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## Nostalgia and the New Cosmopolitan: Literary and Artistic Interventions in the City of Casablanca

### Abstract

In the past ten years, groups of local artists, architects, writers and activists have become concerned not only with the changing material conditions of Casablanca, but also with the city's memory. This essay is concerned with two projects that reveal how nostalgic modes of recollection expose and limit geographies of cosmopolitan identity in the city. The first project, a collection of twelve booklets written by prominent novelists and poets with well-known photographers, is entitled *Casablanca, fragments d'imaginaire*. This collection argues that nostalgia and phantasm are key organizing concepts through which the city should be recollected, claiming that these modes of representation produce multiple, plural and heterogeneous forms and imaginations that allow the "soul" of the city to emerge. The second project is a participatory urban archeology art project started by the art collective *La Source du lion*. The collective practices a non-nostalgic curation of memory that moves cosmopolitanism in the city beyond a historical category into a contemporary practice and ethos. Read comparatively, these projects shed light on two post-colonial generations of writers and artists, their claims to the colonial past, identity politics about cosmopolitanism in the present, and struggles over cultural capital for the future.

### Keywords

Casablanca, nostalgia, recollection, Casablanca, fragments d'imaginaire, phantasm, city, urban archeology, La Source du lion, cosmopolitanism, post-colonial

## Nostalgia and the New Cosmopolitan: Literary and Artistic Interventions in the City of Casablanca

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In the tourist imagination, the name Casablanca usually first conjures up Ingrid Bergman, Humphrey Bogart, and the foggy airport where they must say their good-byes. Only subsequently does it evoke a large and dense metropolis of almost four million people. Summarily noted in guidebooks, Casablanca remains systematically left out of the larger Moroccan romance that they sell. For despite having existed in various forms since prehistoric times, it appears as though Casablanca has none of the veneered claims of national history, cultural depth or exotic difference that the imperial cities, Fez, Marrakech, or Meknes routinely make. At first, it seems as though there is little to extol or commit to memory. Too similar to other modern chaotic cities around the world, Casablanca shares their common vocabulary of over-crowded populations, notorious traffic, endless apartments and serious pollution. The Moroccan difference, or the exotic Morocco that tourists pay to see and that the Moroccan economy capitalizes on, appears nowhere in sight. In fact, in order to preserve the sanctity of the Tourist Bureau's images of *riads*, palm trees, and snake charmers, the city is veiled from (and for) tourists making their way in and out of the international airport. As Brian Edwards argues, "Rather than resisting these stereotypes [that fuel tourist fantasies], the Moroccan tourism industry has generally adopted the strategy of performing the stereotypes and profiting off their performance" (73). The train tracks to the airport are literally walled in, while shantytowns and working-class apartments remain out of sight.

In the Moroccan national imaginary, Casablanca is seen as

most valuable in its future-oriented industrial and finance roles, not as a heritage site whose history should be remembered. In news programs on state television as well as national newspapers, the city appears as an economic engine that moves forward and takes the Moroccan economy with it. As Susan Ossman writes, “Casablanca’s portrait is an emblem for what Morocco is, and even more, for what it will become. It stands for both the horrors and the potentials associated with vast social change. Consequently, it evokes both desire and disdain” (31). For the state, the city’s image evokes both economic desire and societal insecurity, and it does not have an easy place in the narrative of stability that the kingdom attempts to project. The difficult history that it has lived—food riots, political protests, mass migration, shantytowns, and terrorist attacks—is sooner forgotten by the state than memorialized.

However, it is not only the politics of tourism or national narratives that exclude the city from Moroccan patrimony and valorized memory. Casablanca is often seen by its own inhabitants as a place of becoming, not of remembering. If, as Patrick Geddes wrote in 1904, “A city is more than a place in space. It is a drama in time,” Casablanca’s residents have an ambivalent relationship to both the space of the city and their role in its drama (cited in Cohen and Eleb, 11). Like its rapid expansion, Casablanca’s story is not complete, and the stories of its inhabitants have in many cases just begun. As Ossman puts it, “People must keep moving toward the climax of their stories in the city; only later can they sit down to tell and retell tales of how they got to where they are now” (28). The tale is not a national history of the city, but rather a personal narrative of movement, migration and possibilities. History, in fact, is deliberately left behind. Zakya Daoud tells us: “It is they, the *bidaouis* [Casablanquans] who make the city. ... Hybrid, having arrived (with some rare exceptions) from other regions of Morocco, they have left their past behind them to integrate into the violent and cruel universe of this immense city” (21-22). For these inhabitants and their families, Casablanca is the city to which they come with the desire to establish a new life. They are not nostalgic for the Casablanca that once was. The Casablanca that matters is the one of the present and the future.

Despite the amnesia or disregard that has dominated the nar-

ration of the city's past, in the past ten years several preservation and heritage projects have emerged. Groups of local artists, architects, writers and activists have become concerned not only with the changing material conditions of the city, but also with the city's memory. How can and how should the cityscape be read from a historical perspective? What should be remembered and how? What needs to be preserved, and by whom? Even more specifically: How does one deal with the colonial past? And who can participate in its history and reframing? Seth Graebner writes, "If places change despite our expectations of constancy, literature that valorizes, commemorates, or reconfigures places proves even slipperier" (322). This essay reveals how two collective projects that valorize, commemorate and reconfigure place in Casablanca reflect on-going discussion and debate about the history of the city at the turn of the twenty-first century.

