

Dynamics of Political Modernity in Lyautey's Colonial Matrix of Power: the Rise of a Post-colonial Interweaving Performance Culture of Denial

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Abstract:

Things do move either because of globalization or colonialism. And as they move, they tend to acquire new identities. I would like to maintain that the movement of things, images, objects and collections accelerates the process of interweaving cultures that has started to impose itself as a principal determining factor of our cultures and identities today. In my presentation,¹ I will examine the movement of French things and institutions to Morocco during colonial times as well as the impact of this movement on the Moroccan theatrical institution.

For colonizers, things and institutions and objects are needful for colonization. They are also needful for implementing their civilizing missions.² I invite you to ponder with me on the following questions: why would a thing like a play be so important for colonizers? Why would colonizers need a thing like a theatrical building or a school in their colonial agenda? I argue that the movement of people alone from one place to another in order to conquer another people is always useless unless the colonizers move their things with them. It is thanks to these things that colonialism can vanquish and subjugate and achieve coloniality. Yet strikingly the colonizers' things soon lose their colonial significance when they fall in the hands of the colonized. I am interested in the movement of things from the colonizers' hand into those of the colonized. To put it into questions, how did Marshal Louis Hubert Gonzalve Lyautey (1854-1934) use the French play, the French school and the French theatrical building as tools for colonizing the imagination of the Moroccans? And how did the Moroccans deal with these things after they had become theirs?

The colonial French machine discerned the important role Moroccan theatres of performance such as *al-halqa* theatre and *lbsat* theatre were playing in Moroccan society in holding together its fibers of

¹ I take this occasion to gratefully thank Pr. Najib Bounahai, the director of my thesis: **Moroccan Theatre betwixt Eurocentric Eclipses and Productive Resistance: Tayeb Saddiki and Abdelkrim Berchid as Exemplary Instances of a Post-Colonial Interweaving Performance Culture of Denial**, and the Spring School for inviting me to this meeting which has been organized to discuss such a thought-provoking subject: **Thinking about Things: Images, Objects, Collections**.

² It should be foregrounded that these civilizing projects were intended to eclipse the culture of the colonized and subjugate the natives who were regarded as 'savages' and 'barbarians.' Will Durant and Ariel here are critical of this colonizing attitude. They maintain that:

In one important sense the "savage," too, is civilized, for he carefully transmits to his children the heritage of the tribe- that complex of economic, political, mental and moral habits and institutions which it has developed in its efforts to maintain and enjoy itself on the earth. It is impossible to be scientific here; for in calling other human beings "savage" or "barbarous" "we may be expressing no objective fact, but only our fierce fondness for ourselves, and our timid shyness in the presence of alien ways.

See Will Durant & Ariel, *The Story of Civilization: Our Oriental Heritage* Vol. I. (World Library, Inc., 1935), p. 12.

morality, of politics, of ideology, of culture, and therefore wanted to consign them to the dustbins of history through engendering antagonistic “moments of rupture and departure.”³



Fig. 1 shows an outdoor halqa performance. (Photograph by Khalid Amine). (This picture was taken from Khalid Amine and Marvin Carlson, ‘Al-halqa in Arabic Theatre: An Emerging Site of Hybridity’ in *Theatre Journal*, Volume 60, Number 1, March 2008, pp. 71-85. Picture from p. 74)

Resorting to Eurocentric strategies of reduction and reification, the French colonizers situated their own theatrical institution at the center and pushed to the barbarian margins the entire institution of theatre of the Moroccans. They convinced the Moroccans that their culture was devoid of theatricality. To fill in such a cultural gap, Lyautey introduced the French play and the French theatre to the Moroccans as things of Enlightenment. This introduction was meant to serve two main objectives, first, as a means of entertainment for French settlers and colonizers and, second, as an agency intended to alter and eclipse their traditions, implement the French civilizing mission and help in the spread of political modernity, that is to say, to bring Morocco back to France, to the West.⁴ It is this historicist mode of thought that allowed European domination of the world in the nineteenth century⁵ as it presented itself to the colonized as an ideology of progress and development.⁶As a result of this colonial effort, a plethora of Moroccan critics believed (in fact, some still do believe) that Moroccan theatre came into life following 1912, a date that marked the French invasion of Moroccan territories. These critics embraced what Chakrabarty calls “first in Europe, then elsewhere”⁷ historicist temporal structure, and therefore functioned as tools of self-destruction. These

³Khalid Amine, *Moroccan Theatre between East and West* (Le Club du Livre de la Faculté des Lettres et des sciences Humaines de Tétouan, 2000), p. 52.

