginary crimes and scenarios, Lena drifts away from her interrogator, “He looks at me and imagines that I’m searching for answers to his questions. How could he know I had slowly taken my leave, that I am already far away, very far, in search of an effective rhyme?” (Constante 55). Lena the prisoner will compose plays, epigrams, and prison poems. Later, she will say, “altogether I composed eight plays. After my release from prison, I managed to write down only three of them. The time it took to write them down, that of normal life -- unsettling for me -- erased the other five from memory“ (Constante 197).

Also like other strong women-prisoners of the world, Lena realizes that she needs to do physical exercises daily in order to keep her sanity. Her determination is similar to that of Nawal Saadawi, the Egyptian feminist intellectual and doctor jailed under Nasser’s regime who had scandalized her religiously-inclined cellmates with her daily physical exercise regimen. Lena says, “by itself, my mind could not fill the seventeen hours of the day,” and thus, “each morning I forced myself to do some calisthenics,” because “every day some effort was demanded to overcome despondency. To overcome the wish to die” (Constante 88). The skill that will help her not only survive, but more or less silently fight the interrogators is, after the mastering of the language of poetry, the mastering of the language of the walls. On the 584th day of her detention, inside the third prison she had been moved to, her next cell neighbor begins tapping on her wall. Two years into her complete loneliness, Lena communicates with another prisoner who teaches her the Morse code. Her disappointment is swift. The male prisoner tells her not to despair, for

soon they would be free,

But when I asked how, his answer was disappointing. Even silly. The Americans were about to intervene and save us. Fool! Despite my two years in prison, I could not cling to such a flimsy prop. In 1950, the day of my arrest, five years had already passed since the end of the war. We had finally understood it, their agreement. The Iron Curtain, and we were behind it. Sphere of influence.....A war? Impossible. Was my neighbor that naïve? Or was he merely trying to offer me a ray of hope? (Constante 87)

After three days of wall communication, they are caught and interrogated about the information transmitted from one another. Lena Constante will never know if the exchange had been genuine or just part of the interrogation team tactics to break her resistance into collaboration. She confesses that she was not sorry that the neighbor was immediately moved because “he had caused me to lose whatever spurious calm I had contrived. It took me several days to recover it” (Constante 88).

Regardless of this minor disappointment, the language of the walls was an invaluable skill sustaining the remaining ten years of Lena’s imprisonment. One benefit was that, at some point, she learned English from a next-door British woman prisoner whose only guilt was to be a British national married to a Romanian, therefore an easy target for espionage accusations.⁷¹ The two women, despite having never met before, discover, by talking through the walls, that they had common acquaintances in Bucharest and had both studied in Paris in their youth during the same years. The British woman will be freed under the pressure of her government. After her departure, Lena will succeed in building a system through which all the cells on a floor communicated, in a circuitous manner with each other and with cells on different floors as well.

⁷¹ It is highly probable that the Englishwoman (unnamed here by Constante) is Annie Samuelli, who, years after her release, wrote about her prison experience in “Woman Behind Bars in Romania.” London: Frank Cass, 1997. Print.

The price of bread and butter is important news to be transmitted, as is the lifting of the enforced obligation for all the women in the country to wear their head covered with a specific scarf. Having broken the walls of silence, an extraordinary sort of freedom ensues for the women political prisoners who give free expression to their grief, thirst for political or ordinary news, warnings about jailers' moves, or sexual longings and preferences. A unique solidarity and knowledge of each other's hurt and need takes shape,

During my two final years in solitary confinement, the wall took up the most important part of my time. There I had a curious experience. I realized that one's manner of tapping is just as expressive as the timbre of one's voice. As one's handwriting. Sometimes even more so. For it is unaffected by the conscious censorship of the voice. Or the acquired control of gestures and facial expression. (Constante 235)

Among her first experiences, Lena recounts one when she was considered "the prison's number one danger" for the militiawomen (female guards) once she will be inserted into a collective prison, "They eye me very warily. Past history, education, profession, trial, conviction, solitary confinement- everything pointed to me as focus of their vigilance. Of their class hatred. They felt their inferiority complex more acutely with me" (Constante 174). One of the many differences between Constante and her guards was her ability to switch her tapping on the wall to French after the initial contact in Romanian.

Like countless prisoners before her, she summons her past memories as a weapon against insanity and depression, but also, like Paul Goma, she makes it a mission to note mentally every aspect of her imprisonment, every face, every corner, every torture,

She feels morally obliged to give a true statement of her unique case, since a woman detained alone for so many years represents not only a singular psychological experience,

but also a proof that human resources are infinite and that human nature is fundamentally good. At the very centre of evil for so many years, Lena can certify that evil is not contagious. While love and generosity can be learned, evil is a non-catching infection, annihilated through constant exercises of spirituality and dignity. (Brinzeu 156)

Tired of the beatings and of herself, exhausted by cold and disease, and afraid that the interrogator who left part of her scalp bald will succeed in pulling all her hair roots out in one interrogation session, blackmailed with the real imprisonment and promised release of her father and sister, Lena gives up and signs the fabricated documents; she had succeeded of rejecting this gesture for more than four and a half years, but had reached the limits of her resistance.

Lena Constante is moved to a regular women's political prison environment after having spent eight years and a half of isolation. She is freed, after four more years, in 1961. In 1965, the Romanian dictator Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej dies and the leadership of the Romanian Communist Party and country's presidency is taken by Nicolae Ceausescu for the next twenty-five years, until his and his wife's execution by a firing squad in December 1989. In 1969, Nicolae Ceausescu, in a classical-by-now Khrushchev-style maneuver, denounces his predecessor, Gheorghiu-Dej, as a Stalinist murderer; he orders the retrial of Pătrășcanu's case "to prove the man's innocence, and accuse Gheorghiu-Dej of murder" (Constante 255). Thus, all survivors of the Pătrășcanu's lot are retried and exonerated, with Patrascanu reburied in a more appropriate place. Lena and long-time friend Harry Brauner, imprisoned for twelve years as well and released in 1964, marry and continue living as normal of a life as possible under a communist regime after their exoneration. In 1977, Lena writes her prison memoir. In 1985, during a visit to Paris, she is urged by her Romanian-French friends to publish her prison memoir

there; she refuses, afraid of all the reprisals against her and her family, fearing she would never see them or Romania again if she and her husband would choose exile.

Thus, choose freedom? But we wanted at all costs to remain in our own country. And then, what freedom? Since I had succeeded in feeling free, as it were, in prison, I would go on feeling free in Romania. For us, the country and the country's government were two distinct entities. It is the Romanian land that we didn't want to leave, its villages, its peasants, our language. (Constante 257)

Like Paul Goma, Constante would only choose exile if her life or that of her husband would be in imminent danger from the authorities. She returned to Romania, reflecting upon having written a book in French with no hope of it ever being published, despite her initial dream of doing so one day in Paris. The Romanian Revolution of 1989 she declares to be "a miracle" that helped her "reconcile [her] attachment to the country with a desire to bear witness" (Constante 257). In the closing lines of her memoir, written in 1990, she confesses that her hope is for her testimony to make clear "our despair and our terror. The terror that penetrated deeply into each of us" (Constante 257).

This book is not the story of an isolated case. We were not the only ones to suffer. The great mass of the Romanian people was crushed under the weight of an inhuman and aberrant regime, and hundreds of thousands of Romanians suffered oppressive years of prison. But I must recognize that I am the only woman in the country who endured eight-and-a-half years of total isolation. I hope no reader will consider this to be a glorious distinction. (Constante 257)

The Impossible Escape

In her own words, Lena Constante says that she has written two autobiographical novels: the first one, a dark, “black book,” detailing the first eight years of her loneliness and isolation in the communist prisons and the second, a gray book, describing the following four years of her detention in a “normal” collective prison, where she led “a larval existence” (Constante 6). The first volume covering the first eight years represented Constante’s impulse to testify before the younger Romanian generations and leave behind written traces of the suffering that a criminal political and police system based on the Marxist-Leninist ideology promoted on a large scale as an infernal transnational machine. In contrast, the second volume of her memoirs is prompted by the French audience’s reaction to the first one. When asked by her French readers why she did not include her later experience in several collective political prisons where she had been allowed to have human contact, cell partners, and a communal life, Constante answers that she did not see the need to dwell upon the misery of the common political prisons that she thought all Romanians were aware of; “but in Paris, some readers have asked me why did I not write about this second period of my sentence? I understood then that for the citizens of a free country, non-communist, everything that seemed to me banal and uninteresting could form tragic and scary aspects (Constante, *Impossible Escape* 6). Thus, Constante writes the second prison memoir to augment the free world’s knowledge and memory.

To answer her French readership, Constante writes a sequel to *The Silent Escape* and titles it *Evadarea imposibila. Penitenciarul politic de femei Miercurea-Ciuc 1957-1961* [*The Impossible Escape. Women’s Political Penitentiary Miercurea-Ciuc 1957-1961*]. Only this time, the book is written in Romanian and published in Romania in 1993. To date, there is no English edition available. The *Who’s Who in Contemporary Women’s Writing* notes that “the literary success of Constante the writer outshone her previously established fame as an artist. A film,

Nebunia Capetelor (The Madness of the Heads, 1997) was made of both works by the young German director Thomas Ciulei” (Miller 70).

The way Constante qualifies the transition from years of total isolation to the full immersion into an atmosphere replete with women prisoners guarded by female militiawomen is by calling it “from the hell of loneliness to the purgatory of promiscuity,” where the promiscuity for her meant the indiscriminate mingling of crammed female bodies, diseased, dirty, hungry, or dying. The first skill she had to learn here was that of normal speech. In her words, “I didn’t know how to speak. I didn’t know how to articulate. I didn’t know how to place my voice. I talked perhaps like a mute who tried the apprenticeship of speaking” (Constante, *Impossible Escape* 9). Two weeks before her moving into collectivity, Lena receives a meager tuberculosis-geared diet, for in her eighth year of detention she had already had two hemoptysis attacks because of her prison-contracted tuberculosis.

Constante’s initial impulse after being inserted back into a human community of female political prisoners is to observe how different from one another these prisoners were and how the great majority were serving very long sentences for absurdly minor or non-political reasons at all. Some were imprisoned for their failure to denounce a family member or a friend. Even stranger was the case of a woman who received a sentence of ten years in a political prison for not having denounced her rapist. Constante’s subsequent dissatisfaction stems from what she perceives to be the total lack of intellectual or political culture in these inmates. Supporting Constante’s observation in this direction is another prison memoir *The Wall Between*, written in English by Annie Samuelli, former co-inmate of Constante. All the while, Lena understands her positioning in the women’s political penitentiary. “I was part of the Trial Nr. 1 of the country. The investigation lasted five years. The first arrests were made in 1948. The trial took place in

1954. It wasn't easy even for the entire party apparatus to build, out of nothing, the scaffolding of a fabricated trial. To metamorphosize innocent people into criminals" (Constante, *Impossible Escape* 17). She is perceived with suspicion and fear, yet slowly, Lena gains the trust and love of all through her splendid spirit of courage, understanding, and solidarity.

A personality shift occurs in Lena the prisoner, a change in taste and habits; after the loneliness of her first eight jailed years, she experiences initial disgust over the lack of education and manners, or the meanness and ignorance of many of the women prisoners in the common political prison. Very soon, though, these quirks amuse Constante instead of bothering her. Before her arrest, Constante, an inquisitive intellectual mind, admired one's intelligence and creative spirit as best qualities. After the regime change in 1989, she declares that what prison has taught her was to value one's moral values over any sparkling of intellect.

The extraordinary solidarity maintained by women political prisoners described by Constante took a diversity of forms. Some, like the reciprocal sharing of French novels and movies can be a feature common to prison literature from Morocco or other francophone countries.⁷² Perhaps it is not surprising that the telling of exotic Oriental tales and travels -- such as *The One Thousand and One Nights* -- is another remedy against the psychical and mental dissolution brought about by a carceral space not only in Romania, but also other Eastern European prisons.⁷³ Constante does not fail to mention that storytellers were very rare in prison, because women preferred to protect their broken health, and "talking too much on an empty

⁷² See Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun's fictional prison account titled *This Blinding Absence of Light* (*Cette aveuglante absence de lumière*, in the original French) Trans. Linda Coverdale. New Press, 2002. Print.

⁷³ See Jiri Mucha's prison memoir, entitled *Living and Partly Living (A Czech Writer in a Stalinist Prison)*" Trans. Ewald Oser. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967. Print.

stomach is very strenuous.”⁷⁴ Besides herself, she also mentions another great prison storyteller, Madeleine Cancicov, an erudite woman who will write her own prison memoir in French published post-mortem in 1990. Yet another female storyteller would reproduce page by page the English readings of her youth, insisting that she was doing was not a creative act, but a word-by-word translation of the English text into Romanian for her listeners.

That French or English are the languages most taught in various prisons around the world during the second half of the twentieth century is probably not surprising. Male and female prisoners alike practiced the telling of French stories or the teaching of French language.⁷⁵ Lena Constante humorously recalls that “her second profession” in prison “after storyteller, [was that of] a French teacher,” who had two committed students and many listeners (Constante, *Impossible Escape* 63). Her third profession would be that of a budding fitness instructor, after her mobilization of five women in the cell to do a daily exercise routine with her to stave off the inertia caused by hunger, poor circulation, and depression.

A very important question for Constante is the reason why the guardians felt constantly compelled to inflict undue cruelty on their prisoners and to perform their duties in an overly-zealous manner. She finds several reasons for their gratuitous meanness, and it is important to note that the explication Constante offers is radically different from the analysis offered by male prison writers of the same era.⁷⁶ Constante is tempted to think at first that they are motivated by Marxist ideas, but then she realizes that “they know nothing about Marxism or dialectical materialism,” in an informed way, yet they have absorbed some basic tenets in a rabid way,

⁷⁴ Lena Constante specifies that her food ration, like everyone else’s in the collective prison was “scientifically planned to maintain her on the threshold between life and death” (Constante 67).

⁷⁵ See Arenas, Reinaldo, *Before Night Falls*.

⁷⁶ Paul Goma, Reinaldo Arenas and many others, find that their male torturers and jailers are specifically targeted for selection due to their pre-existent, innate sadistic tendencies reaching paroxysmic levels.

Their brains were infected to septicemic levels with the class struggle. With the dictatorship of the proletariat, with the exploitation of masses by a social class whom they were told that we, the detainees, all belonged. We were the scapegoats, we carried the guilt of their poverty and troubles. Only when we all, the former masters, will be annihilated, will they all will be rich and happy. (Constante 21)

Constante acknowledges that the guardians were guarded and surveilled, too, under the constant threat of becoming inmates themselves if caught to be sympathetic in any way to a prisoner. But beyond everything, what was important to all these proletarians manipulated by the high-ranking party activists was that, for the first time, the power of the day was theirs, with many enjoying and abusing the unlimited power and sense of false superiority over helpless starving inmates. The other two causes Lena the prisoner identifies are the inferiority complex and fear.