The first project, *Casablanca, fragments d'imaginaire* 'Casablanca, Fragments of an Imaginary' is a collection of twelve individually bound booklets sold together in a case. Written by prominent novelists and poets, and illustrated by well-known photographers, the collection was published in 1997 by the Institut Français, a vibrant cultural institution in Casablanca, with the participation of Editions Le Fennec, a Moroccan publishing house run by a longtime French resident of the city. Editors Alain Bourdon and Didier Folléas explain that nostalgia and phantasm are the key lenses through which the city should be recollected, for they claim that these modes of representation produce multiple, plural and heterogeneous forms and imaginations that allow the cosmopolitan "soul" of the city to emerge. The second project here is a series of urban archeology projects by the art collective *La Source du lion / Ain Sebaà* 'The Lion's Spring,' including an experimental renovation of a colonial-era park in central Casablanca, and a family portrait series that re-draws the identity of a former colonial neighborhood. Re-organizing memory of the past, in the present, and for the future, *La Source du lion* works to expose new formations of identity and existence in the city.

Both projects aim to recollect the city's past and address this process through explicit uses and rejections of various types of nostalgia. In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym theorizes two types of nostalgic recollection: restorative and reflective nostalgia.

These modes are most helpful in teasing out the politics of remembering Casablanca. Where restorative nostalgia attempts “a trans-historical reconstruction of the lost home” and “protects the absolute truth,” reflective nostalgia “dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging,” calling into doubt constructions of absolute truth or tradition (xviii). Boym argues that both types of nostalgia can share maps and spaces through the city, but that the narratives that they produce will differ fundamentally: “If restorative nostalgia ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialize time, reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space” (49). Indeed, in opposition to the Moroccan state’s politics of restorative nostalgia, a politics that ignores Casablanca in its reconstruction of “authentic” Moroccan *medina*<sup>1</sup> culture, literary texts from *Casablanca, fragments d’imaginaire* engage in reflective nostalgia in order to retrieve cherished personal fragments of urban memory while making astute social critiques of the city that Casablanca has become. However, where reflective nostalgia has creative and critical potential, I will argue that it too has creative and critical limits. As these literary and artistic projects reveal, both nostalgic modes can prevent the imagination of new geographies in the city, and restrict visions of what the city can become in the future.

A reading of how these projects engage and reject different forms of nostalgia also invites us to enter into a critical discussion of cosmopolitanism in the Moroccan context. In order to recollect neighborhood histories, both projects articulate what it means to be cosmopolitan in the post-colonial city, and in doing so, open a window on the politics of the term. *Casablanca, fragments d’imaginaire* defines cosmopolitanism as a historical period of ethnic and cultural diversity in order to critique what it sees today as a homogeneous, often close-minded society. Through reflective nostalgia for the colonial neighborhoods, the collection dwells on the ambivalences of “belonging” during the colonial period and in its aftermath. However, while these texts critique exclusionary colonial constructions of modernity in Casablanca, they do not imagine or engage other forms of cosmopolitan practice that could move beyond redrawn European universalisms. Reflective nostalgia has the power and creative potential to incite political change. As Boym puts it, “reflective

nostalgia narrates a past that opens up a multitude of potentialities, nonteological possibilities of historic development” (50). Nonetheless, *Casablanca, fragments d’imaginaire* maintains trajectories of development toward the North and valorizes European models of humanism and modernity. It does not look toward the South, or toward other creative frameworks for mutual recognition between peoples confronted with the forces of modernity and globalization and too often excluded from narratives of development and wealth. It cannot imagine new possibilities of a Middle Eastern or an African intercontinental cosmopolitanism unmoored from European philosophical referents and historical categories.

Meanwhile the work of the art collective *La Source du lion* defines cosmopolitanism not as a historical period but rather as a contemporary participatory practice of ethics that seeks to address global exclusion and local elitism. *La Source du lion* moves toward a recollection of the city that explores and embraces difference between Moroccans of different origins and recent African immigrants. In rejecting nostalgia in their focus on former colonial neighborhoods, *La Source du lion* strives to create new, non-elite images of the cosmopolitan by emptying colonial forms of their meanings and re-investing them with narratives produced through inclusive tactics that draw on the richness of difference present in today’s city. Ultimately, their very practice, a consensual curation of memory, moves beyond cosmopolitanism as a historical category and becomes both a cosmopolitan practice and a cosmopolitan ethos that in the words of Anthony Appiah, “take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance” (xv). The cosmopolitan here is not the story of a visible elite few, but rather emerges as a history and commitment to Casablanca’s invisible and undocumented inhabitants.

### Frames of Nostalgia for the City

In the introductory booklet to *Casablanca, fragments d’imaginaire*, editors Bourdon and Folléas describe their project as one that will contend with the image of Casablanca as the “pole of Moroccan modernity, economic lung of the country, ... a city with-

out a soul, without charm, without imagination, a purely predatory space of speculation and survival.”<sup>2</sup> They argue that anyone who has spent any time in the city will know that

this city is, in effect, lived, thought, spoken and represented (though spoken and represented precisely too little) through the mode of nostalgia, dreams and phantasms. There is no one collective imagination nor archetypal representation of this city (with the exception perhaps of the infamous film which has nothing of *Casablanca* except its title) but rather a plural imaginary, fragmented, parceled, a ray of individual apprehensions, intimate, often contradictory and antithetical. (n. pag.)

