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## Challenging the Oikos of Al-Andalus: Hybridity, Cyborgs, and Coloniality in Abderrahman El Fathi's *Danzadelaire*

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### Abstract

In Abderrahman El Fathi's *Danzadelaire*, there is a hybrid, non-binary poetics that questions originality and the idea that human subjects are subservient tools for exploitative neoliberal economics. As the central thesis, I argue that El Fathi pens a cyborg poetics in his *Danzadelaire* anthology by questioning a racist, paternalist, and Africanist vision of *oikos*, a home space that is no longer defined as the glorified Al-Andalus. Instead, the investigation argues that Al-Andalus is a destructive idealized home space because it conceals the colonial difference between Spain and Morocco. The close examination of El Fathi's poetics entails a discussion of the meaning of tools and prosthetics and how human colonial subjects relate to them. At issue is whether the colonial subjects are in control of these tools or whether they become a prosthetics of empire, leading to theoretical and literary analyses of the similarities between cyborgs and colonized subjectivities as well as matters of agency in the context of the hegemonic capitalism that so often dominates the global South. The investigation of global South issues as relating to coloniality opens up fresh avenues for discussing space, *oikos*, hybrid identities, and movement across borders. Using Marxist theory from Donna Haraway, literary analysis of Arab poetics from Jaroslav Stetkevych, and postcolonial postulations from Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, and Frantz Fanon, the study analyzes poetry in a light that combines issues of race, coloniality, technology, cyborgs, and feminist gender theory.

### Key Words

Abderrahman El Fathi, Donna Haraway, cyborg, coloniality, tool prosthetics

Certainly, many hundreds of years ago the Arab and Muslim people were the creators of their destiny. We know that they were responsible for having invented the astrolabe, the guitar, modern surgery, and algebra. They forged, developed, and introduced the world to tools and prosthetic devices. To a degree, the Arab and Muslim world found itself, during the European Dark Ages, at a zenith of invention and creativity as Europe declined. By the time that the Moroccan poet Abderrahman El Fathi began to compose his poetry anthology, *Danzadelaire*, the Arabo-Islamic world found itself subjected to neoliberal rule that served and serves the interests of a capitalist world order. In this modern context, Morocco, a country within the Arabo-Islamic region, finds itself no longer in the position of creating tools, but rather a tool itself of a dominant order within which it has no say. Moroccans are not the drivers of a totalizing and imperial narrative that is all-

encompassing; instead, owing to erroneous Spanish cultural narratives, they are stuck to the life into which they were born, having become human prosthetics of an exploitative global socioeconomic order that perceives them as machines and as appendages for the preservation of the status quo. But this created status has the potential to challenge its own adversity, to stand up to power. In Donna Haraway's essay, *A Manifesto for Cyborgs*, there is a sense that tools can rise against their creators and can contest the oppressed situations and ecologies in which they find themselves. Haraway observes that:

The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the *oikos*, the household. Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other. The relationships for forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchical domination, are at issue in the cyborg world. (2192)

In this study I argue that El Fathi pens a cyborg poetics in his *Danzadelaire* anthology by questioning a racist, paternalist, and Africanist vision of *oikos*, a home space that is no longer defined as the glorified Al-Andalus.<sup>1</sup> No longer nostalgic for a past that was never his, El Fathi becomes cognizant of the dangerous and perilous role that emulating traditional (classical Arabic) poetics may have in reaffirming and reinforcing Morocco's subservient and subaltern status as Spain's colonial other and, significantly, as Spain's tool. This neocolonial status is of crucial note, especially considering the context of the extensive presence of African migrants in Spain. In the post-Franco era, African migration to Spain increased exponentially, as Michael Ugarte has observed, noting that the Iberian country "began to change in a significant way with the first massive wave of immigration . . . around the mid-1980s" (x). This has led to migrants being exploited and abused as cheap economic labor in much of Spain, perhaps most notably in the southern regions such as Andalusia, Extremadura, Valencia, Catalonia, and Murcia. It is with this contemporary social panorama in mind that I will be examining five different poems to discuss how decolonial subjects can work with a knowledge of Haraway's theory on cyborgs and cyborg identities to create a progressive *oikos* that foment positive transformation in living situations for North African societies. The poems selected for analysis are representative of the sixty-eight poems found throughout the anthology in their thematic concern regarding the contrast of neocoloniality's utilitarian *oikos* with the subversiveness of play and creativity.

Abderrahman El Fathi is an admired poet in his home city, Tetouan, where he was raised in an Arabic and Spanish-speaking household. His father and grandfather worked for the Spanish colonial administration that governed the Spanish Protectorate of Northern Morocco from 1912-1956. He thus comes from a family whose loyalty is to a colonially bent Spain, a genealogy that could be identified as one with colonized values, submissive to the will of Spain and its colonially Africanist designs. Yet, as we will see, the fact that El Fathi feels just as at home in Spanish culture as he is in Moroccan culture gives him a unique edge in writing a poetics that is critical of *and* sympathetic to the region comprising the shores on both sides of the Strait of Gibraltar. The poet is currently Professor of Spanish Philology and Literature at the Université Abdelmalek Essaadi in Tetouan. He has published many works of poetry, including *Triana, imágenes y palabras* (1998), *Abordaje* (2000), *África en versos mojados* (2002), *El cielo herido* (2003), *Primavera en Ramallah y Bagdad* (2003), and *Desde la otra orilla* (2004). As of 2018, El Fathi finished an urban project identifying the Route of Cervantes through northern Morocco. An expert in Cervantine literature, specifically on *Don Quijote*, the writer is part of and well-versed in two cultural traditions. His poetry reflects this sort of double-consciousness. To date, very little has been written about El Fathi's work, although notably Cristián Ricci in *¡Hay moros en la costa!* and Ana Rueda in *El retorno/el reencuentro* have written about it. Ricci points out that it is through this consciousness that the writer "exploits his double perspective in his role as a participant, an observer, and as a subject displaced by multiple discourses and belongings" (2014: 176)<sup>2</sup>. This double knowledge, somewhat common to many who live in colonized geographies, makes El Fathi especially relevant to the study of hybridity in cyborg studies and its relation to North African Hispanophone literature.