On occasion, some little service such as extra food or permission to stand on a sunlighted hallway was provided to a jailed woman prisoner by a female guardian trying to help not out of compassion, as the miserable hungry prisoner would have initially believed, but in exchange for obtaining information about other. Constante writes her impression that although the communist party incited the snitching, encouraged it and imposed it oftentimes through threats and blackmail, the informers were always cheated on and many times, also punished” (Constante, *Impossible Escape* 86).

Whenever a female prisoner died, the other prisoners would come round and say prayers, usually “Our Father,” regardless if they were religious or not (inmates were Catholics, Uniate, Eastern Orthodox, Jewish, atheist, etc.). But whenever they reached the line “and forgive us our trespassings, for we forgive everyone who has trespassed against us” Constante, a secular woman, would ask if they were really qualified to promise God that they forgave those who

trespassed against them, or the death of old forgotten women in a prison. Upon hearing the lengthy dramatic gasps of a dying cellmate, Lena reflects,

I told myself that if God, bored of loneliness in the chaos, had perhaps amused himself by creating beasts and humans, His game was cruel. Time has come for his august hands to gather the game cards and spread them again with the same responsibility that he asked of his subjects. (Constante 74)

Constante declares that, in prison, the issue of forgiving was very clear to her, “Not the thousands of executants, guardians and administrative personnel had to be punished, but the upper levels of the power pyramid. Those who, not forced by anyone, had conceived and had directed the enormous torture machine.” If Constante says that she might have found, in an insane moment, the power to forgive, still what she could never forgive the torturers was the suffering of all the other women-prisoners that she saw destroyed under her very eyes, the tears and lost youth and lives of thousands. In her view, all former anticommunist political detainees, male or female, who had suffered “with their flesh, heart and spirit” are “very far, indeed, from forgiving their torturers.”

The case of Madame Sablin, a seventy-year old Frenchwoman born in the Jura Mountains, Lena considers imperative for her to narrate because of the type of torture applied to an old woman on her first day of prison due to a linguistic misunderstanding. A governess by profession, she had married a white Russian in Romania and settled there, but her husband, in his old age, had started writing his memoir. Because one of their acquaintances informs the secret police, both husband and wife are arrested. She is imprisoned at seventy. After having issued her the customary seven-day isolation in a freezing room and with almost no food, the militiaman changes his mind, realizing that she would most probably die; instead, he covers her face with a

gas mask, torturing the old woman in front of all the other women unable to help her while she shakes on the floor due to spasmodic asphyxiation.

Fallen on the ground, Madame Sablin's body was arched by convulsions. She was getting up and falling down with thuds on the floor, in her beautiful coat, now all stained by the dirt of the floorboard. She was gasping for air. She was snorting spasmodically harder and harder, quicker and quicker. Horror-stricken, we all were standing around at a certain distance from her and could not do anything to help her. Her breast was dilating, ready to burst. We couldn't see her face covered by the mask, but we could guess the rictus of death. We were convinced that she would die before our eyes. At that point, we headed for the cell door and we hit it until it hurt with our clenched fists (Constante, *Impossible Escape* 142).

The female guardian finally summons the militiaman, who removes Madame Sablin's mask; the process had been well perfected to leave just enough air passing to keep the prisoner panicked by the throes of death. In 1962, after her release, Lena Constante meets Madame Sablin at the train station in Bucharest, Romania's capital city; she leaving for France after having obtained her French repatriation papers. Madame Sablin takes a special adieu from Lena, "Lena, she told me, I'm very glad to see you one more time. After I arrive in France, I will write the French government about how you gave French lessons in the penitentiary and you deserved at least a medal..." (Constante, *Impossible Escape* 144).

Lena Constante succeeds in writing the "book of ash" that she wished to be an expression of the common solidarity manifested by women serving long prison sentences within a collective larval existence. She declares that for these women, "for all these anonymous martyrs, my companions and my friends, for our suffering born with dignity not to be forgotten, to resurrect

them, even if only between the pages of a book, I felt the need to write.” Constante is an exemplary woman who testifies for women and about women, the oppressed and the oppressors alike. Similarly to Paul Goma, she is also disappointed to encounter in the Romanian society after release people who cannot or do not want to listen to her story because of its traumatic nature and urge her to put it behind her and them instead. Unlike Goma, who declares himself a writer whose duty is to write exactly what he sees around him truthfully, Constante declares that she is no writer and her motivation to submit the manuscript of her book to the French publishing house the first year after the collapse of the communism was prompted by her responsibility to contribute to the national memory of the dark period of communist years. “Prompting an outcry against communist atrocities, she not only wins a moral victory over her violators, she also makes her readers understand that the great traumas of the past do not represent a mental impoverishment but an antidote against collective amnesia and perpetuation of evil” (Brinzeu 156).

The Romanian contribution to the French literature of human rights

It may be interesting to note that both authors discussed in this chapter maintained all throughout their leftist intellectual inclinations. Their anticommunism is not antithetic to a leftist life philosophy (Lena Constante insists that she was never involved in politics) dismissive of a Marxist-Leninist ideology, which they both deplore. Both are non-observant, secular Eastern Orthodox that are not particularly inclined during their incarceration towards experiencing religious epiphanies or support from active prayer, unlike countless other Romanian inmates of various faiths who had found religion a survivalist strategy. Both resist torturous and tortuous communist investigations and prison with their sheer will, an acute and extraordinary exercise of

memory, and a psychological and practical understanding of their prison surroundings punctuated by terror and absurd laws. Stubbornness and a sense of wanting to achieve justice for others and speak for others to the best of their ability animate their literary testimonial work. Goma's work, mostly produced in Romanian on French soil, appeared in French decades before their publication in Romanian became possible. Lena Constante wrote in French on Romanian soil and published her moving testimony in France. Their narrative activism against the localized and "systems of organized forgetting"⁷⁷ is incontestable; their memoirs are a perpetual challenge to the officially-promoted and sanctioned amnesia about the recent past in Romania. Moreover, regardless of their choice of language, their other contribution to the transnational memory of human rights in French can be framed within the context of other French and Francophone testimonial literature opposing totalitarian and autocratic regimes around the globe, originating from North or Sub-Saharan Africa to Vietnam and China. In this sense, Lena Constante and Paul Goma's works provoke a theoretical remapping of the space of French memory and a rethinking of the dimensions of Francophone human rights discourse.

⁷⁷ See Kundera, Milan. *The Joke*. New York: Harper Perennial. 2001. Print.

Chapter Four

The Cuban literature of human rights in France

Cuban writers in Paris after WWII

In the 1960s, a pleiade of Cuban, Latin-American, and European writers engage with the political phenomenon of the Cuban Revolution in several world *metropoli* such as Paris, London, Madrid, or New York. While the context of this engagement is marked by the Cold War ideological and cultural paradigm, in France this period is complicated even further by its former colonies' struggle to attain independence and by the economic, political, and cultural shifts that gave rise to the prominence of Latin American politics and culture in Europe and the United States. Latin American writers such as Julio Cortázar, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Carlos Fuentes, whose works had created the literary Boom of the sixties, deeply believed, along with their French counterparts such as Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, etc., in the miracle of social justice promised by the Cuban Revolution. After the miracle turned unequivocally totalitarian in the late sixties, a nascent exilic Cuban dictatorship literature brought its contribution to the pantheon of transnational human rights literature, as numerous Cuban intellectuals started to produce or publish their works abroad.

Cuban literature written or published in France either in French or Spanish deserves critical attention as a particular case not necessarily due to its prominence, but because of its complex, strategic positioning among other diasporic literatures in the Paris of the 1960s and the decades after. As indicated in the first chapter, exilic Cuban writers were aware of being already inscribed into a tradition of Spanish American letters abroad and even more so in France, where the *modernistas* from various Latin American countries had lived in the first decades of the

twentieth century. These predecessors had contributed to the French literary space in myriad ways, “In addition to journalism and diplomatic assignments, some writers -- then as now -- found work in French publishing houses as advisers’ for the nascent Spanish American collections. A few even ended up editing literary or general interest magazines for a while” (Weiss 9). Some of these writers, like Lydia Cabrera, Alejo Carpentier, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Ricardo Guiraldo, César Vallejo, Gabriela Mistral, and others, wrote their best novels, short-stories and poems in Paris. “ After WWII, a generation of Cuban writers and artists will become displaced twice, first, by fleeing the dictatorship rule of Fulgencio Batista (1952-1959), and second, that of Fidel Castro (1959-2008) to seek refuge abroad.

The choice of France as land of exile for Cubans in the sixties was not necessarily a prevalent one. In the fifties, Paris had been a more preferred destination due to the scholarships offered by the Alliance Française to Cuban artists, that helped some of them (such as Germán Puig and Nino Franqui) establish residence in *La Maison Cuba* in the *Cité Universitaire*- (Paris University Residence Halls). Most Cuban authors and artists settled in the United States – in Miami or New York - while others settled in Europe. Guillermo Cabrera Infante established residence in London (1966-2005), but Eduardo Manet, Severo Sarduy, and Juan Acrocha were among those attracted to France because “as it entered the sixties, Paris was a haven for exiles of every nation and persuasion, a refuge where Latin American artists could establish closer ties with each other than in their home countries” (Levine 109). With an important part of the Cuban cultural output coming out from various exilic spaces extraneous to the island, questions of bilingualism, circulation, audiences, homelessness, memory or political aesthetics became important. Critics rightly question “what happens to a culture when two or three generations of its artists become displaced and dispersed...What happens when this culture changes languages

in the process?" (Alvarez-Borland 1)

Cuban exiles face the French Left

Questions of hospitality and hostility or assimilation and integration arise when diasporic intellectuals come to experience what Cuban American critic Gustavo Perez Firmat terms as "life on the hyphen." It has often been said by postcolonial authors such as Salman Rushdie or Aamin Maalouf that for many diasporic writers exile means that "neither a return to the homeland left behind, nor being at home in the host country is an option. They need an alternative space, a third geography. This is the space of memory, of language, of translation" (Seyhan 15). Concomitantly, fundamental hopes of gaining access to global points of contact animate the literary work and activism of the Cuban expats after the sixties. Their aspirations within this third cultural space is the valorization of their aesthetics before a world audience made to listen to the story of their political displacement in a/the transition from national to universal memory exacting an international political and intellectual response to it.

What Cuban authors and artists fleeing Castro's regime did not anticipate was the considerable resistance they met abroad, because of the enthusiastic admiration for Castro's revolution prevalent in the major European and American intellectual circles. In his essay, titled "Invisible Exile," Guillermo Cabrera Infante expresses his resentment "for the lack of sympathy shown to Cuban exiles abroad as well as his feelings of alienation from the community of Spanish-speaking exiles in Europe" (Alvarez-Borland 18). According to Cabrera Infante, Cubans in exile faced further erasure than other writers in exile especially because the exiles from other Latin-American countries rejected their Cubans counterparts on political grounds, "As for me (a nonpoet), invisible is not the word to define my status. Even the Latin word is

different when it applies to a Cuban.... There are no exiles from Cuba. As we know, this is a model country when it comes to dissidents and malcontents, who are usually going, rather than coming” (Alvarez-Borland 18).

What Cubans exile in Paris came to realize was that the admiration for Castro and his revolutionary coup and later policies from a large part of the Western intelligentsias was an augmentation of their pre-existent pro-communist convictions or sympathies. Eastern European writers who had sought refuge in Paris in the forties and the fifties had already experienced “the wall” of illusion between many French intellectuals and those arrived to report on the horrors of “the communist heaven” situated behind the Iron Curtain. In his 1953 influential political essay .titled *The Captive Mind*, Polish author and Nobel laureate Czeslav Milosz wrote about the overwhelming mesmerizing effect that the communist dystopia exercised on major Western European intellectuals after WWII,

There is a great difference, indeed, between the believers of the East and those of the West. The Western Communist needs a vision of the golden age which is already being realized on earth. The Stalinist of the East does everything in his power to instill this vision in the minds of others, but he never forgets that it is merely a useful lie.”⁷⁸ (Milosz 234)

The denunciation of the communist lie was the fashion in which some Cuban intellectuals in exile unwittingly joined the ranks of their Eastern European colleagues in Paris whose aim was to speak truth to power from marginalized, yet invisible-turned-visible positions.⁷⁹ The asylum

⁷⁸ Historian Norman Davies said about Milosz’ *The Captive Mind* that “totally discredited the cultural and psychological machinery of Communism.” (Davies, Norman. *Heart of Europe. A Short History of Poland*. Oxford University Press, 1984. Print.)

⁷⁹ For the collaboration between Cuban students and artists in Paris and the Maghrebians in the fifties, see Eduardo Manet’s memoir, *Un Cubain à Paris* [A Cuban in Paris], Paris: Écriture, 2009. Print.

that France had provided them had become, for those writers who came to scream about widespread social injustice, the spatial echoing of *a vox clamantis in deserto*, or the voice of the solitary crying out in a desert. Only with the advent of the seventies, would Western European intellectuals (the French included) relent and acknowledge publicly the abusive realities of communist dictatorships that had been incessantly denounced to a largely deaf, immovable Western world (highly rare and notable exceptions of French writers who immediately saw through the communist deception include Albert Camus).