In order to dispel images of the city as an ugly industrial and financial center, a cruel space devoted solely to the production of capital and the circulation of people, the editors call upon writers and readers to dwell in the intimate fragments of a plural imaginary. To tap into the nostalgia, dreams and phantasms of its inhabitants, the editors invited writers and poets who have a connection with the city to take a real or imaginary walk in one of *Casablanca*'s neighborhoods and create a text that reveals its soul. Meanwhile, they invited photographers to take the same routes, independent of the writers and their texts, and create parallel sets of images. The resulting texts and images approach personal memory and nostalgia in most striking and engaging ways.<sup>3</sup> Some texts present the author's return to his childhood neighborhood. Others reveal how the city continues to carry traces of painful national and personal history by reading the street as a palimpsest. Photographs record landscapes of isolation, loneliness, and material degradation. Yet other texts dwell on the first views and experiences of the city and present a love story of arrival. And while the texts focus on certain places within the city, they are also written from a variety of spaces: Driss Chraïbi confronts his memory from a space of exile and return, Mostafa Nissabouri from an international aesthetic modernism, Youssef Fadel from the body. Nissabouri's text "*Casablanca, Fragments of a Dispersed Memory*" articulates this plurality of voice and approach to the city best when he writes:

The memory of the city, to the extent that we can go back in time, deploys itself in conversation through rebellious chaotic fragments. Each stop gives up a multitude of unstable landscapes, *derbs* [neighborhoods] and other places where the anecdotal anchor, instead of consolidating the chain of events, only sets in motion supplementary digressions. From this dispersed memory, we would seize in passing almost timeless residues. (n. pag.)

Nissabouri's theorization echoes Boym's discussion of reflective nostalgia and urban archeology; Boym writes, "Memory resides in moving, traversing, cutting through place, taking detours. Personal memory, while linked to a common topos in the city, can be precisely what escapes memorialization, it can be that residue that remains" (80). Through reflective nostalgia, the literary collection seeks to exist as a conversation, a process of representation that has multiple interlocutors, rebellious fragments and supplementary digressions that reveal residues of memory.

*Casablanca, fragments d'imaginaire* argues that through reflective nostalgia, important parts of the past that have now disappeared from the cityscape can be recollected, however momentarily. It valorizes nostalgia as an intensely personal practice in the face of an impersonal city, and argues that nostalgia can serve as a temporary refuge from both the present and an uncertain future. In the context of development, modernization, and quickly changing landscapes in the city, the turn to the past as a temporary haven from an often illegible present and unpredictable future allows the nostalgic subject to momentarily take hold of the city and orient his place within it. The booklet that comes closest to this practice of nostalgic recollection is fiction writer Abdallah Zrika's "The Habous City," a lengthy description of the Habous area that proclaims this neighborhood the lost soul of Casablanca. He writes:

In the middle of Casa, where the builders' hammers never stop, only this neighborhood seems to refuse to sprawl out into neighboring areas. One is in a space of heritage, legally protected. If this weren't the case, it would have become exclusively apartment buildings. Also, it is the only space of human scale in Casablanca. I am never sad when I walk through these alleys, fascinated by the

incessant activity and people who chitchat. Everyone talks. Never have I seen someone who was not in a conversation. In general, walking in a crowd provokes the need to communicate. Chatty space, I say, space of laughter! (n. pag.)

In reaction to the alienation and isolation of the individual from communal practices in the contemporary city, Zrika praises this space as one that preserves an environment of human scale and contact. In his fiction, Zrika focuses on the people often unseen and left behind in the city's rush to material wealth. In this text, he turns his attention to the immaterial things left behind—community, a more human sense of time, and a communal “our”:

In the café near the bookstores, what to drink but tea? It is very slowly that you sip it. It suffices to lift the teapot and pour the tea to feel that everything that is around you is yours. You are the master of the place. Everything merges, the tint of the tea, that of the place and that of the past. In the bustle of its frantic rhythm, Casa knew to preserve here the nobility of slower time. This neighborhood, the Habous, is the most majestic of the ancient cities of Morocco. (n. pag.)

Zrika's use of the national ritual of tea to evoke a timeless cultural practice and his declaration of the Habous as the most majestic of ancient cities (*antique* in the French text; *qadima* in the Arabic text), points to Zrika's nuanced approach to the neighborhood and various politics of preservation in Morocco. The nostalgia in this text is one for a more “traditional” Moroccan way of communal living, but at the same time, unlike certain restorative nostalgias, Zrika recognizes that the tradition he valorizes is not an absolute timeless truth. In the Habous, traditional life is mediated by the history of the neighborhood's development by colonial-era French architects who had a certain vision of what Moroccan memory should be, and by contemporary state-generated cultural politics that privilege imperial cities such as Fez.