In a most searingly honest poem, full of self-derision and autocriticism, El Fathi pens a series of verses that question the utility, ethics, and motives for writing poetry in contemporary Morocco:

. . . y es una verdad,  
soy más útil  
plantando pimientos y tomates  
en campos de Almería,  
saciando ansias  
al aire libre,  
vendiendo Herbalife  
o CD's pirata de Sabina.  
[. . . and it is true,

I am more useful  
planting peppers and tomatoes  
in the fields of Almería,  
satiating desires  
in the open-air,  
selling Herbalife  
or pirated Sabina CD albums.] [v. 10] (21)

The poetic voice is indirectly asking the reading public just why, considering the country's illiteracy and poverty rates, a Moroccan should even dare to write poetry. At the end of the text, where the poet mentions selling Joaquín Sabina's pirated CDs, he indicates, *a la* McLuhan, that the medium is the message. El Fathi's writing hints that the poetic voice is asking a very difficult question: is the poem, in its revelation of exploitation, still enabling the fortification of colonial power dynamics?

The poem simultaneously highlights a capitalist sense of utility, whereby a person's existence is justified so long as they sell or consume products. In this light, anything is useful so long as it satisfies monetized desires and materialist whims. Hence a person or thing is valuable only according to the extent to which it successfully allows itself to be exploited for profit, that is, to be a prosthetics of global capitalism. Consequently, the poetic voice refers to their particular utility as "saciando ansias" (v. 7) via the selling of trinkets on the streets. The poem makes it clear that El Fathi is referring to the plight of African subjects who live precarious lives while engaged in the underground Spanish economy, where they are forced to sell their merchandise on the streets of major municipalities such as Almería, Granada, Madrid, Bilbao, Barcelona, or Seville, among others. El Fathi is indeed a modern Andalusian poet, for his ties to both North Africa and Iberia qualify him as a writer who is knowledgeable about both Spain and Morocco, the two areas that once comprised Al-Andalus. Due to the poet's particular regional knowledge, Ricci has included El Fathi in a certain circle of Moroccan writers, each of whom "are very conscious of the ontological and epistemological differences between both cultures, and can cross from one side to the other (from West to East), and criticize both cultures, with no need to request a 'visa' from any academic guard" ("African Voices" 208). The fact that the Maghreb author cannot be tied solely to one region allows for his poetics to be read as partially Arabic and partially Hispanic. He writes from the perspective of parts and not from a totalizing whole, and he composes with a special affinity for the Mediterranean Spanish and Moroccan shores.

Haraway, when discussing cyborgs, has hinted at the power of understanding the difference between affinities and the essentialism of identity politics. Like the Nahuatl translator Malinche<sup>3</sup>, whom

Haraway also mentions in her essay, El Fathi's poetics challenge the idea of pure, *castizo* identities that are immutable. Haraway writes that there is "a growing recognition of another response through coalition affinity, not identity" (2197). She observes that those who fail to fully comply with traditional categories of identity, like Malinche's son Martín, are similar to cyborgs because they represent a fractured subjectivity. Both the colonized and the cyborgs are fractured entities because they are not only part of one category, but also because they are part of another and therefore cannot be boxed in. The colonial bastard, the race of human beings that is neither this nor that, is like the cyborg in that they identify only with the story that they have lived, not with the legend of the story. Haraway writes on how understanding cyborg realities can be potentially liberating:

With no available original dream of a common language or original symbiosis promising protection from hostile "masculine" separation, but written into the play of a text that has no finally privileged reading or salvation history, to recognize 'oneself' as fully implicated in the world, frees us of the need to root politics in identification, vanguard parties, purity, and mothering. Stripped of identity, the bastard race teaches about the power of the margins and the importance of a mother like Malinche. (2216)

Under this rubric of the Lacanian signification of masculinized power, one sees the trope of gendered colonial relationships in which the colonial master is semantically perceived as the all-powerful phallogocentric male, and the subjugated colonists are perceived, erroneously, as feminized entities, both semantically and metaphorically. But the bastard, the colonized, and even the cyborg, identify neither with Malinche nor with Cortés. Their lives negate essentialism.