The first massive incident of defection from Castro's Cuban paradise recorded in France was the demand for political asylum of ten Cuban ballet dancers of touring France with their group in 1966. If the event that proved decisive for the Cuban intellectuals' migration to the West was the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the event that prompted a turn in the French intellectuals' attitude were the reports of the show trial of fellow writer Heberto Padilla in 1971. Padilla was a prominent Cuban author who had been arrested, tortured and then severely disciplined in a public show of force,

The second important incident was the reaction of Parisian intellectual circles (which had up to that point sympathized with and supported the revolution) to the "Padilla Affair," the Stalin-style trial of the poet Heberto Padilla in 1971 for his "counterrevolutionary" intellectual stance, which was considered damaging to "the Cuban process." The trial provoked a turn in Cuba's cultural relationship with the French. Two letters of protest, dated in Paris, were signed by dozens of intellectuals, placing the Castro regime on notice of the injustice committed and of the arbitrary nature of the judicial process, considered an affront to freedom of expression. (Navarrete 41-2)

What helped the Cuban cause as well as that of other anticommunist exiles in Paris was,

undoubtedly, the so-called Solzhenitsyn momentum. Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's imprisonment, exile, and subsequent publication of *The Gulag Archipelago* in 1973 in the West marks the turn (or perhaps the philosophical-ideological *Kehre*) in the French intelligentsia's position vis-à-vis the communist repressive policies. After this moment, the Cuban diaspora in Paris succeeds in building central and transversal alliances by rallying influential French, Romanian, Russian and Spanish writers to their struggle for rights and justice. As an example, Carlos Alberto Montaner writes that in 1979,

the first Congress of Cuban Dissident Intellectuals was convened in Paris, joined by a dozen first-rate figures such as Fernando Arrabal, Alain Ravaillac, Bernard Henry-Lévy, Phillippe Sollers, Paul Goma and Vladimir Bukovsky. Eugène Ionesco, Jean-François Revel, Néstor Almendros, Juan Goytisolo and Jorge and Carlos Semprún lent their enthusiastic support. The poet and essayist Miguel Sales and the Cuban-French writer Eduardo Manet coordinated it along with the painter Siro del Castillo and the agrarian expert Mario Villar Rocés. [...] This collaboration proved that the European democratic intelligentsia not only opposed and condemned Castro, but also supported the opposition movement and identified with the dissident Cuban intellectuals. The intention was to break the isolation and even the rejection that numerous Cuban intellectuals and artists have experienced for rigorously opposing the regime. At this Congress, some of the great Cuban writers who had been silenced and even discredited by Castroism were honored: Lidia Cabrera, Gaston Baquero, Lino Novas Calvo. If the Padilla case marked the beginning of a rupture between Castroism and the democratic intellectuals of the West, then this congress in Paris signaled a rapprochement and moral endorsement of the opposition.” (Montaner 211-2)

Considerably less known are the more disturbing ways in which the life of these three ethnic diasporas in France -- Arab, Cuban, and Romanian -- are connected, namely their positioning at a nexus of transnational state terror interventions. If exiled writers and activists in Paris are joining hands in public protest, the political police of their countries of origin are secretly at work against them and various Western interests. Illustrative of some of these carefully planned and financed transnational criminal interventions is *Carlos*, the 2010 documentary-fiction film about the international terrorist Carlos the Jackal made by the French director Olivier Assayas and shown at the Cannes movie festival in France.⁸⁰ Carlos the Jackal's real name is Ilich Ramirez Sanchez; he is known as the notorious Venezuelan-born assassin with communist and later Islamist convictions who has been hired by Arab terrorist organizations and state political police services (such as the East German *Stasi*, or the Romanian *Securitate*) and state leaders (such as Muammar Gaddafi of Libya and Nicolae Ceausescu of Romania) to carry out bombings, killings, assassinations or kidnappings of high officials in France and all over the globe. Carlos the Jackal resided in and traveled extensively between the states of Eastern Europe and the Middle East, carrying terrorist operations in Western European capitals such as Paris or Vienna. For his activities, "the Venezuelan terrorist "Carlos" is believed to have received help from the Cuban mission in Paris" (Horowitz 725). For the killing of two counter-intelligence French agents and the attacks that he committed on the French soil that killed and injured many more, he is currently serving a life imprisonment sentence in France after he was arrested in Sudan in 1994. Carlos paramilitary training in guerilla camps near Havana, Moscow, Beirut, Amman and on the Syrian-Iraqi border staffed by Iraqi military speaks volumes for the extended collaborative networks of terror operational between Cuba and various Arab and East European countries during the Cold War era.

⁸⁰ In the United States, the movie was shown on Sundance channel in 2011.

With the gradual disclosure of the secret political police files in several former East European and Arab countries, the collaborative networks of state terror operations against anticommunist dissidents in France will become an integral part of the history of that period. The dissemination of the Soviet *Mitrokhin Archive*, for example, is only one major step in this direction.

The two Cuban writers selected for analysis in this chapter, Eduardo Manet and Reinaldo Arenas, testify aesthetically and politically to an oppressive Cuban reality that each came to experience directly, albeit in very different ways. These two authors represent also distinctly illustrative cases of the Cuban human rights literature in France after 1960. Although Eduardo Manet writes in French and Reinaldo Arenas writes in Spanish, both Cubans made their impressive entrance onto the world literary scene via the French *belles-lettres*. In what follows, I will delineate how the intellectual trajectories of these two writers are representative of the role that France played in the freedom of expression of Cuban intellectuals during the Cold War.

Eduardo Manet: A Cuban in Paris

Eduardo Manet (b. 1930) is a Cuban author of French who is known mostly as an exilic Cuban playwright, due to his successful career in the Parisian and international world of theater.

Although several well-known Cuban writers had long term residences in Paris in the second part of the twentieth century -- such as Alejo Carpentier, Severo Sarduy, or Zoé Valdés, -- they continued to write in their native Spanish language. Contrastively, Eduardo Manet is the only Cuban writer who switched to the use of French in the sixties and uninterruptedly used it in his writing ever since. Thus, his case is an exceptional one, because his *oeuvre* is not necessarily considered part of Cuban literature since it is written in French, and is neither unequivocally

included in the French literary tradition. Moreover, because he did not write in Spanish, he was not included in the studies on the Latin American literary movement in Paris either. Recently, his name has been increasingly mentioned in the special category of “Cuban literature of exile,” where this exile pertains predominantly to the much more conspicuous Cuban-American diasporic tradition, which Manet has never been part of. Often interviewed about his choice of French as the language of his writing, he has consistently said that, after having experimented with writing in Spanish, English, Italian, and Portuguese, he settled on French, because the French publishers had expressed appreciation for his work. His second reason to write in French was to overcome the major literary influences of his formative years. In his words,

One day I had the blues, because I saw some review talking about Latin American writers in Paris, and at that moment I was, modestly, very well known, but they never mentioned my name. So, I felt sad. I was walking in the Luxembourg Gardens and I came across Sam Beckett. We began to talk and I said, Sam, I have this problem, I'm a Cuban, I'm Spanish. "Oh, don't worry, Eduardo, don't worry. I wrote in French because I wanted to forget Joyce." The influence of Joyce. And I wanted to forget Lorca's influence on me, and Valle-Inclán. And he said to me, "Anyhow, writers are always exiles, and you write in the language that you're published. You are published in French, you are a Cuban-French writer. And I'm from Ireland. I feel even more guilty than you." So, he lifted me up. (Celestin 1)

Perhaps these statements led to the literary critics Roger Celestin and Eliane Dalmolin's classification of Manet as a Hispanophone French writer, even if the categorization did not stay.

Manet's trajectory is marked by two major Parisian sejours, a youthful temporary ones (1950-1954 and 1956-1960), followed by a mature, permanent exile that started in 1968 and

continues until today. As a young aspiring Cuban actor, Manet's desire to acquire a solid theater education brought him to the old continent where he trained with the best names of the French theatre such as Jean Louis Barrault and Roger Blin. He interrupts his Parisian education to go to Italy for two years, from where he returns to Paris with a diploma in Italian art. Later he will write in his memoir, entitled *Un Cubain à Paris*, [*A Cuban in Paris*], that this was the period during which questions of identity, belonging, and choice of language become prevalent for him. Manet's evolution is similar to that of his Cuban peers who left for temporary stays abroad to enrich their educational horizons with a clear intention to return and live in Cuba. However, many Cubans chose to stay abroad during the Batista regime hoping for a political change that, when it finally arrived, brought about a Cuban Revolution promising unprecedented social and economic justice. This is when Manet's wandering generation returned to the island and for the first decade after the Revolution, Havana and the island came to know a cultural effervescence renowned in the entire Latin America and Europe. Cuban writers, film directors, painters, and actors returned from their places of international exile bringing their artistic skills intensely cultivated for years in the world's cultural capitals, transforming thus Havana into "the Paris of the Caribbean."⁸¹

Unfortunately, Castro's increased grip on individual liberties, cultural expression, and repression of political undesirables disquieted a considerable number of Cuban and Latin American intellectuals who gradually chose a permanent exile to his rule. The last wave of disillusioned intellectuals still able to leave Cuba (more or less) freely was in 1968, when Castro sided with the Soviets in their brutal invasion of Czechoslovakia and, in exchange for clear economic and political advantages, aligned his internal and external repressive policies with those of the Soviet Union. The military invasion of Czechoslovakia, a sovereign nation, by the

⁸¹ Almondoz, A. (ed.) *Planning Latin American Capital Cities: 1850-1950*. (2002): 279.

Soviet Union that year and the brutal repression of the Prague Spring praised by Castro convinced the last Cuban hopefuls that 1968 represented probably their last chance to flee Castro's communist paradise.

Deeply disillusioned, Manet leaves permanently for France, where he builds a satisfying professional and personal life by writing more than twelve plays and twenty novels that will obtain important French prizes. A French citizen, he currently lives in Paris, where he continues to write about Cuban and non-Cuban themes alike.

Manet fictionalizes the communist East

In 1984, the French house Gallimard publishes Eduardo Manet's novel written in French under the title *Zone Interdite* [*The Forbidden Zone*]. As of today, the novel has not been translated into English. Similarly to 'Abd ar-Rahman Munif's *East of the Mediterranean*, Eduardo Manet's *Forbidden Zone*, is an allegorical novel "set in an unspecified country at an indeterminate time" (Zatlin 39-40). In his book, Manet "avoided a simplistic allegory, with his book encompassing "any country and any system by creating a stylized, but possible, world," while he still had in mind a very specific model. "According to the author, his fictional world was inspired in part by events in Romania, not Cuba" (Zatlin 40). The question that needs to be raised is what determined a Cuban writer of French language residing in Paris to write a book about Romania in the 1980s while hinting at the nightmarish realities of Cuba of the same period?

Perhaps it is no accident that both Munif and Manet write fictional prison and dictatorship novels that seek to address and redress political realities larger than those of their formative environments. Both are outspoken critics of the regimes they left behind, and because they were privileged to travel and study extensively in their youth, they became aware of the

larger schemas of power whose ramifications ensured the viability of oppression in their respective home countries. From the standpoint of political repression, Cuba and Romania are special cases within the former communist bloc. Their respective Cold War long-standing dictators, Fidel Castro and Nicolae Ceausescu, both proffered their independence from Moscow and, subsequently, acted erratically and independently in regards to their foreign and national policy. Both rulers displayed short initial periods of relative political and cultural tolerance followed by the implementation of draconic measures for controlling and repressing their citizens. Although the security police training came to Cuba and Romania via Russian intelligence operatives, the Romanian and Cuban secret services surpassed their Russian counterparts and devised their own evil systems of mass surveillance and liquidation of opposition.⁸²

The Forbidden Zone

The 1973, the YMCA press in Paris publishes Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, an extremely influential book that shattered any lingering illusions in the West about the nature of the Soviet communist state based on generalized terror; Solzhenitsyn had successfully and painstakingly documented Lenin's theoretical, legal, and practical development and implementation of a system of punishment and elimination of opposition via forced labor concentration camps in the Soviet Union. (His ideas will be quickly borrowed by Hitler, who, as a young politician in Germany in 1921, proposed the application of the same model for Germany's Jewish population; about two decades later, he will exterminate, with considerably greater technical efficiency, six million German and European Jews). Two years after the

⁸² Some, like Aleksandr S., mentioned in the book, trained security officers in political police practices in both Romania and Cuba

appearance of *The Gulag Archipelago*, Michel Foucault publishes his influential study *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison* (1975), in which he investigates the cultural shifts that made incarceration a main strategy of modern societies; in Foucault's view, these modern societies are themselves larger carceral systems whose continuous existence is ensured by the vast surveillance-and-punishment institutional networks whose goal is to instill in their subjects the internalization of a disciplined individuality.

The *Forbidden Zone* is a fictional work that describes a nightmarish totalitarian society of the twentieth century in which a coercive system and its aggregates survey, reform, manipulate and destroy individual lives. The publication of the novel comes after Manet had tried for years to reason with the leftist intellectuals in France about the communist realities he experienced first hand in Cuba and also in his travels to Eastern European countries in the 1960s; while he himself had been a supporter of Castro's revolution and one of the leading figures in the Cuban cultural renaissance of the sixties, there was no doubt for him that after the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, *The Gulag Archipelago*, and the countless testimonies from fellow exiles in Paris that the communist system should be indicted as an all-encompassing evil repressive system. Aggravated by the still prevalent pro-Castrist attitudes in Parisian intellectual circles, he writes an "Open Letter to My Leftist Friends" ("*Lettre ouverte à mes amis de gauche*") and publishes it in the French newspaper *Le Monde*.

In 1984, Manet gives his French audience a fictionalized version of the drab carceral space documented by Solzhenitsyn, theorized by Foucault and created under the communist rule in a great number of countries. Enforcing the aesthetic and political irony, *The Forbidden Zone* appears in 1984, the very year that George Orwell used for the title of his acclaimed novel which had made totalitarianism *cause célèbre* decades earlier. In his book, Manet sets out to depict the

communist totalitarian surveillance system through the perspective of a disengaged functionary who begins his career as a secret documents translator in an unnamed country's intelligence agency. Successively, the agent, also the narrator, is promoted from his translator position in the General Surveillance Center to that of a case officer in the Analysis Bureau, and later to that of a high-profile recruiter of youth informants; as a reward for all this exemplary hard work, he is granted access to the most secret Project of this totalitarian state,

By turns evoking the state apparatus of Cuba, the sterile modern labyrinths of Paris suburbs, and the massive lunacy of autocratic vision perpetrated in Rumania, the story follows the narrator's almost unwitting climb through the ranks of power. A freelance multilingual translator, he is recommended for entry into the Center for Information and Surveillance, the seat of control known as the House, where every post is precarious and is easy to fall out of favor, Employed to detect antigovernment activity, he proves rather effective, though with no special fervor or patriotism. (Weiss 199)

The multiethnic totalitarian space that Manet portrays in his *Forbidden Zone* comes a result of his visits to several countries of the former Eastern European bloc between 1961-1967, among which were Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria and Romania. Asked during a 2012 interview why he had in mind the specific example of Romania when writing his dictatorship novel, Manet said that in Romania he had been struck by "the sadness and the fear" that was imprinted on the ordinary Romanians' faces, most probably caused by Ceausescu's repressive megalomania. The various governmental offices he names in his book carry generic propagandistic names, such as the Ministry of Well Being, the Institute for the Cordial Relationships among People, or the Home for the Children of the Nation, ironically employed by Manet to underline their exact opposite functions within totalitarian systems.

The Portrait of the communist citizen

Manet's narrator, although free, is already a product of the larger system described by Foucault that creates self-disciplined individuals already born in a society of control where dissent is closely monitored. The fact that he is part of the monitoring system is for him, a fact of life in a uniformly engineered society in which he leads as normal of an existence as possible. As the novel unfolds, and the narrator is transferred from one job position to the next, the narrative offers descriptions of poker soirees between the chiefs of various divisions of the internal intelligence agency, professional rivalries among them, drunken evenings spent at the agency's night bar, and the developing friendship between the immigrant bar owner and the narrator; all are punctuated by glimpses into the agency's monitoring of unruly subjects, their capture, and later indoctrination for a successful metamorphosis into docile instruments of the state. Paradoxically, in the course of his otherwise excellent surveillance work, the metamorphosis of his monitored subjects provokes his own, albeit inverted. Gradually, the narrator's amoral life becomes marked by uneasiness about his job duties and life in general. The reader understands that his successive promotions have enabled him to gain an unprecedented trust of the unscrupulous intelligence chiefs he works under and access to the Center's most highly guarded secretive operations; moreover, he changed his residence for a much better one. His first overt moral gesture is the assistance he lends to a helpless immigrant mother of two and her children, finding employment for her and ensuring her children's access to education,

eventually, he grows too comfortable with his pernicious role of inducing children to inform on their elders, and this due to the humanizing influence of two immigrants who have each fled worse horrors. Lin-Ah, who arrives with her two children as boat people,

gets a job as his concierge in his building, thanks to him, and becomes his lover. He knows he can only protect them by remaining in good terms at the Center. In a clear critique of France, Manet has the narrator confront the hypocrisy of the populace on such matters:” On the one hand they scorned and hated the foreigners who took their places and ate their bread; on the other, for reasons of international prestige, they were eager to be seen as an open and generous land of asylum. (Weiss 199-200)

The narrator’s moral disquiet is marked both by personal and professional contexts, indicative of the pervasiveness of the system in the entire social life of a nation. His lover, Lin-Ah, the immigrant boat person suffers from advanced tuberculosis; because she is not covered by the bureaucratic medical system of her country of adoption, she dies, in spite of the narrator’s best efforts to use his high connections to obtain her unofficial treatment. The other event that radically shakes the narrator’s previous amoral stand comes via one of the cases he handles. Despite being an experienced operative, he is struck by one child informer in particular, who, in the spirit of times, denounces her entire family with exceptional, fascinating hatred, sending them to sure imprisonment and death. As customary, this child-informer named Alba will be placed in the agency’s care to be formed to become a future operative.