⁴ Khalid Amine, “Double Critique: Disrupting Monolithic Thrusts,” in *Textures*, 27 March 2013.

⁵Gyan Prakash, “Introduction” to Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 3–17.

⁶R. Grosfoguel argues that “developmentalism is linked to liberal ideology and to the idea of progress. [...] Developmentalism became a global ideology of the capitalist world-economy.” R. Grosfoguel, ‘Developmentalism, Modernity, and Dependency Theory in Latin America’, in *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1 (2), 2000, pp. 347-374.

⁷ See “Introduction” in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 7.

critics were historicists as they posited historical time as a measure of the cultural distance that was assumed to exist between France and Morocco and as they legitimized the idea of civilization. Reverting to Chakrabarty, these “nationalist elites often rehearsed to their own subaltern classes—and still do if and when the political structures permit—the stagist theory of history on which European ideas of political modernity were based.”⁸

I argue that by pushing Moroccan theatres of performance to the margin, Lyautey was in fact aiming at consigning Moroccan culture to the dustbins of history and the Moroccans themselves to the “imaginary waiting room of history” in which some people (the French) were to arrive earlier than others (the Moroccans) who were *not yet* civilized enough to rule themselves, and who “needed a period of preparation and waiting before they could be recognized as full participants in political modernity.”⁹ This shows that Lyautey was very much inspired by John Stuart Mill who correctly proclaimed self-rule as the highest form of government and yet foolishly argued against giving Indians or Africans self-rule on historicist grounds. Borrowing Stuart Mill’s ‘insights’¹⁰ on the political, France foolishly claimed that Africans and Moroccans were *not yet* civilized enough to rule themselves. This French historicist view of the political is hostile and antagonistic as it legitimated colonialism in Morocco and elsewhere, and more than that saw colonial rule and education as a temporal historical must that had to elapse first before the colonized Moroccans could be considered prepared for self-rule. In view of this, Mill’s historicist argument together with Lyautey’s imperialistic practice thus consigned Moroccans to “an imaginary waiting room of history.” It is here that Chakrabarty provides a reading of Mill’s terrifying historicist statement: “that was what historicist consciousness was: a recommendation to the colonized to wait. Acquiring a historical consciousness, acquiring the public spirit that Mill thought absolutely necessary for the art of self-government, was also to learn this art of waiting.”¹¹ What is striking here is that though imperialist Europe of the nineteenth century “preached Enlightenment humanism at the colonized” she “at the same time denied it in practice.”¹² It is because of this very double attitude of hers that the Tunisian philosopher and historian Hichem Djait accuses her of “deny[ing her] own vision of man.”¹³

Lyautey’s Colonial Matrix of Power

Having placed the Moroccans in such an imaginary waiting room, Lyautey proceeded to penetrate Moroccan consciousness by wittingly mis-using the findings of colonial anthropological research. He deemed it urgent to explore this exotic Moroccan, not with the noble intention to set a path for dialogue, but mainly to control it once and for all in a manner very much reminiscent of Napoleon’s expedition of scientists of anthropology to Egypt in 1798 to assess the country’s resources as a prelude to a large scale military operation. Consequently, a peculiar type of apartheid was established in an attempt to dismantle Moroccan traditions and consign them to the lumber-room of history and Moroccans themselves “to the waiting room of history” as subjects unable yet to rule themselves. Lyautey’s colonial project availed itself of the works of some anthropologists such as Laoust, Cenival, Doutté and many others that were mainly on artistic orature, masquerades, moussems, religious feasts and mystic groups.¹⁴ In this sense, anthropology is a colonial project per se.

⁸ See *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, p. 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁰ See “On Liberty,” chapter 1 (especially p. 15) and “Considerations on Representative Government,” chapter 18, pp. 409–423 in particular, in John Stuart Mill, *Three Essays* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

¹¹ See D. Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe*, p. 8.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 5.

¹³ See Hichem Djait, *Europe and Islam: Cultures and Modernity*, translated by Peter Heinegg (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 101.

¹⁴ *Moroccan Theatre between East and West*, p. 95.