Let us return to the poem we are analyzing. A sort of tool-like usefulness can be seen in the verses in which the poet mentions that "plantando pimientos y tomates / en campos de Almería" (vv. 5-6). This imagery of working away in the greenhouses of the southern Spanish Levant combined with verse 8, "al aire libre," reveals precisely that the poetic voice places itself indoors. These lines reveal the intimate connection that will forever bind the speaker to those less fortunate. The indoor/outdoor binary is a subtle allusion to the idea of the house slave and the plantation slave that Gilberto Freyre discusses in his classic *The Masters and The Slaves*, and to a similar dynamic found between the house slave and the plantation slave during slavery in the U.S. Here, the speaker indirectly answers the central inquiry of the poetic text: yes, the poetry does strengthen colonial power dynamics. Whereas it might seem that a writer is a privileged subject who does not suffer the indignations and humiliations endured by those who are economically enslaved, both the writer and the economically enslaved person are economic tools that obey the market dynamics of hegemonic western capitalism: that is, they are both

slaves to capitalist exploitation. When the poetic voice affirms that “ [...] es una verdad, / soy más útil / plantando pimientos y tomates / en campos de Almería” (vv. 3-6), he is only seeing the worth of his writing as an economically valuable commodity to bookstores and to readers, rather than reflecting on the deeper, and more subversive qualities, of a literature that could reveal weak and vulnerable power structures as well as the necessity of these structures for creating a marginalized class of workers who have very few exits. That is, the poet realizes that, to the extent that he measures his success as a capitalistic success story, then he is just as enmeshed in economic oppression and subjectivity as are other North Africans in conventionally “lesser” (i.e. economically impoverished) situations. The poetic voice fails to see literature as a means for rethinking power structures in a discourse that appears to think of writing as separate from the concerns of the workers.

Using a poetics that is critical of prosthetics, El Fathi’s work challenges us to see North African subjectivities as conscious human beings ready to fight against their twenty-first century indentured servitude. As the Spanish philosopher and gender theorist Paul Preciado might have put it, contemporary human subjects become the prosthetics of an order, an extension of capitalist rule that serves specific economic interests. Preciado describes a sort of apparatus or device “that facilitates a particular activity, in the same way that the hammer functions as a prolongation of the hand or the telescope takes the eye to a viewpoint in space that is far away” (*Manifiesto contra-sexual* 128)<sup>4</sup>. His is a definition of prosthetics that El Fathi identifies in his compositions by questioning and subverting them. Converted into a sort of disposable machine, workers are turned into objects that are used and then discarded, be it through death, disease, poverty, or exhaustion. Although Preciado’s writing on prosthetics has been tied more specifically with the erotics of queer activism and practice, there is additionally the sense of challenging utility and linear narratives, in which subjectivities simply produce according to a conventional timeline. Under coloniality, time is money: in both Haraway’s essay and in El Fathi’s poetics time is not money, but rather it is a space for exploration, imagination and innovation. It is recreational and not procreational, at least not in the fiduciary sense.

As Haraway notes in her *Manifesto*, the controversy stems from “the appropriation of . . . bodies” whereby “laboratories . . . embody and spew out the tools,” creating entities that simply work to serve under the “imposition of a grid of control” (2196). This imposition of a grid of control is, from Haraway’s Marxist perspective, the brutality of capitalism: it is the tendency and the incredible pressure to live according to the oppressive dictates of productivity and staying true to the original genealogy of a creator that creates products for use and for consumption and disposal. Haraway resists this capitalist mandate, writing that:

Communications technologies and biotechnologies are the crucial tools recrafting our bodies. These tools embody and enforce new social relations for women [*and men*] world-wide. Technologies and scientific discourses can be partially understood as formalizations, i.e., as frozen moments, of the fluid social interactions constituting them, but they should also be viewed as instruments for enforcing meanings. The boundary is permeable between tool and myth, instrument and concept, historical systems of social relations and historical anatomies of possible bodies, including objects of knowledge. Indeed, myth and tool mutually constitute each other. (2205)

This mentioning of interdependency between tool and myth is precisely why El Fathi has composed *Danzadelaire*: he has become conscious of the fact that the myth of Al-Andalus has been appropriated by the Spanish political classes in order to keep Moroccans from participating actively in the improvement of their lives. If Al-Andalus is an oikos space, El Fathi's poetry reworks the "household" by replacing one tool with another. He takes the oikos of Al-Andalus, which Spanish narratives use as a tool to diminish the modern-day Moroccan immigrant, and he replaces it with an oikos that is about movement, and not about a destination. Thus, the Moroccan immigrants in his poetry are no longer a prosthetics of the colonial designs of capitalism, but are agents of their own transformation, using tools to improve their own lot in life.

The myth of the distant Moorish past is the oikos that catalyzes El Fathi's erotic but nonconformist poetry in his anthology. This is the same oikos that Haraway refers to as "the household" or home space. The Al-Andalus oikos will be the foundational myth, the genealogical story of origin that is the organic loss-of-innocence narrative that Haraway so berates in her essay. El Fathi will flip the notion of this essentialist history, revealing Al-Andalus not to be a natural story, but rather a machination of colonial desire and ambition.

Finally, there is in the poem an allusion to Joaquín Sabina (v. 10), the well-known Spanish folk singer whose songs are about protest. The fascinating and deliberate imagery of the pirated versions of the so-called original Sabina CDs itself is a creative play on the meanings and semantics of cyborgs, tools, and prosthetics for Moroccan subjects. The CD as an object of sound is a copy of a copy, and it is not an original; this is a commentary, too, on Al-Andalus as a false oikos, a history that has been used to naturalize culture, to make it seem as self-evident and as the basis for value and humanity. Just as the naturalization of the mythified Al-Andalus functions to delegitimize Arab migrants as being ghosts and non-beings, the selling of the CD inscribes a non-human value to the vendors, it dehumanizes them. As such, one can conclude that it is better to be a tool of one's own imagination



than to be subject to the commercial designs of an economy completely indifferent to one's provenance, culture, and linguistic affinities.