Depressed by his work and alienated after the death of his lover, the narrator decides to leave his disabling life behind. He and his friend Pablo, the bar owner whose wife had also recently died, decide to use their high connections to gain access to the most coveted top secret operation in the country, a utopian undertaking directed personally by the country’s “Number One” political figure, its president. What they both know about the “Project” is that it is a highly technologized enterprise designed to help advance the country’s future in unprecedented ways; their speculations about its nature are as good as anyone else’s, as the secrecy surrounding this

alleged technical wonder is impenetrable. Considering this alternative better than their disaffected, disabused lives, they join the Project, which proves to be just another, even more sinister reality than the one they had left behind,

Along with other volunteers, they discover a diabolically absurd mixture of futile labor camps and sinister paradise: the Project turns out to be a mad dream of national isolation in the form of a long wall parallel to the coast, slowly built of marble blocks, to close the land against the sea; for relief, at regular intervals, the workers are housed in a luxurious mansion, unable to leave, but with every sort of pleasure at their disposal. The country thus poised at its self-destructive limits, his friendship with Pablo impels the narrator to go collect on an old offer from his former mentor, now the new ruler, and he returns in charge of the cursed Project. At the press of a button, in the end, the wall comes crumbling down. (Weiss 200)

The Project turns out to be a highly-perfected concentration labor camp, implemented to serve the megalomaniacal vision of a senile paranoid leader. Pablo and the narrator along with other prisoner-workers are forced to perform hard labor to cut, carry, and polish immense blocks of marbles for the high wall that are to completely surround this nation, destined to totally isolate it from the rest of the world. To ensure productivity, at short pre-established intervals; the forced laborers are served by female agents in a carefully staged and surveilled brothel. The impossibility of escape from this surreal monstrous place is made palpable by the narrator-prisoner's awareness that the entire country was, in fact, nothing but an immense carceral space. The absurd and painful death of his best and only friend Pablo at the hands of the Project determines the narrator to seek the leadership of the Project in order to take it down as a tribute to all the lives destroyed by a totalitarian space. In a twist of fate, the strongest link of the

system becomes its weakest; the amoral, unaffected narrator, as a carefully groomed and rewarded subject who has fully participated in the progress of the system, becomes its ultimate impassionate undoer. As early as 1953, Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz had captured the mechanism of the potential totalitarian failure,

Rule over the minds of masses, therefore, is not seriously threatened (...) It is a different matter, however, when one considers the emotional life of the masses and the terrible hatred that dominates it. This hatred cannot be explained on purely economic grounds. The Party senses that in this realm, which Marxism has studied least, surprises and real threats lie hidden. (Milosz 205)

Indeed, at the time of Manet's writing, the phenomenon called in urban vernacular "Ceaushima" was in full swing in Romania in the 1980s. (The sarcastic term equates Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu's destruction of the capital city and the country with that of Hiroshima). Ceausescu erased Bucharest's downtown, the site of his many historical monuments, in order to make room for his grandiose urban project called the House of the Republic. Inspired, after a rip to China in 1973, by the Chinese communists' gigantic public works, Ceausescu ordered the building of a widespread House of the Republic that was to house the Parliament, the president's residence, the Council of Ministries and the Supreme Court, along with avenues of high-density standardized apartment buildings for the communist government's functionaries; underground tunnels and garages, a stadium, etc. The preparations for this enormous enterprise started in 1974, although its construction begun in 1983. To the utter desperation and dismay of the impoverished Romanian ordinary citizens, the monstrous construction carried on for decades and was not completed prior to Ceausescu's violent execution in 1989. Impiously, the communist megalomaniacal leader had succeeded to erect a giant architectural structure that set the record,

as evaluated by the World Records Academy, of the largest administrative civilian building in the world, the heaviest, and the costliest.

A similar nightmarish urban planning is described by Reinaldo Arenas in his memoir illustrating Fidel Castro's paranoia, "swimming in the ocean was prohibited and "by government order, only authorized workers who had paid their monthly union dues were allowed on the beaches" (Arenas 228). Moreover, the workers had to go only to the beaches allotted to their respective union, since the beaches were divided from each other: "huge walls had been put up all the way down to the water; bureaucracy had even reached the sea." Unruly swimmers were punished by being arrested. Arenas asks rhetorically "How could you live on an island and have no access to the sea?" (Arenas 228)

But perhaps Manet's intention in this novel is to indict both the megalomaniacal construction projects that ruined countless lives and resources of countries run by paranoid leaders and any walls that serve to isolate and control oppressed populations. One such example well known in the eighties was the infamous Berlin Wall, separating East Germany (part of the Eastern communist bloc) from West Germany (part of the Western free world).

Building the memory of a nation: communist child informers and political police

Manet's contribution to the world dictatorship literature comes from his exploration of one of the less studied aspects of the intelligence work carried within the communist states during the Cold War. His *Forbidden Zone* offers a detailed fictional reconstitution of the psychological profiles of both the child informers and their handlers behind the Iron Curtain. Very few, either in the West or in the East, were aware about the sheer number of children recruited to spy on their parents, teachers, and neighbors or their preparation for future

intelligence work in their mature years, let alone about the sophisticated system behind this thought policing mass enterprise.

The narrator describes his work step by step, starting with the denunciatory phone call made to the agency by a child previously brainwashed by society that it was his patriotic duty to inform on his own family members in case they are hostile to the regime in power. When phoning, children have no idea that they were phoning the secret police headquarters directly. Most of them thought they called an anonymous hot line number,

The phone contact with the denouncing children became my specialty. The Analysis Section chief had remarked one day after making me re-listen to the tapes: «You have a young, warm, and cute voice. » And for rendering my voice even more likeable and reassuring, the sound technician modified the device. The result: I had a suave dream voice which made the interlocutor safe. (Manet 54)

The narrator's task as a political officer was to follow up on the initial denouncing calls, establish the identity of the caller and invite him or her to a face to face meeting. The description of the guilt-inducing techniques preying on the hesitant children gives the reader a glimpse into why the narrator will become increasingly uncomfortable with his role,

Calling a school administration, make a kid or teenager come to the phone and confronting them, listening to them contradicting themselves badly or listening to their sobs unsettled me while they mumbled, I continued my plea: Don't worry, little one. Everything will alright. Maybe this is just an error. You will be the first to be glad when their innocence will be proven, won't you? (Manet 54)

A sophisticated technological and psychological apparatus sustains the successful obtaining of information about nascent complots against the state from children who, either willingly or

inadvertently, come to know them from the adults in their lives. Even more than in the case of adult informers, a very close relation, hypocritical on one side and suspicious on the other, ensues between the child informers and their handlers until the adult plotters are arrested and tried in sham trials. “Supported by the lie detector which analyzed the interlocutor’s voice and emotions while he was speaking, I oriented the conversation toward the key phrases triggering the investigation process” (Manet 55). Once the cornered interlocutor accepts to meet at a local cafeteria, the specialists in children’s psychology meet them. These experienced functionaries were then handpicked and the child-informer would meet either a nice father figure or a kindly-speaking female officer, according to the pre-studied profile of the respective child.

During the Cold War, neither the French, nor the American intelligence community ever took the Cuban intelligence services seriously. Would their members have read Manet’s dystopian *Forbidden Zone*, they could have gained an intriguing insight into one of the devious *modus operandi* of the Cuban intelligence. In a recently published book titled *Castro’s Secrets. The CIA and Cuba’s Intelligence Machine*, American intelligence agent Brian Latell explains how the Cubans were “better than us.” (Latell 12) During the Cold War, Cuban intelligence was better not technologically, but psychologically; one of the reasons for this advantage was the recruitment of their operatives from a very young age. Florentino Aspillaga, a Cuban senior intelligence officer, who, in June 1987, defected to the US, recounts how his father enrolled him in a Cuban government intelligence school at fifteen, and declared that he never doubted “his father’s wisdom in facilitating it” (Latell 63). This government training school was set up quickly after the Cuban revolution in a country that had no intelligence agency under the previous regime. Aspillaga describes this youth intelligence prep school by noting that “all of his fifty classmates were precocious, too, most also teenagers, sixteen to nineteen years old. The

eldest was twenty-three, and there was another boy” even younger than him, who was fifteen at the time (Latell 63). “They were malleable and learned quickly, enthusiastic acolytes in a fledgling intelligence service led by revolutionary stalwarts, most of whom were only a few years older” (Latell 63). In *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left After the Cold War*, Jorge Castañeda, Mexican author and former foreign minister of Mexico, also wrote about these young Cuban operatives, saying that they “were generally young, lower middle class, or quite poor, uncouth but bright” (Castañeda 54).

Two cases involving his work with child informers contribute to shake the indifference of the narrator-agent. One of them concerned his former boss codenamed Fatball, chief of the Analysis Bureau, and former night poker mate of the narrator. Denounced by his most beloved grandson, Tristan, Fatball faces a death sentence. In his bid to solidify his power as a future general Director of Intelligence, Fatball had elaborated a secret plan for a coup d’état in case things turned otherwise. The grandson inadvertently sees the plan while asking his grandfather for help with his math homework and immediately places the call to the denouncing hotline. The narrator, working at the time on the secret monstrous Project, is called upon by Fatball’s rival to manipulate the grandson, considered now a child informer, into bringing forth the fatally-incriminating written evidence. Studying the adolescent’s dossier and watching the tapes on record that suggested a happy, well-to do childhood, and a scene with the grandfather who had proudly celebrated his grandson only three months earlier, the narrator asks, rhetorically, “what secret force, what mysterious mechanism could so well push the child to denounce his grandfather?”

The eternal disquieting contrast between the innocence of a child and the act of betrayal is one of the forces that destabilize the narrator’s complicity with the system.” I watch and re-

watch the tapes, to try to understand, to find a sign, something to give me a clue .Yet I didn't see but a happy kid without any after thoughts, a perfect image of candor. Not for a single instant I could imagine a shadow of perversity on this crystalline happy face" (Manet 157). The reason is becoming clear during the first encounter, when the narrator tells the child, " Do you know that this document means a death sentence for your grandfather?" only to hear the child's quick, angry reply: "But he has betrayed, you well know, he has betrayed [the regime]" (Manet 160). The narrator's inner impulse is to tell the teen to take the incriminating pages and destroy them, but says nothing, because "not he, nor I or anyone could do anything now to save Fatball. The aggregate had been started. The child and the grandfather were only pawns in the ruthless struggle for power" (Manet 161). However neutral in this struggle, the narrator is not safe from his own lucidly controlled strategies and emotions vis-à-vis his own role,

I was apprehensive in regard to my third encounter with Tristan. To meet him in one of those inconspicuous apartments that the Center used for this chat; to make him retell in all detail the process that brought him from the absolute trust that he had in his grandfather to the decision to denounce him, was beyond my strength. As always, I feared my reaction upon seeing, yet again, the innocent eyes of a child who thought that he had acted in good faith. (Manet 168)

Tristan the grandson shares with the narrator an earlier story about his grandfather having pushed him to obtain incriminating evidence from one of his classmates whose father was a Ministry of Commerce functionary suspected for participation in a state treason plot. Since his grandfather had convinced Tristan to do his "duty before the State," Tristan considers this occasion entirely similar. Critics will later observe how a refined social culture of informing motivated by an absolute loyalty to the dominant ideology was all pervasive in Castro's Cuba,

Mutual distrust is one of the consistent elements of totalitarian societies, and the first thing families teach the children is to distrust and to pretend, for the child's chances of not running afoul of the repressive machinery will depend on his skills in those two behaviors. At the same time, that family training, the development of cynicism and lying as means of protection, helps convince the child that the system is invincible and that it would be futile to try to oppose it. (Montaner 123)

The narrator reminisces one of his former talks with Grand Eagle, the boss who had thoroughly instructed him in the art of manipulating child informers,

You told me: when I see their crystalline eyes, what I see there scares me. Because it is joy what I read. If you do everything possible to avoid their remorse, you will end up discovering that the only engine driving the young interlocutors is the intense pleasure of doing harm (...) Innocence is a utopia." (Manet 170)

Fatball commits suicide and the rival who took him down, Grand Eagle, becomes the Director of Intelligence. The narrator refuses Grand Eagle's offer of a higher position by his side and chooses to return to the stone-cutting Project, in order to avoid "harming anyone" anymore (Manet 171). To ensure the maintenance of their rule, Fidel and Raul Castro employed the same repressive controlling strategies as the Soviets. Routinely, in the communist countries heads of the Ministry of Internal Affairs were demitted, killed, arrested, or removed, according to the Stalinist model; ever since the 1930s, the NKVD and KGB's bosses had liquidated one another: Yagoda (suspected of having poisoned Lenin) was killed by Yezhov, who, in turn, was killed by Lavrenti Beria. Beria will also be killed at the order of Khrushchev in 1953). Research tells us that "like their communist counterparts parts in East Europe, MININT (the Cuban Ministry of Interior) has always played a double role: as enforcer of loyalty to Fidel, and as a listening post

on the population as a whole” (Radu 104).

The other case that haunts Manet’s narrator is that of a beautiful girl from a highly-positioned family, who implacably brings the demise of her entire family by denouncing her father, a Foreign Affairs Ministry diplomat, and her grandmother for plotting against the state. Her implacable will and bitter hatred looks as well as her beauty haunt the narrator who has been the agent handling the compromising surveillance of her family. Later, the narrator encounters her in a luxurious desert brothel serving the Project’s workers in their pre-scheduled breaks and wonders how did a highly-trained exquisitely looking young woman like her end up there instead of landing a diplomatic career. Their confrontation as disillusioned agents serving the same system brings them to an intimate discussion of how the system orchestrates their metamorphosis from the fall of innocence to deep mistrusts. Alba confesses, “They teach us to mistrust, but to what avail? I reached the point where I can’t look at my face in a mirror. I lived the obsession a cheap blow, of a betrayal. And then, you appeared.” The narrator answers, “And what tells you that one day or another I won’t stab you?” (Manet 217)

After their rapprochement, Alba decides to fight for clearing the memory and honor of her dead father. The narrator’s former boss and current Chief of Intelligence, Grand Eagle, entrusts him with the leadership of the Project, which he himself deems “an egotistic whim” of a senile delirious dictator (Manet 50). Power-thirsty but realistic, Grand Eagle needs a trusting hand to assist him in the continuous building, destroying, and rebuilding of the huge wall, just to give the country’s senile leader the impression that the construction is still carried out and to replace the workers with common-law criminals. The narrator accepts the position, delivering his final word of wisdom that complete his political metamorphosis, “In this country, there are only two possibilities, the escape into madness or death, or the adaptation to reality (...) I know from

experience that we must not leave the dirty jobs to the torturers, because otherwise, it's the hell" (Manet 253).