Lyautey established numerous elementary and secondary schools in order to support and diffuse the French language throughout the native population.¹⁵ He created a directorate of the Fine Arts and Monuments¹⁶ as soon as he arrived in May 1912. He sponsored the creation of the *Congrès des Hautes Études Marocaines* [Congress of the High Moroccan Studies], which was intended to save and preserve native traditions, antiquities, fine arts, folklore, history and linguistics.¹⁷ Yet his so-called appreciation of Moroccan cultural orature together with its variegated expressive behaviors inaugurated, so to speak, an era of exoticism and folklorization that would last for many decades. He also changed the face of the main cities in Morocco: Casablanca (1914), Fez (1916), Marrakesh (1916), Meknes (1917), and Rabat (1920). The establishment of modern cities “as an alternative to the ancient medinas” prompted a regression of the indigenous theatrical traditions of performance that “were relegated to a defensive position.”¹⁸ This modernization prompted a painful rupture between the old dynamics of orature and the new ideals, a rupture that was aimed to overshadow orature that included masquerades and spectacles and other it from within and without.¹⁹ So, it seems that this act was intentional to affect public spaces that once flourished with dramatic orature and theatrical performances, spaces that have been “transformed into a bazaar of formulaic artistic expression, enhancing tourists’ gaze with a variety of museum pieces, [and] fetishized artifacts.”²⁰ Today, in the new space of Jamaa el-fna, which “is marked by the absence of the old story-tellers,” “distorted forms of al-halqa are reproduced.”²¹

I argue that erasing or distorting al-halqa squares and old medinas are tantamount to erasing or distorting memory, which is a trace of the past. How can you remember what your medina once was if its visual indicators are removed? How can you remember the medina at all if it no longer fits the model of memory you have created for yourself? As a subject of the colonial city, you start to see yourself as a stranger in a city that once was yours, because removing familiar landmarks, or rather transforming them to different architectural styles, generates a feeling of *dépaysement*, of alienation.

However, Lyautey’s efforts to erase the Moroccans’ traces of memory in a bid to reduce their entire existence to dust resulted in failure because the contact between French and Moroccan cultures has already left its mark. Besides, the medina as a labyrinth does not permit an easy escape. More importantly, the very act of destroying the culture of the colonized (The Moroccans) must have surely left negative side-effects on the colonizers (the French).²² It is in this sense that the Moroccan philosopher and sociologist A. Khatibi tells us that the “retour aux sources” is impossible,²³ a mere myth intoxicating our visions with theological interpretations.

Theatre of Resistance

Despite the French colonial endeavors that are firmly rooted in European Enlightenment, Moroccan theatre was able to generate resistance. Indeed, dramatists of Resistance “realized theatre’s intricate ability to subvert, or even dispense with the colonizer’s theatrical linearity.”²⁴ This Theatre deployed the western model of theatre making (the western theatrical building and the western dramatic art) to address and embrace the sufferings of the Moroccans and to have it serve as a means of subverting colonial authority.

¹⁵ Lyautey, *Paroles d’action* (Paris: Ed. Colin, 1927), ed., Imprimerie Nationale, 1995, p. 144.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 488.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 384.

¹⁸ *Moroccan Theatre between East and West*, p. 93.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 96-97.

²¹ Hassnaoui Moustapha, “On the Space of Jamaa El-fna” in *Al-alam*, June 24, 1995, p. 12.

²² For an excellent explanation of this double-edged sword, read H. Bhabha and A. Khatibi.

²³ A. Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel* (Paris: Denoël, 1983), p. 24.

²⁴ *Moroccan Theatre between East and West*, p. 99.

Colonialism produces mimicry but mimicry has a subversive power.²⁵ It is within such a situation that “the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and the “partial” representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence.”²⁶ That is to say, due to the shifting of boundaries of difference within identity, Otherness renders itself both reassuring and disturbing, resemblance and threat.²⁷ Moroccan Theatre of Resistance was aware that mimicry has such a subversive power in turning the gaze of power upon the colonizer and therefore used it to destabilize the position of the colonizer, disperse his very identity and authority and displace the Franco-Hispanic hegemony. This Theatre used “dramas [that] represent parodic supplements that re-inscribe a confirmation of difference. Colonial authority was denied by such dramas.”²⁸

Theatre of Resistance was a nationalist rejection of historicist history as it encouraged the Moroccans to reject the Franco-Hispanic historicist democracy. When the Moroccans expelled the Spanish and French colonizers, they were basically arguing against the idea that the Moroccans as a people were not yet ready to rule themselves. Whether literate or illiterate, the Moroccans –just like other peoples – were always suited for self-rule. What else was this position if not a national gesture of abolishing the imaginary waiting room in which the Moroccans had been placed by the Franco-Hispanic historicist thought?²⁹ In short, Theatre of Resistance was a legitimate part of the anti-colonial struggle’s agenda. For example, *Intisar al-Haq* [The Triumph of Right], *Alwalid Bnu Abde-Elmalik* [Alwalid Son of Abde-Elmalik], and *Salah Eddin Al-Ayoubi* constituted good examples of anti-colonial dramas which made bold endeavors that allegedly conveyed hostility towards the occupier and encouraged the Moroccan Resistance Movement.