A quick history of urban development in the neighborhood reveals the extent of this mediation and how the area has always served as a space for negotiation of how to live in a modern city, and of who

sets the terms for living there. Developed between 1920 and 1940, the Habous area was designed by the French architect Henri Prost as a small “indigenous town” to serve as a residential area for Moroccans who were coming to Casablanca to work, not finding space in the *medina*, and setting up “grim suburbs and squalid slums” (Prost in Cohen and Eleb, 215). An aesthetic mix of architectural styles from Morocco and the Middle East and the latest in French sanitation engineering, the Habous was, as Léandre Vaillat put it in 1930, “an indigenous town or, more precisely, a town built for the native population by French architects in a way that respects local customs and scruples, while offering the additional benefit of French hygienic facilities” (Cohen and Eleb 217). Contemporary critics stress the constructed nature of the neighborhood. Jean-Louis Cohen and Monique Eleb describe it in their 1998 study as a “fictitious quarter” that “Today, most inhabitants ... think ... ancient and ... built by Moroccans of the ‘good and true tradition’” (215; Footnote 31, 224). And Ossman exclaims that the fictitious neighborhood “seems a fitting monument to the manner in which Casablanca continues to re-interpret what it sees as its heritage” (30). While the neighborhood may indeed have become a naturalized “ancient” space for Casabancans due to and through prevalent amnesia of the city’s history, I read Zrika’s text not as reproducing the amnesia, but rather engaging it through an ironic performance. In so doing, he differentiates his reflective nostalgia from state practices of restorative nostalgia that valorize imperial cities and old *medinas* over new urban formations that challenge the established social orders.<sup>4</sup> Casablanca can participate in heritage as well, he argues, even if that heritage is constructed and produced in the twentieth century.

While individual booklets succeed in presenting a multiplicity of approaches, memories and stories of the city, when we start looking at the project as a whole, the collection reveals some exclusionary limits and dynamics. For one, the politics of the translation in the collection reflect who speaks and to whom. While texts written by Arabic writers are translated into French, those that are written in French offer no Arabic counterpart. Amazigh languages (even in translation) are absent altogether. The literary fragments of the city’s imaginary are not as multilingual and pluralistic as the city they present, and privilege a Francophone readership. However, this

is not just about a French audience for the book. Rather, I would argue that language is distinctly tied to the definition of Casablancon cosmopolitanism that the collection articulates. While the collection argues for heterogeneity and multiple forms of conversation, and ultimately existence in the city, the underlying model for this heterogeneity and inclusiveness often emerges from a nostalgic engagement with European models of universality and humanism that precludes alternative recollection of modes of existence.

A nostalgic positioning of European models of cosmopolitanism emerges most clearly in two pieces in the collection: Idriss El-Khoury's "Who Are We in This White World?" and Mohamed Zaf-Zaf's "Maârif." These two texts describe the residential neighborhood of the Maârif that emerged during the Protectorate period. Developed in the 1920s, the Maârif was home to a multinational and heterogeneous group of southern European workers, and in this sense was one of the most cosmopolitan neighborhoods in colonial Casablanca. Cohen and Eleb describe the neighborhood during the colonial period:

There was a strong sense of belonging, and residents even felt that they were more Maârifian than Casablancon. ... It functioned as a tightly knit, multicultural society (mostly of Mediterranean origins) and was based on a system of mutual cooperation, even though some hierarchical order between classes and nationalities did continue to exist. (228-29)

Today, the Maârif is primarily a commercial neighborhood with expensive boutiques, cafés, and restaurants that attract upwardly mobile young people. However, behind the veneer of its central avenues, it is still a "quartier populaire," home to a working-class population with snack bars and sidewalk fruit vendors. Its public faces are both extremely polished and run-down: boutiques shine while apartments look gray with pollution, wealthy Moroccans mingle with pick-pockets, and a police presence is distinctly felt.

While referring to the colonial past of the neighborhood, both texts reveal a reflective nostalgia not for the colonial period, but rather for the promises of modern living (social mobility, work, education, decent housing and healthcare) that the neighborhood

presented—promises of modernity that inspired many in the post-Independence period to become activists for change in Moroccan society and to petition for inclusion in “universal” narratives that had excluded them.

El-Khoury structures his piece “Who Are We in This White World?” through a meditation on the current degeneration of the neighborhood’s infrastructure, and on how this represents a deeper decay of cosmopolitan ideals such as education, cultural exchange, and cooperation. By listing the names of cafés, bars, cinemas, and other public spaces no longer there, El-Khoury underlines how the colonial Maârif of his youth has disappeared. Furthermore, what remains has decomposed: “Old monuments, the spaces, the houses, the apartments have changed, the cafés have made themselves ugly and become stagnant swamps.” Rampant commercialism in the form of designer boutiques cannot disguise the internal decay in the neighborhood behind such stores. As El-Khoury spells out quite forcefully, “In short, the Maârif has started to degenerate, to forget its history, to sink in questionable waters. Here it is moaning with agony despite the vulgar make-up that soils its face.” Veneers of capitalist modernity do not substitute for a deeper development of human capacities. So far, so good: through reflective nostalgia, El-Khoury produces a trenchant critique of contemporary society. However his desire for a lost urban sociability also reveals a curious intolerance for any definition of the cosmopolitan separated from its European or elite character. He writes: “Where is the Maârif of yesterday? It is massively peopled by emigrants from other neighborhoods, like neighboring towns, in virtue of its central location in the city and its European character. The country mentality of its new inhabitants dominates every space.” His lost cosmopolitanism cannot be replaced by any other type of heterogeneous space and population, and certainly not by that of the many recent rural migrations that have brought people from all over the country and the continent to the city, and to Maârif itself. His elitist and reductive vision of rural migrants does not fit with the image of the worldly café cosmopolitan he retrieves from his memories of the space. Thus, he cannot imagine the new set of encounters, education, and cooperation that occurs daily behind the doors of the neighborhood’s aging apartments.