This acquiescing indictment, the lesser of two evils, is perhaps the only philosophy left to ordinary beings always already cogs in a machine that allows no development of an alternative ethics. The ideological imaginary worlds of the children come crumbling down Czeslaw Milosz' insight into the inner torment of the citizens of the totalitarian states is revealing, "The citizens of the Imperium of the East long for nothing so much as liberation from the terror their own thought creates" (Milosz 221). The ideological imaginary worlds of the children come down, fragmented along those of the very enforcers of the system. What the novel's ending suggests is that, if a system ensures its survival based on the complicit participation of a significant part of its citizenry, it is through the same social categories that the eventual downfall will come through. If totalitarian systems are often implemented with the initial enthusiasm of euphoric subjects, neither the highly-positioned agents of the state, nor its witless servants will remain, over time, deep believers in the system. On the contrary, some become the first ones to access the truth behind the propaganda and initiate the minute, perhaps, but no less important change of abusive world for a better one. In other words, the potential for submission and revolt may have an unexpectedly common societal origin.

Reinaldo Arenas: "I scream, therefore I exist"

Reinaldo Arenas (1943-1990) is a Cuban novelist, poet, playwright, and journalist born in 1943 in the rural province of Oriente. Coming from deep poverty, Arenas owes his initial social and professional ascent to the communist social policies that stipulated the elimination of the bourgeois elements from the Cuban society, labeled as "class enemies," and the promotion of the

disenfranchised poor. As always the case with totalitarian systems, an obsession about some form of purity is inscribed in their ideologies; a so-called 'healthy origin' is required of every communist citizen wishing to benefit from the transformations brought about by a Marxist revolution. It will take Arenas a few years to understand how the healthy origin of a poor peasant that brought him the initial opportunities of education and work, will serve him to question and survive an oppressive regime. In his teens, he is part of the first generation of Cubans selected to be trained in the managing of the country's agriculture. Sent to the School of Planning in Havana, the young Reinaldo, previously an agricultural accountant, decides to follow an earlier inclination towards literature, which he studies at the University of Havana.

After landing a job at the National Library, he enters a literary competition organized by the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists with his first novel, *Hallucinations*, which is awarded second place. However, an obstinate refusal to produce "social-realist" literature as dictated by the Soviet communist propaganda in Cuba, along with his open homosexual lifestyle will soon land Arenas under the panoptic visor of the Cuban political police. Prohibited from publishing in Cuba, Arenas starts smuggling his literary work abroad.

In 1973, following a mock trial, Arenas is sentenced to prison for "deviation" and for publishing abroad without official permission. In an article written in 1980, literary critic Emir Rodriguez Monegal, explains that Arenas, as a true counterrevolutionary, could not have been accepted by the Cuban communist society,

because his texts undermine the official ideology of the regime, mock the progressive view of history and deconstruct our views of reality. More dangerous than Lezama Lima (with whom he has many literary and poetic affinities), more effective than Padilla (an easier target for the regime because he uses the same bureaucratic language), Reinaldo

Arenas is the only voice to come out of Cuba in recent years that truly questions the official version of reality, political or otherwise. (Rodriguez-Monegal 131)

Before Night Falls: the intestinal writing of Reinaldo Arenas

Published in 1992, *Before Night Falls (Antes que anochezca)* is Reinaldo Arenas' autobiographical memoir. Because its author was suffering from AIDS and unable to write, the book was dictated into a tape recorder on some twenty tapes that were transcribed by one of Arenas' friends before his death. The 1993 book translation's in English comes out to such public success that a film based on it is made in the United States, directed by Julian Schnabel and starring Javier Bardem. Together with his beloved *Pentagonia* -- an ambitious plan of writing the secret history of post-revolutionary Cuba in five volumes, -- his memoir attests before anything to Arenas' passion for "writing as salvation" and "writing as revenge."⁸³ It is in Havana's Lenin Park where Arenas, an escaped fugitive from the Cuban police, starts writing his memoir, waiting for the night to settle in Havana, but also "waiting for the other darkness that would come when the police eventually found me" (Arenas 173). Later, Arenas will declare, "that manuscript, of course, was lost, as was almost everything I had written in Cuba that I had not been able to smuggle out," but the echoing words of his dying friend Lezama Lima provide the impulse for Reinaldo to rewrite it, "Remember that our only salvation lies in words: Write!" (Arenas 173, 230).

Whereas Eduardo Manet's *Zone Interdite* depicts a Cuban-style gulag and surveillance society envisioned as a mixed inflexion of a larger communist space, Arenas writes the Cuban prison system from memory and into memory, offering the world the intestinal view of a voice

⁸³ Manrique, Jaime. "After Night Falls. The Revival of Reinaldo Arenas." *The Village Voice*. 5 Dec. 2000. Web. 25 Aug. 2012.

crying out from the monster's belly. Arenas assumes the task of describing from first hand experience the world of the living dead. While many prison literature authors have written from the depths of horror that they, like Arenas, directly experienced, Arenas writes from the place where things are masticated by the system -- parceled out, mutilated, and putrefied -- from where the ultimate emanation is the absolute cry of man. Arenas writes about the degradation of the human spirit and body, including his own, in grotesque, cathartic terms. "The grotesque as style, script, and sign of the self" is perhaps one of the best words to characterize Arenas' writing style in this book. "Etymologically the word comes from *grotta*, meaning "cave" (or *grotto*) and, by extension, the once buried walls and rooms of the ruins. *Grotta* itself comes from the Latin *crypta*," meaning vault or crypt" (Epps 41).

The grotesque does in fact recall the excrescences of a cave, the superfluous, if subterranean, surgings of the natural world (...) The grotesque is, I want to insist, a way of drawing and writing the self and (or as) others. It involves not just *what* is drawn or written, but *how* or even *where*. (Epps 42, author's italics)

Walter Benjamin also associates the grotesque with ruin and even death. I consider Arenas' style an intestinal form of writing because of the bitterness accumulated by the direct ingestion and active processing of Castroist revolting and disabling policies. Critics opine that "the near madness in his writing, that is so angry, subjective, bitchy, paranoid in the face of injustice, occasionally reaches the heights of literary vendetta" (Riley 492). My perspective is that a bitter liquid aesthetics expressed in his "writing-from-the-gut" is the style imprinted on this book.

Before Night Falls is Arenas' powerful confession in which he explores the uneasy articulation of his literary, ideological and sexual identity within the frame of a movingly ostentatious autobiography. His memoir addresses the urgencies of writing, persecution, and

exile and serves both as therapeutic, healing exercise as well as a powerful indictment of Fidel Castro's repressive regime. As such, his book represents an outstanding testimony that has become part of the world literature of human rights. Arenas' credo of penning injustice by using his aesthetics as a weapon against any carceral, forcibly uniformized reality is superbly expressed in his memoir,

A sense of beauty is always dangerous and antagonistic to any dictatorship because it implies a realm extending beyond the limits that a dictatorship can impose on human beings. Beauty is a territory that escapes the control of the political police. Being independent and outside of their domain, beauty is so irritating to dictators that they attempt to destroy it whichever way they can. Under a dictatorship, beauty is always a dissident force, because a dictatorship is itself unaesthetic, grotesque; to a dictator and his agents, the attempt to create beauty is an escapist or reactionary act. (Arenas 87)

Arenas will make it his life mission to expose, via powerful aesthetics, the public and individual dehumanization brought about by any ideological state apparatus that restricts freedom and beauty.

The Cuban literature of human rights and its French connection

In 1967, Cuban expat and French resident Jorge Camacho smuggles Reinaldo Arenas' *Singing from the Well* and the manuscript of *The Ill-Fated Peregrinations of Fray Servando*, submitting both to the prestigious Éditions du Seuil in Paris. The second novel is so successful in its French translation that it "share[s] first prize as the best foreign novel with Garcia Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*" (Arenas 118). Immediately after, Arenas will be

placed under surveillance by State Security, not only as a controversial figure who had

written novels such as *Fray Servando* and *Singing from the Well*, which were irreverent and did not praise the regime (they really were rather critical) but as one who had the nerve to smuggle his manuscripts out of the country and have them published without the authorization of Nicolás Guillén, president of the Writers and Artists Union (UNEAC). (Arenas 118)

By this time, Arenas had also published a volume of short stories, *Con los ojos cerrados* (*With My Eyes Closed*) in Uruguay. Arenas mentions that by 1972-1973, he was already known abroad for this collection and the two novels. After his 1973 arrest and escape from a police station in Havana due to police inattention, Arenas attempts to flee the country via the Guantanamo American base, but fails and returns to his home province of Oriente to see his mother and family. Realizing that he could not hide there, he returns to Havana with the dream of using his French connections to get out of the country,

I had hopes that if somebody talked with the French ambassador, perhaps he could arrange for me to be granted political asylum at the French embassy, perhaps the ambassador could hide me in his home and obtain an exist permit for me. After all, all my books had been published in France. I was hoping that my mother would go to the home of a French citizen who had been one of my professors, and with whom we had established a certain friendship; it would be easy for him to speak with the ambassador.(...) it was a crazy idea, but perhaps it might work. (Arenas 168)

The ambassador could do nothing for him, unfortunately; his French friends though, knowing that Arenas was a fugitive from Castro's prison living in hiding in a public park, sent a French citizen with a sailboat under the cover story of sailing competition participation to smuggle Arenas out of Cuba. The boat is kept in custody by the Cuban authorities, and this plan fails as

well. Arenas is thankful for the lifelong, “indestructible” friendship with the Cuban-French residents Jorge and Margarita Camacho, who, “through some French tourist (...) always managed to send me a letter that would comfort me, and very often they would send a shirt, a pair of shoes, a handkerchief, or a bottle of cologne. These gifts became symbols of life for me, as I pictured them coming from a country that is free” (Arenas 141). He later explains, “wearing those clothes or shoes for the first time, we walked differently. This, to some extent, made us a little freer and connected us to a world in which people could still breathe (Arenas 141).

In prison, Arenas discovers that the French language has the strangest applications. One of the lieutenants supervising Arenas during his imprisonment in Castro’s sugar cane concentration camp asks the writer to teach him French in his free time. Arenas stretches those classes as much as he can, first, to grant himself a break from the inhumane forced labor on the plantation, and second, because the lieutenant, more or less interested in French is aware of Arenas’ homosexuality and seems to have a powerful erection during each class.

Like other writers going against the regime in Cuba or elsewhere, Arenas suffers from the censorship of friends and colleagues even before the state can get its hands on his manuscripts. His third novel, *Farewell to the Sea*, which, according to him, took a decade to write, ends up destroyed by one of Arenas’ friends who had been supposed to hide the manuscript from the authorities. It takes Arenas two years to re-write it. Unfortunately, the second version, which he hid under the roof tiles of his aunt’s house during his imprisonment, falls into the hands of the Cuban State Security and he will have to write a third version. Around 1977, when two French tourists sent by his friends in France came to see him, Arenas smuggles his third version of *Farewell to Sea out of Cuba* to be published in France.

In 1974, unable to leave Cuba via any means, Arenas writes a communiqué about the

executions, imprisonments, and incommunicado captivities in Cuba addressed “to the International Red Cross, the UN, UNESCO, and the countries still privileged to hear to truth,” in which he listed the persecutions that he and other writers were subjected to (Arenas 171). Like Paul Goma under the Romanian sinister communist system, Arenas needs to take preemptive measures against a regime that might force him to recant under torture his convictions or statements, “*I want now to affirm now that what I am saying here is the truth, even though under torture I might later be forced to say the opposite* (Arenas 171, author’s italics). Joris Lagarde, the French sail man who could not smuggle Arenas out of Cuba aboard his boat, returned to Paris with this communiqué and other manuscripts from other writers. The communiqué appeared in Paris in the journal *Le Figaro* and also in Mexico City. His friends Margarita and Olga, one a French national, the other a French resident, sent telegrams on Arenas’ behalf to the Cuban government and officials, all while he was hiding for weeks in a row in Havana’s Lenin Park.

Not much later, Arenas is captured and sent to the infamous Cuban prison of El Morro. Once again, he describes the French implications of his case, “after six months at El Morro I still had not been brought to trial; others had been waiting for more than a year” (Arenas 196). Nonetheless,

State Security wanted to know how I had smuggled out my manuscripts and the communiqué to the International Red Cross, the UN and UNESCO. My friends Margarita and Jorge Camacho had stirred up an enormous campaign with the French press concerning my situation. *Le Figaro* reported that I disappeared five months ago. Now State Security wanted to know who had been in contact with that newspaper, who my friends were in and out of Cuba. (Arenas 200)

Under torture and imminent death threats, Arenas signs the confession-collaboration papers;

back at the infamous El Morro prison, the interrogators, thoroughly unconvinced of his confession-conversion, though elated to have obtained it, during one of their visits to Arenas, inform him that his book, entitled *The Palace of the White Skunks*, had been published in France and Germany, and even show him a copy without allowing him to touch it. “The publication of this book was proof of my existence, and that infuriated them. My friends in Europe had been very wise in organizing a campaign against the isolation to which I was subjected. Victor [the interrogator] made me write a letter to my publisher in France stating that I was in perfect health and that I would probably be home soon” (Arenas 214).

In one of the better jails to which Arenas is transferred after the signing of his confession and a serious death threat, his and other the prisoners’ job is to build executive housing for Castro’s Soviet advisers. Regardless, his interrogator shows up and asks Arenas to write yet another letter to his publisher in France, “stating that I was practically free already and was spending my weekends at home.” Through Cuban friends, Arenas smuggled secret notices to his friends in France, apprising them of his real situation and “begging them to do all they could to get [him] out of the country” (Arenas 218).

Communist Megalomania

Officials of State Security, among which “the notorious Lieutenant Luis Pavón” already in control of UNEAC [the writers’ union], send Arenas to perform forced labor the Manuel Sanguily Sugar Mill, west of Havana, in Pinar de Rio. Per Arenas’ account, forced labor camps had already been created by 1969. UNEAC closed down altogether and sent all writers “to the sugarmills to cut cane,” according to Castro’s instructions, who had made a deal to deliver a ten-million-ton harvest to the Soviet Union. “The Island became an enormous sugar cane plantation”

(Arenas 126). During night raids, State Security arrest and beat hundreds of young people to send them to concentration camps for forced labor. “Those vital, long-haired young men who still dared to walk around the city were all dragged to the sugar plantations, just like the Indians and black slaves of the past.” Arenas recounts how “those adolescents were changed for life; after all the forced labor and constant vigilance, they turned into enslaved ghosts” (Arenas 128). “For any of those young men, to desert a plantation could mean from five to thirty years in jail” (Arenas 128-9). The writer gives a lengthy description of the extermination purpose behind the sugar camp’s existence. Officially set up to reform the country’s homosexuals, the labor activities in this camp were organized according to a strict regime that aimed to drive the inmates to self-mutilation, suicide, or death,

To be sent to one of those places was like entering the last circle of hell. Completely covered from head to foot, with long sleeves, gloves, and a hat (the only way to be in those infernal places), I came to understand why the Indians had preferred suicide to working there as slaves; I understood why so many black men had killed themselves by suffocation. Now I was the Indian, I was the black slave, and I was not alone. I was among hundreds of recruits. (Arenas 129)

Arenas describes the horror of seeing that those young men, sixteen or seventeen years old “were treated like beasts, had no future to hope for, nor a past to remember. Many would hack their legs or cut their fingers off with their machetes (...) For any of those young men, to desert a plantation could mean from five to thirty years in jail (Arenas 129). Ironically, Arenas underlines, “all this was happening in the country proclaiming itself the First Free Territory of the Americas” (Arenas 130). Castro’s paranoid refusal to listen to his adjuncts that the ten million ton harvest was an impossibility left the country devastated, with thousands and

thousands of fruit trees and royal palms and forests felled, sugar mills into the ground, and “the whole nation, completely ruined, was now the poorest province of the Soviet Union” (Arenas 133).