Resisting Resistance: Why?

Yet due to its political and anti-colonial tendencies, Lyautey thought it needful to strip Theatre of Resistance of its political force and render it apolitical in the process in order to “produce a perfect copy of the western master model.”³⁰ For this reason, the colonial administration appealed to French theatre makers – Charles Nugu and André Voisin – to administer theatrical workshops.³¹

²⁵ Robert Young argues that “[it] implies an even greater loss of control for the colonizer, of inevitable processes of counter-domination produced by a miming of the very operation of domination.” Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 148.

²⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge: London and New York, 1994), p. 89.

²⁷ In H. Bhabha’s words, it becomes “a dangerous place where identity and aggressivity are twinned” and a place where “a subversive slippage of identity and authority” takes place. [Homi Bhabha, “Forward: Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and Colonial Condition,” in Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), pp. xxii; p. xxiv; p. xxii] Bhabha borrows the term mimicry and maintains that, “In occupying two places at once...the depersonalized, disclosed colonial subject can become an incalculable object, quite literally, difficult to place. The demand of authority cannot unify its message nor simply identify its subjects.” [Ibid, p. xxii]. Thus, with Bhabha, mimicry becomes both resemblance and threat. *The Location of Culture*, p. 89.

²⁸ *Moroccan Theatre between East and West*, p. 101.

²⁹ I am thinking here of D. Chakrabarty’s description of the Indians who rejected the historicist room of history of the colonizer: “Indians, literate or illiterate, were always suited for self-rule. What else was this position if not a national gesture of abolishing the imaginary waiting room in which Indians had been placed by European historicist thought?” See “Introduction” in *Provincializing Europe*, p. 10.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Abdelwahed Ouzri, *Le théâtre au Maroc : structures et tendances* (Les Editions Toubkal, 1997), p. 43.



Fig.2 shows André Voisin teaching a number of Moroccan actors including Tayeb Saddiki in the Mamora Centre. (The picture was taken from Hassan Habibi, *Tayeb Saddiki: Hayato Masrah* (Tayeb Saddiki: A Theatre Story) (Matbaàt Dar al-Nashr, 2011), p. 74.)

Nugu and Voisin were professional theatre makers who were brought to fashion and orient Moroccan theatre towards the direction designated to it by the colonial authority. Assisted by Abdessamad Kenfaoui, Tahar Ouaziz, Tayeb Saddiki and others, these French theatre makers supervised theatrical trainings and workshops in the Mamora Centre which led to the birth of Mamora Troupe. This Troupe was begotten and raised in the cradle and with care of the colonial state. Thus, Al-Maamora Troupe was “the output of the colonial policy of containment and assimilation.”³² It aired the colonizer’s historicist patterns and then the state’s policies and views of government.



Fig.3 shows King Mohamed the Fifth surrounded by Mamora Troupe (The picture was taken from Hassan Habibi, *Tayeb Saddiki: Hayato Masrah* (Tayeb Saddiki: A Theatre Story) (Matbaàt Dar al-Nashr, 2011), p. 170.

³²Moroccan Theatre between East and West, p. 123.

It performed a series of English and French adaptations throughout a whole period covering colonial and postcolonial administrations, to be exact from 1956 till 1974. These adaptations ranged over Moliere’s and Shakespeare’s best plays. Here, it should be foregrounded that “Shakespearean negotiations were adaptations from French translations. That is, these were supplements of other supplements.”³³ I deem it therefore relevant to take up a ‘contrapuntal’³⁴ reading- as designated by Edward Said- to look back at Nugu and Voisin’s theatrical workshops in a bid to deconstruct the structure they form to gear the mechanisms of folklorization and reification of the Moroccan Other.