In “Maârîf,” Zaf-Zaf also presents a narrative of disappointment in the type of people who now inhabit the neighborhood. His nostalgic vision of the Maârîf of his young adulthood, when he taught at a neighborhood high school and wrote in its cafés, produces a space of strangers where no one recognizes the other or their common humanity. He begins his piece with exclamations that “No, I no longer recognize the Maârîf, my neighborhood in Casa!” and “No, I no longer recognize anything, and it will be the same, inevitably, for future generations.” Instead of searching to understand how contemporary populations interact, Zaf-Zaf writes that a community that can affirm the individual’s existence is no longer present. Zaf-Zaf cannot recognize his neighborhood from the 1960s while it too sees him as another anonymous body. He highlights lost communal fabrics to convey his deep disappointment with the degeneration of the space and the loss of its ideals: the value of education, literature, and socialist models of economic cooperation, among others. Using the image of shady tree-lined streets to convey both the peace and sociability of the neighborhood during his younger years, he describes the recent cutting down of trees on Roudani Boulevard as the abandonment of that social idealism and engagement. He goes as far as to call those who carry out such actions “Third World” men in an explicitly negative use of the rhetoric of development: “When I saw the trees being treated like this, I felt that my heart was being ripped out. And I said to myself: ‘The harshness of the Third World man goes even this far! Instead of planting trees and flowers everywhere, they kill them.’” He can no longer recognize the people in his neighborhood; “they” belong to a static Third World and are not part of “his” lost world of progress and development towards a better future. Again, like in El Khoury’s text, contemporary inhabitants do not conform to the image of the engaged cosmopolitan that emerges for him from this space.

Fadel’s text, “The City under My Skin,” appears to be the only part of the collection that unmoors Casablanca’s cosmopolitanism from its colonial roots and routes, through a focus on the violence of modernity.<sup>5</sup> For Fadel, cosmopolitanism is not a romanticized period of social activism and tolerance, but rather the expression of the very violent condition of those whom modernity has excluded. In some respects, his text engages Carol Breckenridge et al.’s conten-

tion that,

The Cosmopolitanism of our times does not spring from the capitalized “virtues” of Rationality, Universality, and Progress; nor is it embodied in the myth of the nation writ large in the figure of the citizen of the world. Cosmopolitans today are often the victims of modernity, failed by capitalism’s upward mobility, and bereft of those comforts and customs of national belonging. Refugees, peoples of the diaspora, and migrants and exiles represent the spirit of cosmopolitical community. (6)

By using the body as metaphor for the city, Fadel plays upon the ideas of possession, accessibility and also the necessity to externalize personal history and trauma into language in order to deroute nostalgic visions of the cosmopolitan. Fadel presents the city as a body that bears scars of its history. Scars demand further examination, exteriorization of memory under the skin, and extrication of internalized stories from illegibility, from oblivion. The individual’s body as part of a larger communal body demands to be spoken:

Casa. From one image to another. As if one were walking on the teeth of a comb. Here I caught my first sparrow. There, I went to school one cold day, in my schoolbag, half a loaf of bread, a small ball and a good dose of insouciance. Casa, entangled memories. Here the Senegalese man was burned. On this bridge the train tore my uncle to pieces. From this window, a rock fell on a passerby that I will call Mustapha to save him from total oblivion. How many sorrows are necessary to reconstruct the fragments of a small section of the city? (n. pag.)

Unlike the previous texts, Fadel’s phantasms are not of a better or more hopeful time. What haunts him, what is no longer there, are people who have violently disappeared: the uncle killed by a train, the Senegalese man burned to death, the stranger killed by a rock. Fadel’s cosmopolitan ethics insist that he give name to those strangers: migrants, refugees and the dispossessed. His reflective nostalgia is not for his youthful insouciance nor is it a critique of present-day Casablanca. Rather it becomes a constant reminder of those who

are gone, or those who remain only as shadows in the contemporary city (people who are denied the most basic of human rights). He concludes his piece by writing about the pain of this remembering: “Finally, I am sure that I can forget. In order to live. Able to forget this and that. To forget, until my foolish outing today. I lean up against the wall in order not to remember anything. As long as they are there, I will not have exhausted the infinite forms of my shadow on them.” In order to continue to live, he must forget.

For Nissabouri, nostalgic recollection invites rebellious fragments of memory to emerge. For Zrika, nostalgia for a more human past allows him to read the Moroccan present and his exclusion from the constantly developing city in terms of societal critique. For Zaf-Zaf and El-Khoury, nostalgia exists for a time of promise and possibility as the country emerged from French colonialism to engage with promises of modernity. But for Fadel, even that memory is suspect. Nostalgia is constantly compromised by what and by whom it erases in the process. For him, nostalgia brings out only memories of repression and violence.