Another paranoid urban project that Arenas mentions is called *El Cordón de la Habana*, or *Havana's Belt*. He reports, “one of Castro’s harebrained ideas consisted in planting coffee seedlings all around the city and turning it into a sort of coffee plantation. Not one of those plants gave a single coffee bean, and millions of dollars were lost, plus the labor of thousands of workers who sacrificed their weekends to dig holes and plant the seedlings” (Arenas 122). Arenas’ examples proves that Eduardo Manet, his fellow Cuban writer in exile in Paris at the time may not have directly witnessed these demented projects, but was not far from the truth in his own fictionalized description of gigantic futile Cuban enterprises either.

Arenas, chronicler of Castro’s parameterized Cuba

One of Reinaldo Arenas’ gifts to literary posterity was to leave behind a thorough account of the Cuban intellectual during the Cold War. In his memoir, he offers detailed examples of individual intellectual trajectories, from the stalwart defiance to the most abject collaboration, covering multiple metamorphoses in between. One portrait of a writer living under oppression is reflected by Cintio Vitier, for example, as indicative of a Cuban writer who had evolved from his critique of the Revolution and refusal to publish under Castro, to writing long laudatory poems “inspired by the coffee harvest and the cutting of the sugarcane” (Arenas 126). Heberto Padilla’s affair of 1971 had a huge echo inside and outside Cuba, mainly because Padilla had dared to publish in 1968 what was deemed an antirevolutionary and anti-Soviet book titled *Out of the Game*, (in Spanish, *Fuera del Juego*) becoming a hero for Arenas’ generation. In 1971, Padilla and his wife

were arrested. Locked up and tortured for a month, he emerged from that experience “a human wreck,” subsequently forced to perform his auto-critique, Soviet-style, in front of an audience summoned by the State Security to participate in the spectacle of a shameful public denial. Padilla recants his former conviction and declares full adherence to the Party line, apologizing for his previous work and branding himself a despicable coward and traitor, along with his wife and his friends, “all of whom, he claimed, also held counterrevolutionary attitudes” (Arenas 137). Padilla names all writers he had been forced to denounce, and they all have to go to the microphone and between sobs and chest beatings denounce themselves of being unworthy and also traitors to the communist ideology. The filming of this shameful spectacle was later shown by the Cuban State Security to all those who signed a petition complaining of Padilla’s arrest, namely world writers such as Mario Vargas Llosa, Octavio Paz, Juan Rulfo, and Gabriel García Márquez. Years later, while Arenas is serving his prison term and find himself *en route* of being transferred from El Morro to another prison, he sees Heberto Padilla walking down a sidewalk in Havana, looking “wan, puffy, and lost, the very image of defeat.” Castro’s agents “had also managed to “rehabilitate” him. Now he walked like a ghost among those trees” (Arenas 217).

Against homosexuals in Cuba, intellectuals or non-intellectuals, a system of communist parameterization was introduced. Arenas explains,

that is, every gay writer, every gay artist, every gay dramatist, received a telegram telling him that his behavior did not fall within the political and moral parameters necessary for his job, and that he was therefore either terminated or offered another job in the forced-labor camps. (Arenas 138)

Needless to add that what started as a one-group targeted social policy in Cuba quickly transformed into a mass policy encompassing non-homosexual social categories, in order to

annihilate anyone politically inconvenient to the regime; Castro's thought police have been successfully doubled and hidden behind a façade of a moral police. From 1970 on, Cuba is transformed into a "maximum security jail," becoming impossible for anyone to leave the island (Arenas 139). To avoid arrest and torture, homosexual and non-homosexual authors alike choose collaboration with the Cuban regime, more or less convincingly. Arenas' fellow homosexual Cuban writers and friends are caught in the system, "Cuba is a police state, and the most practical solution for many is to become policemen. Pepe Malas, Hiram Prado, Oscar Rodríguez -- all of a sudden they became informers for Fidel Castro's regime" (Arenas 140).

Arenas recounts how self-denunciation spectacles like that of Padilla continued in the era, with theater director Roberto Blanco, who had gone through a highly publicized arrest and trial, with the persecution, arrest, and long-term sentence meted to poet René Ariza, then José Lorenzo Fuentes, and Esteban Luis Cárdenas. Many others tried to flee Cuba as stowaways or hijacking them, not to mention by swimming towards Florida or Guantanamo: Guillermo Rosales, Jesús Castro Villalonga, Nelson Rodríguez, Angel López Rabí (the last two will be executed after a failed hijacking of a Cuban plane rerouted to the United States). Like Romanian Paul Goma, who, while imprisoned, finds out about a more horrific prison that others report to him and he decides to consign it to history, Arenas writes a story about the UMAP experiences of his dead friend, Nelson Rodríguez, entitling it *Arturo, la estrella más brillante*, or *The Brightest Star* (Arenas 149).

In the sixties and the seventies, Cuban intellectuals strived to preserve their literary gatherings and salons by holding them in the private homes of Lezama Lima, Olga Andreu, or José Ibáñez, yet none of them would last, because their participants would leave the country, become officials in Castro's infrastructure, or commit suicide on the island or in exile. Arenas

characterizes the suicide of literary patroness Olga Andreu as an act of affirmation: “there are times when living means to degrade yourself, to make compromises, to be bored to death. Olga had wanted to enter that timeless world where State Security could no longer define her parameters, with all her sense of joy and her dignity intact” (Arenas 135). Another woman, poetess Martha Vignier, “jumped from the roof of her home and smashes herself to bits on the pavement” (Arenas 140). An unforgiving chronicler of his times, Arenas, like Paul Goma, names all those writers who had covertly infiltrated those literary meetings as agents of State Security and brought about the demise of their fellow colleagues: Miguel Barnet, Pablo Armando Fernández, César López, and Norberto Fuentes along with all those who were outright supporters of the regime, like José Antonio Portuondo, Roberto Fernández Retamar, Nicolas Guillén, Raúl Roa, Cintio Vitier, etc.

Castroism, Betrayal, and Self-Betrayal

Friends informing on friends in Castro’s Cuba is such a recurrent phenomenon that people were arrested even for wistful comments about leaving the country. Arenas bitterly remarks that one of the most vicious acts perpetrated by Castroism was to break the bonds of friendship, “to make us mistrust our best friends because the system was turning them into informers, into undercover agents. I already mistrusted many of my friends.” Dramatic was also that “such people were victims of blackmail as well as of the system itself, and they were on the point of becoming dehumanized” (Arenas 154). Arenas laments the sad metamorphosis of one of his best friends, homosexual fellow writer Hiram Prado, who had informed on him,

I was not surprised to learn that Hiram Prado was an informer; after living so many years under that regime, I had come to understand how humanity disappears bit by bit in

everyone, and how human beings break down in order to survive. Informing on others is something most Cubans do every day. (...) The night I knew for certain that Hiram Prado was an informer, I returned to my cell rather depressed. (Arenas 203)

Years later, after his release from prison, Arenas' first impulse upon meeting Prado suddenly on the street is to insult him, but ends up forgiving his one-time friend instead. Giving him a hug, Arenas tells himself, "I knew I was hugging a policeman, an informer, but also an excellent poet with whom I had shared some wonderful times" (Arenas 232). Little was Arenas aware that not only Hiram Prado and him were part of each other biographies, but the social culture of informers and betrayal that they were immersed in was common to all the countries of the former communist bloc, because

in a totalitarian state, the ties of complicity are strengthened if all the participants are equally guilty, having stained their hands in the "enemy's" blood. Everyone has to throw stones. Everyone has to repress each other, and this shared dirty work turns into an obscure moral vehicle. (Montaner 134)

Upon his arrest, Arenas finds out that an incriminating UNEAC report portrayed him as "nothing but a homosexual counterrevolutionary who had dared to publish books abroad" (Arenas 155). Arenas recounts the meeting with the lawyer who showed him the evidence,

an intimidating dossier of evidence against me, including a list of titles and descriptions of all the novels I had published abroad. That lengthy report, in which I was accused of being a counterrevolutionary who had smuggled all his books out of Cuba without UNEAC's authorization, was signed by people who, apparently up to that moment, had been excellent friends of mine and only recently were patting me on the back, telling me not to worry, nothing would happen to me. Among those who signed it, accusing me of

constant counterrevolutionary activities, were Nicolás Guillén, Otto Fernández, José Martínez Matos and Bienvenido Suárez. (Arenas 156)

According to the document, there was no doubt about the general opinion of Arenas' fellow writers that he "was a counterrevolutionary engaged in incessant propaganda against the regime" (Arenas 156).

Reminiscing in his memoir about his treatment in Cuba before his imprisonment, an embittered Arenas insists that the UNEAC people or the officials from *La Casa de la Américas* "were particularly despicable; not one of them would even greet me. I had suddenly become invisible" (Arenas 237). "Others, perhaps out of mere cowardice, forgot I existed, although we had shared long friendships" (Arenas 237). Arenas is so terrified of his own friends, that when one approaches him at some point saying that he refused to keep his manuscripts anymore, Arenas takes them and throws them right away in the nearest sewer, not to be caught with them upon him, just in case the friend had informed the authorities of their meeting. Having no place to live, no friends or acquaintances wishing to acknowledge his existence, and no one to hide any of his manuscripts, Arenas gets fed up with "all those who would not be friends at a time when friendship really mattered," and writes up an ironic document that he sends to all his friends. He sarcastically entitles it "The Termination of Friendship Notice" and reads as follows,

Mr. ____

In accordance with the balance sheet of termination of friendships I prepare at the end of each year, based on meticulously exact data, I hereby inform you that your name has been added to the list of those terminated.

Yours very truly,

Reinaldo Arenas. (Arenas 238)

Even former political prisoners from among those allowed to leave in 1979, once abroad, betrayed the friends left behind by sending letters to Cuba disclosing their once-shared activities; as a result, the former friends in Cuba were fired from their jobs, arrested, or sent to insane asylums. A trusting Arenas gives one of them, a Samuel Toca, a secret message for his friends in France. However, immediately after Toca reaches Europe, he sends the secret message directly to the French and Spanish press. Soon after, a Cuban State Security official shows Arenas a copy of *Cambio 16*, a Spanish journal, displaying the headline “REINALDO ARENAS THREATENS SUICIDE IF NOT HELPED OUT OF CUBA” (Arenas 271).

To his enormous sadness and disappointment about the unstoppable unraveling of human relationships in Cuba, and the loss of some of his best friends, a more crushing one is added. During Arenas’ second imprisonment in El Morro, he is interrogated, tortured, threatened with disappearance, and the staging of suicide or murder by other inmate. In isolation for four months at the State Security headquarters, he witnesses other prisoners’ inhumane tortures. He describes how torturers would raise a prisoner’s blood pressure to provoke a heart attack. Evoking a Holocaust-style scientific torture, Arenas describes how his next door neighbor had been subjected to torture every day for a month, “every now and then, a doctor would come in and check the prisoner’s blood pressure, check his heart and say: You can give him a little more” (Arenas 202). When the prisoner would be about to die from a heart attack, “he would be removed from his cell and taken to the interrogation chamber” (Arenas 203). Romanian writer Paul Goma describes in his prison memoir how he had been subjected to the very same procedure in another communist country, thousands of miles away from Cuba. Arenas’ memoir confirms Goma’s direct experience, namely that the interrogations and torture practices in Cuba were strikingly similar to those in other communist countries. Unsurprisingly, Arenas uncovers

that the initiators and trainers of surveillance and torture in Cuba were Russian. “There were many Russians at State Security, which was under the absolute control of the KGB, like a branch office. The Soviet officers were more respected and feared than the Cubans, everyone saluting them as if they were generals; perhaps they were” (Arenas 202). The forced sedation of political prisoners and their shipping to mental asylums is another routine form of punishment witnessed and recorded by Arenas that was a common feature of the former communist governments in the entire Soviet bloc.

After three more months of harsh interrogations and torture at the State Security headquarters, Arenas, exhausted, signs a forced confession-conversion denouncing himself and his ideological weaknesses, his sexuality, his writing; in short, all of his life, and asks to be redeemed and allowed to join the ideals of the Revolution and write its incessant praise; he asks for rehabilitation, while praising all who informed on him. Years later, reflecting retrospectively on his gesture, Arenas explains that “the body suffers more than the soul, because the soul can always find something to hang on to, a memory, a hope” (Arenas 180). He is brutally honest about his breaking point in Castro’s prisons,

Needless to say, this only proves my cowardice, my weakness, the certainty that I am not the stuff of which heroes are made, and that fear, in my case, had won over moral principles. But I was comforted by the fact that in the communiqué I had written in Lenin Park to the International Red Cross, the UN, UNESCO and many other organizations that never published it, I stated that my accusations against the regime of Fidel Castro were absolutely true to fact, even if at some point I denied them. I did know the moment might come when I would have to recant. (Arenas 204)

Like many of those forced to confess under torture, Arenas is tormented by inner guilt,

“once my confession was signed, I was returned to my cell. I have seldom felt more miserable” (Arenas 206). His interrogators had insisted that Arenas mention in his confession a trumped-up charge of corruption of minors against him, which would have forever recorded him as being guilty of a “serious common crime, [that of the] corruption of minors” (Arenas 206). The authorities’ goal was to keep Arenas in jail for eight years and obliterate his contact with the literary world abroad. Arenas’ sentence turned up to be “a two-year jail term for lascivious abuses.” The prosecutors, though, could not convict him of corruption of minors because both minors involved in his trial refused to testify to it. When asked by the officials to write a list of all people he knew to be enemies of the revolution, Arenas writes down instead the names of all the people he knew, from both his personal experience and from having read his legal file, that they had ever informed on him, with the exception a few friends and his aunt; he justifies these exceptions by acknowledging that “one had to recognize that they were also victims of the system” (Arenas 213).