The imagery of selling copies of a copy reveals the revolutionary implications of redefining one's relationship to the tool, redefining where the human subject ends and where the tool begins. By becoming a writer, one does precisely that. He becomes a self-fashioned cyborg, where paper and pen are a prosthetics and an extension of the most complex tool in one's head, the human mind. As Haraway phrases it in her essay, "Writing is pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs, etched surfaces of the late twentieth century. Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism" (2216).

The commonality of El Fathi's contemporary poetics with Haraway's "central dogma of phallogocentrism" is coloniality or, more specifically, the neocolonial relationship that currently exists between Morocco and Spain. This "one code that translates all meaning" is the oppressive symbolic colonialist order under which cyborgs and colonized subjects are signified as incomplete and therefore subhuman and justifiably exploitable, disposable, and worthless. This phallogocentrism deploys a social structure that enables a binary discourse of "modern" Spanish European values that are believed to be superior to a "backward" Morocco. This is of course a revamping of 19<sup>th</sup> century Spanish Africanism, the colonial civilizing mission that meant to bring European enlightenment to "Darkest" Africa, including the Maghreb.<sup>5</sup>

Fighting against what Haraway refers to as "the phallogocentric Family of Man" (2216), the North African bard writes, in the following poem, of a biopolitically feminized geographic body known as Morocco, rising up and refusing to be defined by a discourse that labels its citizens as trash and as human garbage:

Soy feliz aquí,  
en estos versos inconclusos,  
al borde del precipicio  
...  
Creí vivir sin ELLA,  
y ahora que su distancia me reclama,  
mi retorno se acerca en estos versos.  
A cada palabra le exijo más fuerza

para huir/ de mis miedos de infancia.  
ELLA va enmascarando esos pasajes,  
que antaño fueron,  
lejanas voces, suspendidas  
...  
en cualquier medina,  
empeñadas siempre  
en captar imágenes de la otra España.

[I am happy here,  
in these inconclusive verses,  
on the edge of a cliff  
...  
I believed that I was living without HER,  
and now that the distance between us beckons me,  
my return comes closer in these verses.  
I insist that each word exude more energy  
in order to escape  
from my childhood fears.  
SHE goes about masking those passages,  
that of yesteryear were,  
distant voices, suspended  
...  
in any medina,  
forever determined  
in capturing images from the other Spain.] (v. 20) (17)

The poet deploys a poetic trope known in the Arab world as the *nasib*, a Bedouin pre-Islamic trope in which the speaker mourns the loss of his or her beloved. According to Jaroslav Stetkevych, the speaker recalls the departure of his or her loved one, and then begins to evoke the beloved erotically, as the verses develop “both psychologically and formally into the erotic daydream of her presence” (25). A traditional schema in Arab poetics, the *nasib* is essentially a well-known narratological poetic structure that revolves around a memory of a loss: in El Fathi’s verses, there is a beloved, the

“HER/SHE” (vv. 8, 14), who pleads for the poetic persona to return: “I believed that I was living without HER, / and now that the distance between us beckons me. . . .” (vv. 8-9). According to the poem, the source of her diegetic voice comes from a TV set’s sound that is blasting throughout Tetouan’s central medina. The audiovisual simulacra beckon and seduce the poetic persona’s senses, driving the speaker to look upon the television images with lust, contemplating the television propaganda that presents Spain as superior.

Yet “HER/SHE,” a personified memory of Morocco as a robust and strong and dynamic figure, comes to the fore, a Malinche that comes to take what is hers, to contest being misogynistically beaten down by a historic hagiography that praises victorious male colonizers (Hernán Cortés and the Spanish conquistadors). For this reason, Haraway writes of Malinche in her account of writing against the tendency of power to construct colonized subjects and cyborgs as beings unable to signify their own acts. As readers, here we only need to understand the feminine as signifying colonized subjectivities, which allows readers to further appreciate how bastardization and hybridity can be agents for positive change, “Writing . . . affirms . . . the body of a woman of color, against the possibility of passing into the unmarked category of the Anglo father or into the orientalist myth of ‘original illiteracy’ of a mother that never was. Malinche was mother here, not Eve before eating the forbidden fruit.” (2215-2216)

Haraway’s essay is perhaps a bit too Anglocentric, but if one understands the imagery of the “Anglo father” as a sort of code for patriarchal Eurocentrism, it is conceivable to understand that her words are relevant to Spain’s historical status as a European colonial power. One can see Spain’s continual anxiety to cast its ambitions for European colonial glory over its proverbial little brother, the developing country of Morocco. By Spain reaffirming its status as an older, more adult brother, lifting its sibling out of nonage, there is a poetic rendering of a geopolitical relationship that Susan Martin-Márquez has referred to as Hispanotropicalism. Writing in acknowledgement of this rubric of colonial desire and subjugation, El Fathi, in his poem, begins to tactically address the psychological effects of colonial domination and the sense of inferiority that European domination over the centuries has brought to its African subjects. Although now supposedly “free” and “liberated” in the present-day post World War II and officially decolonized space of the African continent, the haunting of the colonial specter remains in the deepest recesses of North African subjects. The speaker alludes to their own childhood, “A cada palabra le exijo más fuerza/ para huir/ de mis miedos de infancia” (vv. 11-13), indicating that in their early days, they were afraid and in awe of Spain’s paternalistic legacy. In this context, “SHE/HER” is an example of using personification, along with gender, to subvert

the idea that Morocco should shy away from embracing its semantically feminized neocolonial status; to fight the colonial rhetoric that true development and self-determination come from a desire to identify with the colonial, masculine order.