The twelve booklets in *Casablanca, fragments d’imaginaire* reveal not only a desire on the part of their authors to chronicle the city, but also the struggle of a cultural elite to be valued in a city that appears more invested in commercial gain and blatant materialism than literature and the arts. In its exclusion of certain voices and spaces for the privileging of others, the collection sheds light on a post-colonial generation of writers and their claims to the past, identity politics in the present, and struggles over cultural capital for the future. These writers who were most active in the 1960s and 70s, see their own decline in relevance to the galloping capitalist city, and their models of the cosmopolitan, drawn from the promises of modernity, now replaced by illegible spaces and unrecognizable populations. With the notable exception of Fadel’s text, the booklets I have discussed here draw a map of city neighborhoods constructed during the colonial period, and this geography harbors nostalgic visions of an elite cosmopolitanism that emerged during and after the colonial period.

The inability of the collection to articulate non-elite definitions of the cosmopolitan mirrors approaches taken by recent studies of cosmopolitanism in Middle East history. In “Grieving Cosmopoli-

tanism in Middle East Studies,” Will Hanley argues that scholars of the Middle East too often use the term to critique contemporary society without substantive discussion of what lost cosmopolitanism looked like beyond its elite manifestations, or what it actually brought to societies-at-large. The *Casablanca, fragments d’imaginaire* project uses nostalgic cosmopolitanism to critique the present disintegration of space and community in the city. And in its nostalgia, it does not allow for a different type of Casablancon cosmopolitan to emerge, a non-elite heterogeneous population drawn from migrations from rural Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa, a population that inhabits both colonial neighborhoods and new urban formations such as shantytowns and gated villas.

#### From Limiting Nostalgias to Creative Interventions in the City

In 2005, journalist and social activist Daoud published *Casablanca en mouvement* ‘Casablanca in Movement,’ a book of biographical portraits of Casablanca residents who represent and drive the energy of renewal and hope in the city that started in the 1990s. Seeming to reject the rhetoric of loss articulated by the first post-colonial generation of cultural figures of which she was a part, Daoud asserts the importance of moving beyond a nostalgic vision of the past, no matter how reflective and critical, and redefining what it means to be cosmopolitan today by looking at the creation of memory today.<sup>6</sup> She writes in the introduction that, “Casablangans are asserting their cosmopolitanism of yesteryear, a cosmopolitanism that they never lived, a cosmopolitanism of which they are learning to dream” (27). Casablangans today, who were never part of Zaf-Zaf, El-Khoury, and Zrika’s world are dreaming and working towards a new vision of a multicultural city. Among a cast of young entrepreneurs, journalists, social activists, and artists, Daoud also positions the neighborhood of Derb Ghallef as a leading actor. Bordering the Maârif, this area in Casablanca houses the largest outdoor technology market in Morocco. Constructed of corrugated metal stands and alleyways with planks of wood to protect the customer from the mud beneath, Derb Ghallef presents “an inventive Morocco, that is not civic-minded, in which the genius of cheating has the blessing of the masses” (Daoud 80). For the right price, you can buy refurbished

computers and cell-phones, boxes to unscramble satellite reception for a fraction of the official cost, and a plethora of pirated DVDs and CDs. The cosmopolitan is defined differently in this space; rather than belonging to an educated cultural elite, the cosmopolitan in *Derb Ghallef* is the realm of inventive but unschooled urban youth who can rework global technologies, and in so doing open life in Morocco to a larger world beyond it. James Clifford writes that cosmopolitanism “recognizes something important: worldly, productive sites of crossing; complex, unfinished paths between local and global attachments. Cosmopolitanism, viewed without universalist nostalgia, seems to hold a promise” (362). Unlike the *Casablanca, fragments d’imaginaire* project, Daoud’s book presents the cosmopolitan identity of the city as located not only *in* but also *beyond* its formerly colonial neighborhoods. Cosmopolitanism is not a historical category defined and circumscribed by a colonial past, but rather a practice of navigating “complex, unfinished paths between local and global attachments” (Clifford 362).

Hassan Darsi, founder of the art collective *La Source du lion*, also searches for “productive sites of crossing” in new formations of local and transnational exchange throughout the city. He finds them even in those neighborhoods like the Maârif whose demise Zaf-Zaf and El-Khoury regret. By exploring how people live there today, he has worked to re-inhabit colonial geographies in the city not with distant history and nostalgic recollections, but with experiences and stories from the ground up that hold promise for the future. While interested in the city’s memory, the collective rejects both restorative and reflective nostalgia. Like the new cosmopolitans described by Daoud, this group of artists asserts its engagement with a city of strangers that constantly transforms and mutates without being tied to one model of the past. Rather than taking memory of life in the colonial neighborhoods as a referent for cosmopolitan practice, it takes the form of the neighborhood and populates it with new memories *as* cosmopolitan practice. By encouraging local inhabitants to set the terms for memory, their cosmopolitan practice is participatory rather than exclusive.