A lucid and anti-heroic Arenas declares, “before my confession I had a great companion, my pride. After the confession, I had nothing. I had lost my dignity and my rebellious spirit” (Arenas 207). For him, the worst part of this type of torture, of the breaking of the human spirit is the feeling of loneliness, impotence, and senselessness, “now I was alone in my misery; no one could witness my misfortune in that cell. The worst misfortune was to continue living after that, after having betrayed myself and after having been betrayed by almost everybody else” (Arenas 207). After his signing of the forced confession, Arenas is taken back to the El Morro prison, where, from the murderers’ ward, he is transferred to that of the workers. Descending in another hell, he describes how “the atmosphere in the workers’ ward was not one of camaraderie but of snitching, [because] most people there were informers and could report you for almost anything.

They had no scruples about snitching on anyone just to obtain some privilege (Arenas 208). In the two years following his arrest, Arenas witnesses beatings, murders, executions, filth, recurrent raping, reciprocal torture, self-mutilation, suicides, guards sexually-aroused by torture, and much more.

Castro's *Coup*: the Mariel Boatlift

In April 1980, a public bus driver takes his passengers through the gates of the Peruvian embassy in Havana, where they all ask for political asylum. When a miscalculating Castro retreats the guards from the embassy, pretending that he will not stop them from leaving, more than a hundred thousand Cubans take refuge inside the embassy seeking to exit Cuba. Arenas describes the siege that ensues: electricity and water supplies get cut off, food rations brought inside for only 800 people, undercover agents sneak in and murder high Cuban officials that had requested Peruvian asylum, and the international press wires news about the crisis all over the world. More Cuban citizens that try to enter the embassy are machine-gunned by Castro's forces, and mobs are organized by Cuban authorities to lynch anyone daring to approach the Peruvian embassy building. After fifteen days of living almost without food and sleeping on their feet, the besieged Cubans are gunned down on the order of Fidel Castro, who, in the meanwhile, had summoned the help of the Soviets and the KGB. In his memoir, Arenas shares how the victims died by "fac[ing] up to the bullets [and] by singing the old national anthem" (Arenas 278).

A revolted Arenas describes how Castro gave public speeches during those days, accusing everyone refugiated in the embassy to be "antisocial and sexually depraved." He says, "I'll never forget that speech -- Castro looked like a furious, cornered rat -- nor will I forget the hypocritical applause of García Márquez and Juan Bosch, giving their support to such a crime

against the unfortunate captives“(278). Arenas says that on the advice of the Soviet Union Fidel Castro only allowed the exit of those he wanted to get rid of, namely ”common prisoners and criminals from Cuban jails; undercover agents he wanted to infiltrate in Miami; the mentally ill, ”but also, prostitutes and the homosexuals (Arenas 279). In order to get out, Arenas goes to an obscure local police station and declares himself a homosexual, to obtain an exit permit; upon arriving at the concentration camp near Mariel, he changes his name on his passport so that it does not match the one by which he has already been listed among those forbidden to leave the country.

Arenas leaves Cuba in one of the boats and arrives in Miami after several challenging days at sea. He remarks that, from the 135, 500 people participants in the Mariel exodus, “the majority were people like myself; all they wanted was to live in a free world, to work and regain their lost humanity” (284). Once in Miami, Arenas contacts his Cuban-French friends and inquires about the fate of his smuggled manuscripts. They answer him that the manuscripts had been already delivered to Cuban writer Severo Sarduy in Paris, who worked for Éditions du Seuil (Arenas 286). Sarduy denies receiving the manuscripts; Arenas’ friends reassure him that they had only given Sarduy copies and had kept the originals.

Arenas’ exile and the Western Left

In the United States, Arenas takes up residence in Miami at first, but in August 1980, after being invited to speak at Columbia University in New York, he packs his bags and moves to a city that gives him a familiar feeling, coming across to him like “a glorified Havana” (Arenas 293). The first two or three years in New York seem to him “a true celebration,” during which a prolific Arenas “writ[es] a lot” (297). His literary meetings with fellow Cubans in exile are re-ignited,

and, in 1983, a group of *marielitos* in New York publish the first issue of the literary magazine *Mariel*, which they dedicated to José Lezama Lima, and edited under the inspired advising of Lydia Cabrera. They dedicate a successive issue to the treatment of homosexuality in Cuba, but the magazine is not well received; Arenas explains that “it could not, of course, appeal to the frivolous left of the United States, to the hypocrites of that left, to communists and fellow travelers, to Cuban Castrist agents worldwide, especially those living in the United States,” nor to the Miami bourgeois Cubans (Arenas 299).

More invitations are extended to Arenas to speak at various conferences organized by American universities. He is unpleasantly surprised by the generalized resistance that he encounters whenever he criticizes the tyrannical rule of Castro, mentioning that, because of this criticism, even his publishers and friends in Mexico and Uruguay, who had made money from his books while he had been imprisoned in Cuba, had turned against him, “Emmanuel Carballo, who had published more than five editions of *El mundo alucinante* [in Mexico] and never paid me a penny, now wrote me an indignant letter saying I should have never left Cuba, while, at the same time, refusing to make any payment to me” (Arenas 287). Reacting in a similar vein, Ángel Rama, instead of hailing Arenas’ arrival to freedom, “wrote a lengthy newspaper article in which he stated that Reinaldo Arenas was on his way to ostracism and should have never left Cuba, because his problems were only bureaucratic” (Arenas 288). The next disappointing blow comes to Arenas from a fellow Cuban in France: “to top it all, after numerous calls to Paris, [Severo] Sarduy not only paid me a mere one thousand dollars for the French editions, but one day called my aunt in Miami and told her I had lots of money” (Arenas 288). In his distinct survivalist narrative style, Arenas delineates his perspective on his freshly-acquired diasporic experience,

None if this surprised me: I already knew that the capitalist system was also sordid and

money-hungry. In one of my first statements after leaving Cuba I had declared that “the difference between the communist and capitalist system is that, although both give you a kick in the ass, in the communist system you have to applaud, while in the capitalist system you can scream. And I came here to scream. (Arenas 288)

Arenas rhetorical scream will be heard in his courses and lectures around various universities in the United States or in his travels to Venezuela, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, France, and Portugal. A feisty, unabashed Arenas declares, “In all these countries I screamed; it was my treasure, it was all I had” (Arenas 288). Like his fellow Cuban in France, Eduardo Manet, who has confronted his leftist friends in France about the oppression in Cuba, Arenas is faced with the deep mistrust of the American Left. He tries to describe this phenomenon to his reader,

I now discovered a variety unknown in Cuba: the Communist Deluxe. I remember that at a Harvard University banquet a German professor said to me: “In a way I can understand that you may have suffered in Cuba, but I am a great admirer of Fidel Castro and I am very happy with what he has done in Cuba.” While saying this, the man had a huge, full plate of food in front of him, and I told him: “I think it’s fine for you to admire Fidel Castro, but in that case, you should not continue eating that food on your plate; no one in Cuba can eat food like that, with the exception of Cuban officials. (Arenas 289)

Increasingly disillusioned, Arenas later states, “my encounters with this festive and fascist left stirred a good amount of controversy” and takes notice that “evidently, the war against communists, hypocrites and cowards had not ended just because I was out of Cuba” (Arenas 289). Arenas’ screaming will cost him dearly; he remembers too late the advice he had received from of a Cuban exile in Washington, DC, who had warned him upon arrival in the States “to never quarrel with the left.” Arenas rhetorically asks: “after twenty years of repression, how

could I have kept silent about those crimes?” (Arenas 301) Arenas plainly states that he had never considered himself to belong to any Left, Right, or any other “opportunistic or political label. I tell my truth, as does the Jew who has suffered racism or the Russian who has been in the Gulag, or any human being who has eyes to see the way things really are. I scream, therefore I exist” (Arenas 301). His unwavering attitude will bring about financial and professional loss; his books get dropped from the curriculum of New York University and other universities as well. Deeply saddened, he concludes that for the Cubans who have suffered already twenty years of pain, there was “really no solace anywhere. Suffering has marked us forever, and only with people who have gone through a similar experience can we perhaps find some level of understanding (Arenas 308).

Other Spanish-speaking fellow writers have been equally persecuted by fellow leftist intellectuals. Nobel prize-winner for Literature Mario Vargas Llosa, ardent supporter of the Cuban revolution in the 60s, dared write an article in 1968 in which he expressed “his criticism of Fidel Castro for recanting his initial condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia,” followed by “denunciations of censorship and human rights violations in both Cuba and the Soviet Union” (Kristal and King 4). Little could have Vargas Llosa anticipated the generalized reaction of his leftist friends against him, “The backlash against Vargas Llosa for the views he had expressed disabused him of the idea that he had earned the right to criticize the Cuban Revolution, even though he had thought of himself as a committed ally of the regime, with the right to do so” (Kristal and King 4). His ostracism was swift,

He found himself in an awkward situation, having become a world celebrity with novels he thought were contributing to socialist causes, but considered an outcast by the Latin American left and by most professional academic specialists of Latin American

literature in the 1970s, who agreed that they had overestimated the significance of Vargas Llosa's contribution to literature, or at least of Vargas Llosa as a writer who fulfilled their political aspirations. (Kristal and King 4)

Blacklisted by his former leftist friends similarly to Llosa, Arenas cannot stop analyzing the paradox of his exilic situation, "Ironically, while I was in jail and I could not leave Cuba, my chances of being published were better because I was not allowed to speak out, and foreign publishing companies with leftist leanings would support a writer living in Havana" (301). However, Arenas specifies that this rejecting attitude was directed also against other Cuban exiles, leaving them disenfranchised, since, as he says, "in exile we have no country to represent us; we live as if by special permission, always in danger of being rejected. Instead of having a country, we have an anti-country," in which Castro's far-reaching security apparatus is always ready "to destroy us intellectually, and, if possible, physically," even in exile (301).

Conversely, Arenas enumerates the many extraordinary people whom he has met in the United States; one of them is Reinaldo Sánchez, who offers him a job as a visiting professor at the International University of Florida, where Arenas prepares and teaches a course on Cuban poetry. Another one is Emir Rodríguez Monegal, the Cuban-American academic "who has best understood [his] books (Arenas 310). Also, fellow Cuban exilic authors Lydia Cabrera, Enrique Labrador Ruiz, and Carlos Montenegro are among those whom Arenas counts as new friends. He finds it paradoxical that these writers, who had searched and found freedom outside Cuba, could not publish their work in Miami because of a market-driven society in which literature was a non-lucrative endeavor. Elaborating on his deep admiration for Lydia Cabrera, Arenas says, "I understood that she represented a greatness and a spirit of rebellion that perhaps no longer existed in any of our writers, either in Cuba or in exile" (Arenas 291). Extrapolating on the

position of a Cuban intellectual anywhere, he decries, “It was a paradox and at the same time a good example of the tragic fate Cuban writers have suffered throughout our history; on our Island we have been condemned to silence, to ostracism, censorship, and prison; in exile, despised and forsaken by our fellow exiles” (Arenas 291). Miami’s artificial façade permeated by the repugnant machismo culture looks like a caricature of Cuba to Arenas. At some point, he confesses that the nostalgia for his beloved Havana crept in, “but [my] enraged memory was stronger than any nostalgia” (Arenas 293).

Three international films that Arenas took part in -- *In His Own Words* (1980), directed by Jorge Ulla, *The Other Cuba* (1983), directed by Carlos Franqui and Valerio Rivas, and *Improper Conduct/Conducta Impropria* (1983), directed by Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal were considered important achievements by Arenas during his New York exile. Arenas lauds the accomplishments of directors Almendros and Jiménez Leal, who dared screen footage of the UMAP concentration camps in Cuba, and interviews with numerous Cubans who had been forcibly interned there. “The film attracted international attention, aroused fierce controversy, and won the Human Rights Award as the best documentary shown in Europe that year” (Arenas 300). Almendros, a Spaniard who had evaded Franco’s dictatorship, had also lived in Cuba under both Batista and Castro’s regimes. Arenas points out that Almendros remains “an example of intellectual and artistic integrity, [whose] attitude has been decisive and courageous, in spite of the fact that it has hurt him in many ways” (Arenas 300). Contrastively, Arenas perceives that

the great majority of U.S, liberal intellectuals, in order to appear progressive and to channel and profit from the logical resentment of people subjected to other social ills, have generally supported Fidel Castro, or have conveniently pretended to overlook his

crimes. Now, with the Super-Stalinization of Castro's regime, criticized even in Soviet magazines, I imagine that some U.S. intellectuals are changing their tune for political or financial expediency. (Arenas 300)

In 1987, Arenas is diagnosed with AIDS. He struggles to prolong his life until the completion of his autobiography and several other projects before he commits suicide. While his lack of private medical insurance made the managing of his disease, terminal at the time, an agonizing ordeal, his saving grace is a last link to France that helps him secure the medical care needed for his last years,

I was practically dying, but hospitals refused to admit me because I did not have the means to pay. Fortunately, there was a French doctor at the hospital who was acquainted to Jorge and Margarita, and he helped to get me in. (Arenas x)

Ever supportive, Jorge and Margarita, his lifelong Cuban-French friends, call him weekly from Paris. Although living in freedom in New York, Arenas' book *The Doorman* written in Spanish appeared in French in France at this time. With help from his French publisher and friends, a gravely-ill Arenas travels to France to support the book in the City of Lights.

Upon his return to New York, he continues to work on his autobiography, all while reviewing the French translation of his book *La Loma del Angel*, later published in English as *Graveyard of the Angels*. Back in the hospital, Arenas succeeds in writing the fourth volume of his *Pentagonia*, titled *The Color of Summer*. After leaving the hospital, he finishes his autobiography. He also reviews the manuscript of the fifth volume of the *Pentagonia*, called *The Assault*, which had been written in haste in Cuba. This novel was added to his other manuscripts currently housed by the Firestone Library at Princeton University.

In the wake of his impending death, Arenas states his feelings about his American exile,

feelings similar to those of other world writers that had experienced it,

needless to say, after ten years, I have realized that an exile has no place anywhere, because there is no place, because the place where we started to dream, where we discovered the natural world around us, read our first book, loved for the first time, is always the world of our dreams. In exile one is nothing but a ghost, a shadow of someone who never achieves full reality. I ceased to exist when I went into exile; I started to run away from myself. (Arenas 293)

In the “Farewell” note that he hands to his friends and publishers before his death, and which “appear[s] in major US newspapers and abroad,” Arenas declares that he renounces his life because he cannot continue his writing; he adds that the only person he holds accountable for his life’s end is Fidel Castro. In his own words, “the sufferings of exile, the pain of being banished from my country, the loneliness, and the diseases contracted in exile would probably never have happened if I had been able to enjoy freedom in my country” (Arenas 317). With his last words, he encourages the Cuban people inside and outside Cuba to continue to fight for freedom, “I do not want to convey to you a message of defeat but of continued struggle and of hope. Cuba will be free. I already am” (Arenas 317).