The French colonial system of power managed to produce dramatists who produced plays one could barely distinguish from those of the colonizers. Availing itself of its dramatic and theatrical institutions, French colonialism turned to the past of the Moroccans, distorted, disfigured and destroyed it³⁵ in order to universalize Western particularisms through epistemological colonization that de-centered pre-existing Afro-Moroccan knowledge systems. French colonialism in this sense aimed at producing ‘coloniality’ which refers to “longstanding patterns of power that emerge as a result of colonialism. Coloniality survives colonialism”³⁶ and continues to wreck-havoc on the mind of the colonized. Along this thread of thought, R. Grosfoguel argues that the ex-colonized continue to live under what he termed the “colonial power matrix,” and that they only moved from a period of “global colonialism” to the current period of “global coloniality.”³⁷ Before Grosfoguel, Spivak used the term “postcolonial neocolonized world”³⁸ to assert this very postcolonial condition of coloniality in which the West occupies the top of global power hierarchy while the ex-colonized world is pushed down to the subaltern bottom where its systems of knowledge are passed down from the hegemonic top. However, though these scholars correctly unraveled the colonial strategies of producing systems of power, that is to say, of subjugating the colonized peoples, they failed to read the post-colonial condition as they insisted on choosing to seek refuge in the past and in tradition, and by that fact turning their back on the recent Western influence.

The Rise of Interweaving Cultures in Performance

If the French succeeded in colonizing Morocco for a time (1912-1956), they failed to achieve coloniality. I argue that the 1970s constitutes a period of decolonization. In the field of theatre, the 1970s brought with it a new era characterized by a general dissatisfaction towards the western model of theatre making and a persistent quest for a lost tradition. This tendency of eroding all forms of logocentric theatrical practice was in fact ubiquitous in postwar/postmodern Europe following the advent of avant-gardists’ experimental theatres promulgated thanks to Pirandello, Artaud, Brecht, Kantor, Brook, Grotowski, Churchill and many others. Fischer-Lichte rightly argues that “since the 1970s... the interweaving of cultures in performance has neither led to the westernization of non-Western performances nor to the homogenization of performances

³³Ibid., p. 104.

³⁴In his *Culture and Imperialism*, Said explains the notion of contrapuntal reading: “As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but contrapuntally, with simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts.” See Edward Said *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 59.

³⁵Frantz Fanon correctly notes that colonialism was never simply satisfied with imposing its grammar and logic upon the “present and the future of a dominated country.” Colonialism was also not simply contented with merely holding the colonized people in its grip and emptying “the native’s brain of all form and content.” Rather, “By a kind of perverse logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts it, disfigures and destroys it.” See F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 67.

³⁶ See N. Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” in *Cultural Studies*, 21 (2/3) (March/May, 2007), pp. 240-270. Here, p. 243.

³⁷ See R. Grosfoguel, “The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms,” in *Cultural Studies*, 21, (2/3) (March/May, 2007), pp. 203-246.

³⁸ See G.C. Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 166.

globally. Instead, it has generated new forms of diversity.”³⁹In this sense, decolonization, or the process of building a post-colonial society, does not mean a rupture from the West. The West is a part of contemporary Moroccan culture and ideology. The Indian critic Chakrabarty puts it rightly: “European thought is a gift to us all. We can talk of provincializing it only in an anti-colonial spirit of gratitude.”⁴⁰

Conclusion

Armed with post-colonial consciousness of denial, Moroccan dramatists discerned that the Western medium of playwriting and theatre making (the French play and the French theatrical building) was a burden that eclipsed and consigned Moroccan theatrical difference to the dustbins of history. Hence, to revive and confirm their deep-rooted theatrical existence these dramatists thought it urgent “to take a step for revisionism” that was subsequently manifested in and elucidated through thorough theoretical writings and aspirations “calling for the return to tradition.”⁴¹Yet Moroccan theatre at present is a product of interweaving western theatrical traditions and Arabo-Islamic performance cultures in the spirit of interspersing productive differences. That is to say, it exists in a liminal third space, between East and West, tradition and modernity, willing to compromise and negotiate the heterogeneous elements comprising its totality. If some forms of Moroccan theatrical orature lapsed into the cold shade of neglect under the baleful influence of the French colonial machine, others still remain and are transposed to literacy by “the merging post-colonial theatre of denial.”⁴² This fact constitutes modern Moroccan theatre today as it is spaced ‘betwixt and between’ two traditions, the old and the new, two borderlines, interweaving the local artistic expressive behaviors and the western way of theatre making, thereby creating an interspace of intercultural performance cultures.



Fig. 4 shows and indoor halqa performance. (Photograph by Khalid Amine)(This picture was taken from Khalid Amine and Marvin Carlson, ‘Al-halqa in Arabic Theatre: An Emerging Site of Hybridity’ in *Theatre Journal*, Volume 60, Number 1, March 2008, pp. 71-85. Picture from p. 76)

³⁹Erika Fischer-Lichte, “Interweaving Cultures in Performance: Different States of Being In-Between” in *Textures*, August 11, (2010).

⁴⁰*Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, p. 255.

⁴¹*Moroccan Theatre between East and west*, p. 105.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 97.