The mission statement of the group describes its commitment to the city of Casablanca and its inhabitants. Rather than a manifesto, the preferred form of social engagement by Moroccan artists in

the 60s and 70s, the collective asks a series of questions on its website, [lasourcedulion.org](http://lasourcedulion.org), inviting the beginning of a dialogue rather than a unidirectional mission:

How can we combine long-awaited artistic desires with the needs generated by the city itself, its anarchic and galloping expansion, its inexorable quest for urbanity often paid for at the cost of its humanity? How can an artistic project be conceived on the scale of a city like Casablanca and its inhabitants in a context where art has little effect on reality? (Renault)

These questions go to the heart of the problem: in an out-of-control megacity that has purportedly lost its humanity, how can art have a meaningful role in engaging the city and the capitalist drives of modernity that have defined and dominated its development?

In order to address these questions, *La Source du lion* started several projects that render people visible *within* certain urban geographies that have historically excluded them. In 2002, Darsi set up a photography studio in the Maârif, the neighborhood of former cosmopolitan life described by Zaf-Zaf and El-Khoury, and invited families to come and pose for their portraits. As artist Florence Renault describes it, “Families, of diverse nationalities, living in Casablanca came to pose in front of the camera—under the gaze of the artist—and brought with them a personal object chosen in a consensual fashion” (Renault). The families posed with this object on a kitschy interior set with heavy velvet fabrics and a poster of a sunset that refers to interior decorating practices in many Moroccan homes. The project not only documented various families in Casablanca, but also challenged the very definition of what produces a family, how various constellations of people form in the city and what they value. The series of resulting photographs creates a new map of the neighborhood on a purely human scale—images speak of a new type of cosmopolitan family in the city with photographs of extended families, nuclear units, couples from different national, religious, or regional backgrounds, and people joined together across generations as well as places. Darsi’s “Family Portrait Series” worked to chronicle life in the unseen and intimate interior of city life without violating the privacy of that space. Rather than enter homes and

literally *take* images, he invited people to participate in staging their own family life by bringing an object from home onto a common set, a fabric shared by all. Stephen Foster writes that “Cosmopolitanism is not a state of being but a practice, process and performance” where “it is possible to critique the fetishizing of difference” (170, 16). This participatory model of creating an image without exploitation allowed people to perform their family’s individuality, difference and similarity vis-à-vis dominant society. The project’s participatory approach was civic-minded in that it recognized that one of the responsibilities of belonging to a community was to hear its various voices, and espoused cosmopolitanism as a practice of mutual respect and recognition within the neighborhood.

In addition to the *Portraits de familles* project, Darsi’s most significant intervention into the city’s memory through cosmopolitan participatory practice is his work with *La Source du lion* on the *Parc de l’Hermitage* project: a long-term process to chronicle and preserve the many layers of memory in an abandoned colonial-era park in Casablanca. The project started in 2002 through collaboration with various neighborhood groups already advocating the renovation of this park, once a botanical garden during the French Protectorate. Faced with mountains of trash, and homeless populations exiled from the modern city, the collective decided to intervene artistically into this site rather than simply “cleaning it up” and erasing its unwanted memory from the city landscape. The collective constructed a scale model of the site and displayed it alongside a detailed inventory of the contents of the park: plastic bags (various colors but predominantly black), plaster, glass, various cartons, plastic and aluminum containers (from coffee, yogurt, drinks), beer cans, glass from bottles, paper, animal waste, car parts, radios, various metals, marble, cigarette butts and human feces. Everything counted and had value. Objects and people didn’t just disappear due to a process of aesthetic renewal. The group wrote an open invitation to the city to participate in their project and various workshops began with the participation of artists and neighborhood locals alike. In 2003, the group started an open dialogue about the park’s future with the mayor of the city and restored a small building in the park to be used as an art activity space for children and the site of story-telling circles (*Contes de l’Hermitage*). What was

once relegated to the colonial past was reinvested with meaning for contemporary Casablanca.<sup>7</sup> The absence of restorative nostalgia for one model of an “authentic” past, and the absence of a *Casablanca, fragments d’imaginaire* reflective nostalgia that valorizes a certain vision of who participates in cosmopolitanism, enabled a process that invited diverse and heterogeneous groups to participate in the creation of new memory and meaning. We can read in the work of this collective an intense desire to facilitate the recuperation of the city’s past by its multiple current inhabitants. Artists become agents of cosmopolitanism, and inhabitants of the city emerge as cosmopolitan communities interested in art.

*La Source du lion* performs the potential of art to exhibit, to catalogue, to engage and to transform space and memory. The project is not caught up in the national politics of memory that have turned *medinas* into preservation safaris and refuse to consider patrimony anything that post-dates the colonial period, as though the modern nation has produced no culture of worth. Rather, rejecting nostalgia for the pre-colonial, colonial and the post-independence periods, the art collective focuses on the present. It collects memory from multiple city sites and the people who live them to deepen the signification and relevance of the city and, most importantly, to claim memory as a multivoiced and participatory process. Darsi puts it best when he says, “I am here to raise questions ... there is no model” (Derain 178). Indeed, rather than leaning on models of the past, Darsi’s group engages with as many inhabitants of the city as possible in order to raise questions for the city’s future collectively.