El Fathi's poetry refuses to accept that the signification of superiority is rooted in Eurocentric heteropatriarchal norms. Identifying with the feminine signified, his decolonial poetics debunk the European discourse that Frantz Fanon described as a "prey" rhetoric where Maghreb families as units could fall "prey fought over with equal ferocity" by either the forces of good (Europe) or the forces of evil (Islam). Concluding, just as Fanon, that North African women "do their part in further breaking down the enemy system and in liquidating the old mystifications once and for all" (*A Dying Colonialism* 67), El Fathi's literature also reconfigures oikos as a space for family boundaries to be transgressed, that is, as a space for movement, and not as a single historical space in time.

El Fathi recognizes that, in penning a nostalgia for the feminine signified, he is revealing the colonial code that upholds the false idea (Judith Butler in *Frames of War*) that the limits of modernity are defined by a false and purely constructed symbolic order that is both "theologically derived and a prerequisite of psycho-social development" (114). Hence, Morocco and its citizens are only non-modern and non-human because they are non-Christian and because they are outside the geopolitics of capitalist hegemony, affirming Butler's thesis that the cultural racism of heteropatriarchal norms frame some lives as more important than others. For El Fathi, psycho-social development in the West appears to be intimately framed by capitalism's love of individuality and individual appetites. One can evidence this intimate connection between psycho-social development and individuality in the following text that, on the surface, appears to be about lust and sexual desire:

Perseguí tu otoño en una esquina  
de octubre  
para ocultar, cierta primavera  
un invierno cualquiera.”  
[I pursued your autumn into a corner  
of October  
in order to hide, a certain spring  
just any winter.] (100)

The idea of running after someone, of pursuing someone sexually, is codified in this poem. The poetic voice recognizes pursuing a certain (some)body, from behind. The idea of being pursued from behind (the side the pursued subject is not facing) is codified in the concept of the latter part of summer, its

“indian summer” that comes *after* the “autumn” (v. 1) or that *follows* “autumn,” in which case the fall season would signify one’s rear end, or *derriere*. Thus, the reader is introduced to a poetics of what in English would colloquially be known as “ass-chasing” or in binary cis-gender terms as “skirt-chasing.” The imagery of the body in seasonal term—“your autumn” (v. 1), “a corner / of October” (vv. 1-2), “a certain spring” (v. 3), and “just any winter” (v. 4)—is consistent with an Arabo-Islamic tradition in art that does not use human body imagery in explicit fashion. Thus, El Fathi elegantly fashions sexuality, corporeality, and desire in a non-vulgar manner, allowing for the imagination to take control of the reader’s understanding of the verses. One can read the pursuing of “your autumn” (*tu otoño* in the original Spanish rendition of the poem) in the opening verse as “your rear end” that specifically obstructs one’s view of female genitalia that rhymes, phonetically, with *otoño* (*coño*), namely, a vagina. The use of the verb phrase “to hide” in the third verse is deliberate then, as a way of imagining a body that hides what is in front, that is, the metaphoric expression teases out what is to be discovered on the other side, euphemistically and artfully expressed not as full frontal genitalia, but rather as a “a certain spring” (v. 3).

The emphasis on the sexual chase, marked by the first verse (“I pursued your autumn”), and the deployment of an economy of seasonal terminology gives the poem a flirtatious and playful air, a strategy that appropriately goes along with the anthology’s eponymous title of *Danzadelaire* (“Dance of / in the air”). Consistent with Preciado’s notion that eroticism is best practiced in the name of joy and recreation there is, inherent to this affinity, a sort of rejection of the subject-as-machine-as-copy-product-of-the-original. That is, productivity, in which a person is a mere tool, is subverted, created as a dynamic whereby subjectivity no longer serves merely neocolonial interests. Rather, the poet begins to subvert the conventions of his own poetics in order to actively create a regional North African poetics. No longer does the poetry serve as a mere byproduct of economic subjection and capitalist alienation. There is something buoyant and invigorating about the poem, affirming eroticism, play, and teasing. It is where the political and the erotic meet that the colonized-as-cyborg realizes that production is just a game and, in enjoying the momentary erotics, the subject decenters the erroneous notion that play and escape must always be utilitarian and teleological. Play, in the utilitarian world that is capitalism and the tool-as-a-means-to-an-end, becomes socio-politically divergent and outside the order of control and discipline. The poem itself also reveals a dance between two potential lovers in a cat-and-mouse game. This *jouissance* is one-sided, however. There is no strong evidence that the apostrophic “you” (v. 1) in the poem, the pursued loved interest, has any interest in the pursuing speaker. This is perhaps deliberate, as the speaker comes to the tragic conclusion that all they can think

about is the chase for sexual intercourse, the achievement of arriving to a certain oikos. Sexual play, at first playful, quickly becomes pragmatic and all about utility. It is not about enjoyment, or the foreplay, or the journey. Sex in this poem is about power, that is about, arriving, conquering, and domesticating the other. It is oikos as a place of distinction and bravado, not as a space for travel. The poetic voice is aware of this and is disappointed by the realization. This disillusionment is expressed in verses from an Arab poetic idiom based on the Jahiliyah<sup>6</sup> Bedouin trope known as *nasib*, which normally consists of a scene of elegy to the abandoned encampment where one last saw his or her beloved. Jaroslav Stetkevych defines the *nasib* trope as “a recollection of the beloved’s departure” (25). A key ingredient in a once-honored poetic narratological structure known as the *qasidah*, El Fathi delicately interweaves the *nasib* into his verses as a technique to discuss contemporary events in words associated with Middle Eastern poetical conventions. El Fathi begins to write verses that indicate a sense of absence and the loss of a different beloved—the oikos that is Al-Andalus. Here is an example:

Te tuve en mis desiertos  
Lejanos  
en los dátiles  
de mis ayunos  
en las horas tardías  
de mis palmeras [...]  
[I had you in my deserts  
off in the distance  
in my dates  
from my fasts  
in the twilight hours  
of my palm trees [...]] (v. 8) (42)

In this case, the abandoned encampment is the Bedouin desert, the traditional locus where the *nasib* would take place, because that is where the Bedouins would pitched their tents, later to take them down and move on to another destination. The use of the apostrophe here (v. 1) acknowledges an emotional lacuna, an emptiness based on having lost one’s beloved. The use of the preterit (v. 1) is another clue that the voice is referring to an emotionally amorous relationship that is no more. This sense of emotional loss and the state of malaise must be put into a social context based on the author’s lifetime and milieu. As Stetkevych illustrates, it is common that in inscribing the *nasib* imagery, “The framework and the idiom of the traditional mold are used to contain and express or to comment on

an immediately contemporary historical event” (60). Thus, the poet becomes cognizant of how his poetry itself is playing into the colonial designs of imperialism, racism, and the deterioration of local North African communities.

By writing of a pursuing of oikos as time, place, and achievement, the verses become a tool to the West’s neocolonial designs, where everything is defined by the colonial model. The poetic voice understands the extent to which he has come to be a western tool, a cyborg serving the interests of Western powers and their neoliberal interests. Comprehending that they have internalized individualist values and have effectively become a prosthetics of empire, the speaker changes directions. El Fathi takes the tradition of the *qasidah* and incorporates it into his life as a framework for reworking oikos and the relation of his poetics to Al-Andalus—place, time, and myth. In the Arab poetic tradition, the *qasidah* panegyric poem was tripartite: the *nasib*, where one mourns the loss of one’s beloved, the *rabih*, where the mourner sobers up and undertakes a journey that will take him far away, and the *madih* the return and the dedication in which the speaker often praises a king or states the moral of the poem. Notice how in the poems about lust and love there is no movement into the *rabih* or into the *madih* sections of the panegyric. The reason is that the poetic voice understood that the panegyric was headed toward turning into a praise of globalization, empire, and the new king, capitalism. So instead of playing into that schema, the panegyric stops. Georges Van den Abbeele once wrote, in the case of Montaigne’s essays, that “the cut in the writer’s production occasioned by the voyage then becomes the beneficent wound that would define the very essence of his corpus” (4). Similarly, the decisive cut in El Fathi’s poetry becomes a significant occlusion to what would otherwise be an apologist writing of colonized poetry that placates Spanish and European literary tastes without any trace of threat or difference. Indeed, it is from Van den Abbeele’s very notion of movement and journey within oikos that we can come to better understand the innovative aspects of El Fathi’s compositions.

Mahan L. Ellison, in his 2015 article “*Oikos* and the ‘Other,’” has studied movement and the spatial significance of movement. Ellison characterizes the journey, or voyage, as an oikos space, understanding oikos as “a space upon which narrative action occurs, but also as a realm of possibility” (162). I think that oikos in El Fathi’s writing can be understood as a place where one is on his way, setting out on a journey. This is precisely why the poet chooses to end the poem so abruptly. The speaker is too obsessed with historical time and space to enjoy the erotics of a true transgression. The only thing pursued in this text is conquest. Oikos, in the *Danzadelaire* anthology, becomes a locus for a journey to be traveled, as a roadmap for the possibility of change in the Arab World. El Fathi cleverly turns the readily apparent, face-value message of erotics in the poem on its head, inscribing the poem

with a camouflaged dose of social commentary on the state of the Arab World at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In other words, El Fathi's poetry finally embraces the other part of the Arab *qasidah* tradition: *rabil*, the journey.

The mention of "October" and "spring" in a poem that highlights flirtation and desire can be read as subtly writing on long-existing tensions in a part of the world subjected to Western interests. The Arab Spring of 2011, in which entire urban populations began to protest the rules of their leaders in the Middle East and in North Africa, was a tumultuous time of social and political unrest in which, among others events, Hosni Mubarak was thrown out of office after thirty years of dictatorship.<sup>7</sup> The Spring resonated strongly across North Africa in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco. In El Fathi's country, the catalyst for social unrest became especially intense when a man from the town of Al Hoceima killed himself in a trash compactor to protest police harassment. Widespread protest spread throughout Morocco.<sup>8</sup> It seems that perhaps the idealization of Al-Andalus as an oikos of greatness becomes overshadowed by the pursuit of social changes, a new path that is not predetermined and fixed: the new oikos in *Danzadelaire* turns out to be modern Morocco, experiencing the journey of change. This is the importance of *rabil* in the Arab tradition: the voyage and the trajectory, not the destination.