Cuba within, Cuba without

Despite the fact that Arenas wrote all his work in Spanish, as opposed to Manet, whose work is almost exclusively written in French, Arenas goes largely unrecognized, for Latin American critics “generally ignored the anomalous situation of a writer twice awarded a distinguished prize and translated to several languages, who became a non-writer in his native land” (Rodriguez-Monegal 127). In *The Politics of Literature* (2006), French philosopher

Jacques Rancière has argued that “the expression ‘politics of literature’ (...) implies that literature intervenes as literature in [the] carving up of space and time, the visible and the invisible, speech and noise” (Rancière 4). Arenas’ lifework certainly fits Rancière’s visible-invisible and speech-noise pattern. The more Cuba banned and banished him, the stronger Arenas screamed and reached different and much wider spaces and audiences instead. In 1983, without a passport, Arenas applies and obtains a paper issued by the UN attesting his refugee status; he is finally able to visit France and thank the French Cubans that had uninterruptedly helped him since 1967. He declares that he spent there “some of the most memorable moments of [his] life, discovering one of the most beautiful cities in the world,” Paris, the city that had made him visible to the entire literary world (Arenas 304).

Arenas’ militant, freedom-loving aesthetics resonates strongly with his readers. Always insisting on reporting on the truth as he saw it, he offers the world a Cuban version about intensely debated aspects of colonialism, totalitarianism, communism, and capitalism, all touched by his *enfant terrible* worldview, situated at the intersection of the real, the imaginary, and the outrageous. The “intervention” that Jacques Rancière mentions is Arenas’ outrage at the ignoble deeds of system and man, regardless of political colors or historical dimensions. And after the noise of the more-fashionable intellectuals subsides, with many of his former colleagues having faded in the contextual background of Cuban or Latin-American literature, Arenas’ outrage proves eminently lasting. It remains so not only because of its outraged stylistics (rooted in the intense freedom he took in discussing the taboos of homosexuality or the ravaging effects of AIDS at a time when others would not), but because he intervened in his characteristic brusque manner to publicly state the dilemmatic positioning that marks every modern intellectual’s thought; more exactly, how is a world writer to deal with imperfect ideologies

proposed by imperfect systems -- either capitalist or communist -- and to carve an authentic position in such a way in which one preserves belief and makes his critical contribution count at the same time? From inside and outside Cuba, this is Arenas' literary interventional literary politics in the world: an invitation to all human beings to go beyond a personal or political ethics of either suspicion or consent and, instead, grant each other the bond of the freedom of screaming, or of occupying the very space between speech and noise.

The intellectual and personal trajectories of the two Cuban writers discussed in this chapter are very different: Eduardo Manet's privileged upbringing and access to a continental higher education stand in stark contrast to the deep rural poverty of Reinaldo Arenas' formative years and later educational and professional opportunities facilitated by the social mobility policies aggressively pursued by the Cuban Communist Party in the sixties. Reinaldo Arenas has experienced persecution and prison directly, while Eduardo Manet apparently has not. Arenas died in deep poverty and forgotten by an ungrateful literary establishment, while Manet, presently in his eighties, continues to live in Paris and to enjoy the recognition of his work. Both writers, though, insightfully document in their works -- those discussed in this dissertation and those that could not be elaborated on, due to material restraints -- the nature and growth of the coercive communist Cuban state.

Eduardo Manet and Reinaldo Arenas' *oeuvres* and activism in Cuba and outside their native Cuba, in Spanish and in French, attempt to denounce non-democratic worlds within and without, by enlisting the help of audiences in larger democratic spaces that literature and politics convergently map and remap. For these two Cuban writers, these places are as defined by tropes of loss and mourning (of an identity or home), as they are by the euphoria that the *francité d'urgence* mediates, offering them secure access to multiple points of contact where the story of

suffering and displacement can transition from the national to the universal in its request for international political and intellectual responses to local crises.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has explored and conceptualized the Francophone literature of human rights in postwar France by analyzing the continuities, discontinuities, and intersections of several Francophone diasporic literatures, such as the more prominent North-African or Middle Eastern Francophone literature, the more marginal Eastern European Francophone literature, and the largely unacknowledged Cuban Francophone literature.

As indicated in the introductory chapter, my re-conceptualization of a literary *Francophonie* more encompassing than the prevalent postcolonial one highlights the diasporic Francophone writers' engagement to speak truth to other powers than the French metropolitan center. The impressive amount of human rights literature produced in French or in France against the regimes of the Right and of the Left during the twentieth century demonstrates how France and its capital had become a *plaque tournante* where world writers settled either permanently or temporarily to spark transversal dialogues involving or circumventing the center; appealing to global audiences within and beyond France, these activist-writers follow their problematic quest of achieving social justice in their home countries. Concomitantly, these writers achieve cultural justice *dans la métropole* as well, through their endless debates and complex notions of belonging and unbelonging linguistically, ethnically, creatively, or spatially either to the center or the periphery of the Francophone and French letters or both. The legitimacy/illegitimacy of belonging conundrum is present in the numerous designations and contestations of what a French, French-Francophone, French/Francophone or French-Francophile author is perceived to be in contemporary France and outside it. Never before has a critical literary study explored the transversal circuitous connections between multiple marginal diasporic networks at the heart of

the Hexagon that claim their right to self- designation and narration. Thus, the charting of the intellectual trajectory of six writers coming to France from three regions -- MENA, the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe -- has been necessary in order to exemplify the novel concept of *francité d'urgence*, which illustrate the condition of those writers who, forced by the political situation in their home countries make recourse to France, its language, and its cultural and political traditions to promote national, regional, and global justice.

In what follows, I will review some of the findings common to the three Francophone literary diasporas analyzed in this dissertation. Each of the six writers whose works were explored in this study has focused on describing Orwellian worlds of absurd persecution, imprisonment, arrest, epuration, torture, and eradication of individual freedoms. Three of these writers write in French. The remaining three, who write in their maternal languages while living, publishing in, or appealing to France provide a contrapuntal reading to the first three and also to the metropolis and *francophonie*'s real or perceived role in the human rights movement worldwide.

Although two of these writers -- 'Abd al-Rahman Munif and Eduardo Manet -- have chosen to fictionalize prison or dictatorship and others wrote about the same topics from direct experience -- Abdellatif Laâbi, Paul Goma, Lena Constante, Reinaldo Arenas, -- each of these writers displays an acute sense of history expressed as a succession of traumatic events that mark their personal and collective lives anchored in an irresolvable political present. In their task of consigning a problematic history of their repressive governments to posterity, the prison and dictatorship writers that I explore accomplish much more: they chronicle unknown histories of their countries that are in danger of never being published before becoming lost. Political prison memoirs and dictatorship novels write, at certain political junctures, the only authentic version of

national history indicting the official one; as such, they script a subclass history that runs subversively parallel to the major official one and circulates orally, while awaiting a possible rightful representation in a later canonical form.

My conclusion, after analyzing the fictionalization of dictatorship and prison in the case of ‘Abd al-Rahman Munif and Eduardo Manet is that the urge to fictionalize prison comes from their authorial desire to place the prisoner in control of his or her life. Writers feel compelled to narrate the lived experience of those prisoners of conscience who, for different reasons, cannot narrate or speak about the traumatic experiences of their past. The fictionalization of the tortured body makes the unnarratability of pain not only possible, but also transforms it into a tool of personal and collective agency. In his essay “A Question of Narration,” Joseph Slaughter makes a case for the difference between the unspeakability and unnarratability of trauma; in his view, while (un)speakability may cause a potentially-testifying witness to re-live a dehumanizing experience which he or she would prefer to avoid, the narratability of pain may have a deeply humanizing effect. In light of Slaughter’s theory, I argue that Eduardo Manet and ‘Abd al-Rahman Munif’s efforts at fictionalizing prison aim to create a story about the very unnarratability of prison experience, which proves to be in itself a narrative gesture amounting to a restoration of the victims’ rights. To speculate further, perhaps in its fictionalized form, human rights literature re-creates the trace left behind after the cathartic burning, distilling, and crystallizing of the real trauma of many unspoken individual and collective victims.

While ‘Abd al-Rahman Munif and Eduardo Manet fictionalize prison, Paul Goma and Eduardo Arenas write it with a vengeance, offering readers its aggravated and outrageous intestinal view based on their direct experience of traumatic incarceration. Paul Goma and Eduardo Arenas are emblematic of a category of disenfranchised human rights writers who,

decades after their political, professional, and personal ordeals, feel betrayed by their peers and history alike; nothing can restore to them a dignified external world in which to position their radically singular principles and actions. Throughout their literary careers, their narrative tone remains marked by a deep sense of being betrayed by a country or the world entire. Not even their hard-achieved freedom in the Western world can erase the injustice of the past and offer relief from present marginalization. In an era of global cultural migration and commuting in which identities-on-the-move are defined as hybrid and fluid, Reinaldo Arenas and Paul Goma refuse an identity any different than that they have been born with: Cuban, and, respectively, Romanian. Their radical engagement remains local before any global extension of their aims for social redress: each continue to write in his maternal language, although deeply and permanently aware and grateful for the opportunity that France, the French people, and their language have provided.

Contrastively, Abdellatif Laâbi and Lena Constante offer a more serene philosophical view of their lived experience as former prisoners of conscience. Lena Constante employs an anti-emotional narrative style, while Abdellatif Laâbi creatively suffuses the *écriture* of human rights with his lyrical poetics of a caged consciousness in expanse. Through the creative channeling of their emotions, they counteract processes of de-individualization, depersonalization, and dehumanization that the world of political prisons enacts.

So far, I have identified two aesthetic narrative styles that emerge from the works of human rights literature in French which are marked by the phenomenon of *francité d'urgence*: an **intestinal aesthetics** (exemplified by Reinaldo Arenas and Paul Goma's prison memoirs) and a **bitterless aesthetics** (produced by Lena Constante, Abdellatif Laâbi, Eduardo Manet, and 'Abd al-Rahman Munif's writings).

One of my findings is that too much emphasis has been placed upon the fact that resistant writers, prison writers, feminist writers, or dissident writers are first and foremost writers of trauma whose works are marked by a primary testimonial function. I consider that trauma and memory theoretical approaches remain only partially applicable to writers testifying to human rights abuse, because it insufficiently addresses the fact that writers are writers before or in spite of trauma and they regard the task of a writer to bear witness to social ills as intrinsic and permanent to their art, not prevalent. Writers experience persecution under oppressive regimes because of their authorial actions and status ever before becoming highly inconvenient political witnesses and subsequent prisoners of conscience. Proof of this artistic chronology is that Paul Goma (like Vladimir Bukovsky, Herta Müller, and others) never ceases to dismiss the “dissident” label applied to him, insisting that he has never been a dissident, but a writer.

Another problematic common critical approach is the supposition that writers of human rights literature would, perhaps, overcome trauma to some degree by the way of their aesthetic testimony. I argue here that the intestinal writing of Reinaldo Arenas and Paul Goma brings evidence to the contrary, namely to the fact that these writers vow to never agree to an overcoming of trauma. Goma’s recurrently-stated credo is: “I will always un-forget you, the torturers.” Unequivocally, both Goma and Arenas never give up what can be called their *right to trauma*, as demonstrated in and by their subsequent writings, which never reached the liminal peace experienced by human rights anti-emotional writers. Nonetheless, despite these seemingly embittered, amputating aspects of their rights aspirations, their commitment to testifying to what they know, see, and feel, socially and politically, remains unwavering.

Another major question that the human rights literature focused on the prison experience addresses is that of the relationship between gender and authority. In each chapter of this

dissertation, I examined the ways in which gender affects the positioning of prison or dictatorship ethics. It is well known that gender is a weapon used by authoritarian regimes in their highly- specialized repressive techniques of persecution, harassment, and torture. I noted that the human rights literature writers analyzed in this study elaborated narratively on the issue of politicized gender (male, female, homosexual, transsexual, etc.) in repressive societies by positioning themselves inside and outside politics at the same time, before and after politics. In human rights literature, it becomes more obvious than ever that gender is irreverent of politics and sees it as an alien, diseased, and militaristic agent or event affecting its existence, and not at all as an enduring, unavoidable ontological factor.

What gender considers and values as its main ontological dimension is situated outside the realm of the political, authoritarian or otherwise. This dimension is Hegelian-like in nature, expressed in the desire for a limited or unlimited numbers of recognitions, confrontations, identifications and forms of separation and unity with same or different gendered Others. The unity of gender, whenever manifested as communities of gender, however small, can and does act as a war machine against politics and oppression, as Maurice Blanchot imparted in his *Unavowable Community* (see discussion in Chapter Two). This is one of the major interventions that gender performs whenever inserted in a human rights context. Because gender, with its ineffable, non-linear routes of affect introduces the exceptional in any political discussion, it succeeds in undermining any authoritarian system's ability to categorize, regiment, or regulate it. In Reinaldo Arenas' representation of Castro's queer prisons, readers quickly notice the power's inefficiency in countering the complexity of affected playfulness, spontaneity, illogicality, and theatricality. In the same vein, Abdellatif Laâbi and his wife question if love, affection, and gender (Laâbi brings androgyny to the forefront to counteract forced dehumanization) are even

translatable to power. ‘Abd al-Rahman Munif painstakingly details the multifariousness of gendered prison ethics in the contrasting triad of male prisoner-mother-sister, where each constructs a differently subversive personal ethics to maintain a sense of dignity in the most undignified of circumstances.

As an overview, this study has explicated the modalities in which the transnational Francophone literature of human rights destabilizes the center-periphery model alongside notions of origin, circulation, translation, or audience, with authors writing in “non-languages” as much as they do in a *lingua franca* such as French. This destabilization turns out to be a productive one, leading to new ethics of reading the world literature preoccupied with narrating local, translocal, or global difficult pasts, presents, and futures. The cultural reconfigurations brought about by the *francité d’urgence*, or the world writers’ adherence to the real or idealized French values and opportunities of narrative rights proves empowering to individuals and networking groups bound by their human rights activism in the center. The transversal multiethnic and multilingual links that diasporic cultural authors build in France create different audiences that read narratives of rights cross-culturally and cross-disciplinarily. The proliferation of human rights institutions, truth, equity, and reconciliation commissions, transitional justice organizations, or remembrance museums are all indicative of the fact that, as much as the practices of interrogation, surveillance, and torture contaminate cross-regionally and cross-ideologically, the remedial practices of defending, promoting, and protecting rights cross-contaminate as well. The French metropolis and its centered (linguistic and aesthetic) margins mediate this circulatory contamination-and-redress process by offering an arena for interaction and debate that enable the search for more possibilities of rights and more efficient forms of their dissemination.

Literary authors writing about human rights at a global site alternate between practices of overwriting and underwriting concepts of home, language, identity, nation, and ideology (see Chapter Four about the intestinal writing of Reinaldo Arenas, the “writing in non-Romanian for non-Romanians” statement of Paul Goma, Munif’s “East of the Mediterranean” metaphor that encompasses more than twenty Arab nations, or Laâbi and Manet’s refusal to name the ideologies of the oppressed or the oppressors in their novels). Before critics may feel tempted to define these techniques as facile deconstructions of worlds of oppression, I urge them to reconsider the tragic cost behind the ethics of reading, listening, and responding promoted by human rights literature writers and activists analyzed in this study. Long before the advent of the era of digital technologies, social media, and “social network” systems, modern and pre-modern social networks existed amidst multiethnic migratory intellectual movements and transfers that intersected historically and politically. The questions they raised, pertaining to the metropolitan, regional, and global reception and interception of social suffering, and to the translability of aspirations and rights from one political-cultural space to another, remain as valid and open as they have been in France in the second part of the twentieth century.

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