In the past twenty years, much has been written about cosmopolitanism as a historical category, system of ethics, practice of difference, and oppositional discourse to globalization and universalism, multiculturalism and the nation. What is the relationship between nostalgia and the cosmopolitan? Projects like *Casablanca, fragments d’imaginaire*, that write the city’s memory through nostalgia and phantasm engage cosmopolitanism as a historical category and as colonial modernity’s accompanying promised discourse of universalism. In their most critically reflective mode, nostalgic recollections such as Fadel’s text are able to cut across histories revealing constructions of belonging that define the cosmopolitan and expose exclusionary violence. If we define cosmopolitanism as “an

ethos of macrointerdependencies, with acute consciousness (often forced upon people) of the inescapabilities, and particularities of places, characters, historical trajectories, and fates” (Rabinow cited in Robbins 1), then the potential for reflective nostalgia to function as a cosmopolitan practice is there. However, in *Casablanca, fragments d’imaginaire*, nostalgia even in its most critical, reflective mode is still engaged with phantasmatic models of the past, and cannot see the challenge, the promise and the dynamism of alternative non-elite cosmopolitan practices of memory and life in the city. Haunted by the phantasm of a promised modernity, the conversation that occurs in this collection is always with the European, and never with the rich and diverse local, continental and transnational communities that inhabit this vibrant city.

Casablanca today is multicultural and polyglot with urban, national and transnational identities co-existing and intertwining to produce a new culture, and this is the Casablanca that *La Source du lion* seeks to engage by preserving its memory for the future. Daoud tells us: “In this rural and ruralized city, migrants from all of Morocco join each other in a chaotic melting pot where they bring their heritage and where they invent a new way of life, unique in Morocco” (22). Likewise, though perhaps desired invisible by the state, trans-continental migratory movements produce visible and tangible changes throughout Morocco, and these changes are also the locus for a new cosmopolitanism. Ali Bensaâd writes that:

The trans-Saharan migrations reintroduce [cosmopolitanism] from the fringes, but at the same time, in much greater proximity, because it is borne by modest populations seeking some attachment to local society, for their own survival. This cosmopolitanism, an evident reality in Saharan frontier cities, spreads its ripples on a more modest scale even into the cities of the North. (18)

While the pressure for new migrants to conform to dominant northern urban Moroccan societal models remains strong, the practice is present. It needs to be recognized. Appiah writes that “cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge” (xv). Many challenges face Moroccan society at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Rather than searching for cosmopolitan-

ism through a nostalgic engagement with the past, it is time to start naming cosmopolitanism as the challenge facing contemporary societies negotiating conditions of transnational modernity. *La Source du lion* works to expose the diverse constellations of identity created in contemporary Casablanca, and through this practice, urges us to recognize that cosmopolitanism is not an exclusionary social category from the colonial past, but an important everyday practice that emerges from the intersections of transnational exile and movement, local attachments, and portable cultures. In art and literature, nostalgic modes of representation, even in their most creative and reflective forms, cannot see the living soul of the cosmopolitan city, only its phantasmatic one.

### Notes

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1 *Medina* is the Arabic word for town or city. In the Moroccan urban context, it is usually used to signify the old, or pre-colonial part of the city.

2 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine and are produced from the French (supplemented with the Arabic when necessary). *Casablanca, fragments d'imaginaire* is a set of booklets sold in a case. The booklets are unpaginated.

3 A glance at the table of contents of the twelve booklets reveals the variety of voices and photographic approaches in the collection. In this list, the name of the writer precedes the name of the photographer:

1. "The White. Spaced. High." by Mohammed Bennis with Nabil Mahdaoui;
2. "Instants in a Caravan" by Michel Chaillou with Christian Lignon;
3. "White House" by Driss Chraïbi with Mohammed Jannat;
4. "Who Are We in this White World?" by Idriss El-Khoury with Benabdesslam;
5. "The City under My Skin" by Youssef Fadel with Daoud Aoulansyad;
6. "Casa Awakens" by Didier Folléas with Khalil Nemmaoui;
7. "The Island of Women" by Touria Hadraoui with Yves Jeanmougin;
8. "Casablanca, Fragments of a Dispersed Memory" by Mostafa Niss-

abouri with Lamia Naji;

9. "I See Myself" by Tito Topin with Michel Teuler;

10. "Maârif" by Zaf-Zaf with Martine Derain;

11. "The Habous City" by Zrika with Joseph Marando;

12. "Casablanca, Object of My Desire" by Jean-Michel Zurfluth with Souad Guennoun.

4 See Clifford Geertz's treatment of urban politics and the disarticulation of the city in Sefrou in *After the Fact* for a provocative reading of architectural forms and their political impact in Morocco.

5 Fadel is a theater director, dramaturge, and novelist who writes in Moroccan Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, and French.

6 Daoud, a.k.a. Jacqueline Loghlam, is the founder of the 1960s and 70s cultural journal *Lamalif* and a respected cultural journalist and writer.

7 For more information about the Hermitage project and its uncertain future, please consult [lasourcedulion.org](http://lasourcedulion.org), Derain's *Echo Larmitaj*, and my extensive analysis in *Imagined Museums: Art and Modernity in Postcolonial Morocco* (forthcoming with the University of Minnesota Press 2010).

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