El Fathi's poetry does not anticipate the specific political uprising known as the Arab Spring, nor is his literature inciting rebellion. Rather, it is a poetics that hints, in a seasonal coding, at a desire in a particular region for the enjoyment of greater freedoms, in economic terms (more jobs and income), political terms (more freedom to express oneself without retaliation), and social terms (challenging long-standing cultural and religious taboos and social norms based on tradition and *not* on scientific knowledge). This yearning for change is common not only to Morocco but also apparently all over the Arab World. In this context, one can certainly see, as in the poem, that a certain "spring" can be expected, and it could come from "just any winter" (v. 4). According to this reading of El Fathi's poem, the poetic voice could be hinting at the underlying tensions subtending social and political yearnings in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. His verses hint at a socially discontent part of the world, and the emphasis on codified seasons underscores the lack of freedom of speech that, if more was permitted, would allow for a more pointed and explicit discussion of the causes of the very social anguish that is responsible for a politically cold and desolate "winter" in the first place. Additionally, the nod to a certain "October" in the text seems to indicate a desire for the Western-style liberties won over in European countries such as neighboring Spain (the Asturian Miners' Strike of October 1934), and in Bolshevik Russia (October 1917).



In the last poem to be analyzed, one can see a very dramatic deployment of *rubi*. Here the poetics no longer focuses on Al-Andalus as the ultimate oikos. Instead the poem paints Al-Andalus as dangerously stuck in space and time, frozen and static:

Ni añoro los jardines del Al-Andalus,  
ni la luz de sus cielos, ni tampoco la sed de sus ríos,  
sólo me faltan sus besos a la verita de mi orilla.  
Soy hijo del Al-Andalus, esclavo de tus suspiros,  
inmortal para tus deseos y guardián de tus latidos.

...

Déjame, susurrarte al ombligo, arrimarte a mis deseos,  
penetrarte en tus enigmas.”

[I do not yearn for the gardens of Al-Andalus,  
nor the light of its skies, nor have I any thirst for its rivers,  
I only need the kisses that lead to my side of the shore.  
I am the offspring of Al-Andalus, slave to your sighs,  
here to serve your desires and protector of your heartbeats.

...

Allow me, to whisper to your center, to get closer,  
to penetrate your enigmas.] (88)

The verses above indicate that the speaker no longer looks back longingly for an Al-Andalus oikos, the equivalent of Haraway’s Fall from Innocence narrative. Al-Andalus is not a healthy oikos, it only keeps Moroccan migrants *and* Spaniards stuck to a mythical past that has nothing to do with the realities of change in their respective countries. The desire to put the past on an idealized pedestal is gone as well as the essentialist idea of home. Again, just as in the mentioned poem, there is a poetics of desire, and of lust (“I only need the kisses” v. 5; “Allow me . . . to get closer, / to penetrate your enigmas” vv. 12-13). But it is a lust soon to be disappointed, in the sense that the desire for an essentialist home, the lost paradise of Al-Andalus, is no longer feasible, nor desirable. The poet realizes that the diasporic trope of Islamic Spain, idealized as the spot of originality, return, and purity, is no longer desirable. Instead, he embraces the present, and the potential, as Fatima El-Tayeb has observed, to imagine the migrant diaspora as “not merely a nostalgic longing for a lost, idealized home or past” (60). Instead, the poet is realizing and subtly driving home the point that “part of the problem lies with diaporic populations [...] fixation on a lost past pushing into the background the question of

how they might relate to that of the host country” (78). The point now, and El-Tayeb reflects on Edoard Glissant’s idea of “situational communities,” is being able to move forward from the present-day situation of migrant diasporas, specifically by “accepting the messiness” (78) of the present. Gone is the pretense that Al-Andalus could reoccur, and gone is also the idea that Al-Andalus was the paradise that it is often purported to have been. Like the examined poem on the pursuit of autumn and spring, there is a commonality in their openness to interrogate just how mythical one’s past was. Thus, the poem moves away from emotionally mapping the Spanish fantasy of Al-Andalus as being perfect, safe, and folkloric, which is utilized to placate Spaniards who fear that Moroccans are every bit as modern, engaged, and inquisitive as they are.

Al-Andalus is often mobilized in Spanish fiestas and textbooks as a beacon of a supposed tricultural harmony that represents a safe and distant past where Arabs were not people but historical cardboard cut-outs. Daniela Flesler confirms this concept of safe distance, affirming that there is “the desire to relate Moorish presence to a remote past and to distant lands, thus predetermining the invisibility of the real Moroccan immigrant of today” (115). The essentialist story of origin as Al-Andalus is thus reworked around an oikos that starts not from a past that no one fully understands (no one was there to experience it). Instead, the home space switches over to being in the present, a time space that is changeable and open to social and economic improvements for the Maghreb. The poetic voice in *Danzadelaire* is not so much confronting imperialism and neocoloniality in political terms, as it is positing a desire for newness and freshness in the Maghreb that is expressed in local North African terms. The poetry is ultimately aiming at eliminating an Orientalist narrative of fixed stereotypes rooted in the eternal and the unchanging.<sup>9</sup>

If in a preceding poem we examined how the poetic voice spoke in a discourse of seasons, here the idea of Spring can be usefully deployed to connote newness, freshness, and fertility. Hence the verdure of an old and outdated Al-Andalus is surreptitiously deemphasized in the beginning verses where the speaker steadfastly exclaims that they do not miss “the gardens of Al-Andalus, / nor the light of its skies, nor have I any thirst for its rivers” (vv. 3-4). It would appear that the speaker, in his desire and lust (“slave to your sighs” v. 6), would not prefer that North Africa, or Morocco itself, change entirely, but rather that perhaps new “gardens” or lush regions of new thought and derring-do will come and bravely make their way through the Maghreb, instead of “modernizing” according to the arbitrary dictates of a paternalistic and neocolonial Spain.

It is important to note that the former protectorate region of northern Morocco, from where El Fathi hails, is very engaged with independence, sovereignty, and self-determination, thus making it

a notable locus for localized modernization under Moroccan and North African direction. This perhaps would be a Moroccan or Maghreb version of “modernization” about which Mohamed ‘Abed al-Jabri (1999) spoke. I would not argue that northern Morocco necessarily wants to separate itself from the rest of Morocco, but that the Arab Spring showed a big outpour of popular support for the return of local control of Moroccan markets and economies, and a move away from an over-centralized system of control that is dominated by Casablanca and Rabat. The preceding historical context gives extra meaning and significance to El Fathi’s poem, especially in placing it outside of an imperialist and Africanist space of time. El-Tayeb writes that Western humanist secular thought, biased towards a particular vision of Christianity and whiteness, “depends on the existence of a public space and time” (89) that revolves around the assumption that “the West already is (post) secular while others still have to follow” and are thus behind and undeveloped and therefore primitive. El-Tayeb then argues that Muslims are unjustly marginalized and snubbed by an ignorant Western narrative that constructs them and many non-Europeans as being stuck to “a stubborn commitment to a premodern, antihumanist belief system” (90). By placing the gardens of Al-Andalus in a different time and space, El Fathi is displacing North Africa as a locus of deviant others, and rather as its own center of enunciation based on regional authority and deep local cultural knowledge. This allows the Moroccan, Spain’s “Other”, the chance to speak instead of, as Spivak has famously noted, being spoken for. Thus, El Fathi’s poetics undergoes a dramatic change, going from being a potential prosthetics for coloniality to a prosthetics for the improvement of his North African community. Oikos simply becomes movement from the starting point, a road map in real time, and not a destination. Arrival only confirms colonial time and space, and it appears that Al-Andalus will no longer be El Fathi’s home base. Finally, it is important to keep in mind what the poet’s intention was when he wrote about “planting peppers and tomatoes.” His words should frighten us into questioning our own role in dehumanizing the Maghreb and the rest of the Middle East. After all, just what is it that we should expect to harvest when we treat immigrants not as human beings worthy of humanity and compassion, but as tools for profit?

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> All translations are mine. Most of the translations are of El Fathi's poetic work but some of my quotations will also be translated.

<sup>22</sup> "[E]xplota su doble perspectiva en su rol de participante, observador y sujeto desplazado a través de discursos y pertenencias múltiples."

<sup>3</sup> Malinche was Hernán Cortés's interpreter, an indigenous woman who eventually spoke Spanish, thus enabling communication between the conquistadors and the Nāhua people of Central Mexico. Besides Spanish, she spoke Náhuatl and other indigenous languages; she is idolized as a hero by some and hated as a traitor by the majority of Mexicans. The son she had with Cortés, Martín, is thought to be the first *mestizo*. Like the cyborg, Martín is considered a mixture of two different ethnocultural backgrounds. Martín also symbolizes colonialism in Mexican historiography.

<sup>4</sup> "que facilita una actividad particular, de la misma manera que el martillo viene a prolongar la mano o el telescopio acerca el ojo a un punto de mira alejado en el espacio."

<sup>5</sup> Martín-Márquez highlights efforts in late nineteenth-century Spain, spearheaded by ambitious individuals such as Joaquín Costa, Eduardo Saavedra, and Manuel Fernández y González to expand Spanish territory into Africa in order to keep up with the other European colonial powers such as England, France, Italy, Germany, and Holland. This movement toward recovering Spain's imperial past via expansion in the African continent was known as Spanish Africanism. (See pp. 26, 55-59) Martín-Márquez, because of this colonialism, discusses her idea of Hispanotropicalism as being inspired by Gilberto Freyre's Lusotropicalism, which described a family-discourse related to Portugal and its "family" of colonies, including those in Brazil and in Africa. She defines Hispanotropicalism as a sort of colonialist outlook toward Africa that was based on Spaniards' unique historical closeness to Africa due to "Spain's physical proximity to Africa, the early history of migrations back and forth across the Strait of Gibraltar, and the legacy of eight centuries of Moorish presence on the Iberian Peninsula." Thus, Spain was "deemed to be much more attuned to African culture and thus ideally suited to colonize Africans" (74).

<sup>6</sup> Pre-Islamic period, before Islamicized Arab armies from Mecca brought Islam to other parts of the world.

<sup>7</sup> The Arab Spring began in the spring of 2011, months after a Tunisian fruit merchant set himself on fire in the town of Sidi Bouzid (Fisher, 26 Mar. 2011). Within a very short length of time, social unrest against polemical laws and cultural taboos began to fan out across North Africa and in Egypt. In February 2011, President Hosni Mubarak left Cairo and huge protests began in Tahrir Square. For more information, see Jehane Noujaim's 2013 documentary *The Square*.

<sup>8</sup> See Herve Bar's November 2016 report on unrest in Al Hoceima ("Morocco Fish Seller Death" 1 Nov 2016). According to the article, "His [the vendor's] death in the Rif—an ethnically Berber region long neglected and at the heart of a 2011 protest movement for reform—has triggered outrage in other cities including the capital Rabat."

<sup>9</sup> In his classic treatise *Orientalism*, Edward Said provides an idea of how the West problematically thinks about the East: "The very possibility of development, transformation, human movement – in the deepest sense of the word – is denied the Orient and the Oriental. As a known and ultimately an immobilized or unproductive quality, they come to be identified with a bad sort of eternity" (208).

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