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Fragmented Selves and the Politics of Memory Exploring Exile and Identity in Malika Oufkir's *Freedom: The Story of My Second Life*

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Abstract

Autobiography has increasingly achieved access in literary and cultural scholarship bringing attention to the ways in which the self is perceived and (re)created in virtue of our memories. To investigate the interrelation between self and memory, this paper is engaged with the following questions: what do we mean by the self or himself (autos)? How memory is constituted in the self? How can the self be written into narrative? Can the self be explained by in terms of memory? By introducing the concept of the self on account of these questions, this paper hopes to show that self and memory are intertwined through the process of constructing stories we tell, share and/or conceal about ourselves and others. Within this ambit, this paper seeks to examine Malika Oufkir's Freedom: The Story of My Second Life through the prism of exile, memory, and identity (re)construction. It investigates how this narrative navigates imprisonment, displacement and estrangement. Central to this analysis is the representation of memory as both a site of agony and a mechanism for resistance, through which Oufkir reclaims agency over her identity. In short, the paper also explores the intricate interplay between personal and political exile in the sense that it delves deep into how the author's experiences reflect broader themes of imprisonment, displacement, fragmentation and estrangement in the postcolonial context. Drawing upon theories of autobiographical memory and collective identity, this paper examines how Oufkir's narrative intertwines personal and collective histories, revealing the complex interplay between individual memories and broader socio-cultural contexts. In essence, this paper adopts an eclectic methodology to address the question of autobiographical construction of self and memory. As such, the paper focuses on the transformative role of exile in shaping Malika's identity and memory. By situating Oufkir's narrative within the framework of gendered resistance, this paper seeks to illustrate how she transcends the boundaries of imprisonment and exilic condition in order to reconstruct a sense of being and knowing in a place and time in a world that remains deeply fractured by cultural and historical divides. Eventually, the paper underscores Freedom as a powerful testament to the enduring struggle for selfhood in the face of dislocation and marginalization.

1. INTRODUCTION

After nearly two decades and a half, Malika Oufkir's *Freedom: The Story of My Second Life* (2006), which is the sequel to *Stolen Lives: Twenty Years in a Desert Jail* (1999), is an autobiography that retains much of its original, realist glamor and freshness. Only a few words are needed to sketch its background and explain its context(s). To do so, it has to be noted here that much of the post-independent and contemporary Moroccan prose disclose robust

autobiographical aspects that are mostly inspired by individual and collective experiences of incarceration, fragmentation, and displacement which so many dissident writers and activists have been through. As result, there is an explicit domination of self-centered and individualistic subjects irrespective of the language in which these experiences are and shared in the narratives of activists and writers such as Khadija Marouazi's *History of Ash* (2000), Fatna El Bouih's *Talk of Darkness* (2008), Laila Abouzeid's *Return to Childhood* (1999), and Malika Oufkir's *Stolen Lives* (1999)[1]. The latter is an autobiography in which Malika chronicles her family's twenty years of ordeal imposed upon her family by the king Hassan II who forced Malika and her siblings along with her mother to pay for the crimes of her biological father General Mouhamed Oufkir, a pivotal figure who held some of the highest positions in Moroccan government. Mouhamed Oufkir served as the Minister of Defense and a close confidant of King Hassan II. His family's imprisonment is part of the broader context of King Hassan II's rule during what is known as the Years of Lead, a period of intense political violence, repression, torture, and stifling of dissent opposing voices in Morocco. Years of Lead spanned between early 1960s and 1990s.

Malika's life story is marked by dramatic shift in fortune, power, imprisonment, fragmentation and displacement. She was born into a tremendously privileged family as the daughter of the king of Morocco's closest aide, and she grew up in the palace as companion to the Moroccan princess. Nevertheless, Malika's life of luxury came to a tragic end. Her father was executed because of his attempts to dethrone the king. This is why Malika and her family were locked away in notorious prisons for two decades. Worthy of note here is that after an incredible escape from prison, Malika and her family returned to the world they had left behind, only to find it transformed. The rapid transformation of the world has introduced new modes of being and knowing that are so ambivalent, alienable and strange to fathom at the very new outset of her 'second life'. However, Malika quickly learns to navigate a perilous world while staying true to the principles she dedicated a significant part of her life to defending. Principles such as justice, freedom, dignity and resistance to violence are what render Malika's life and journey into the 'new world' worthy of exploration and archiving for the next generation.

In short, memory in Malika's *The Stolen Lives* and its highly anticipated sequel, *Freedom: The Story of my Second life* is represented at once as a body and a living wound, testifying to the horrors of imprisonment she and her family were put through. Yet, it is here in the twilight threshold of recurrent promises of a dawning light against the assured persistence of darkness that *Freedom: The Story of my Second Life* crafts a glimpse of hope and faith in a better future. For readers and researches in the field of life writing the intricate links between the personal and the political are exactly what informs such life narratives. Albeit the fact that Malika Oufkir and Fanta El Bouih's writings have largely been read and examined discretely due to their socioeconomic and political backgrounds. These two writers have particularly earned recognition as prominent voices of life narratives that relate their and other women's stories of state-sponsored gendered and sexualized violence, as well as their acts of political

[1] Malika Oufkir, in collaboration with Michèle Fitoussi, authored *La Prisonnière*, translated by Ros Schwartz as *Stolen Lives Twenty Years in a Desert Jail* (2001). In 2006 Oufkir published *L'Etrangère* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle), in which she recounts her life in France since 26 February 1991, when she was freed from prison and fled to Europe, particularly to install in France with her Husband Eric.

resistance. Indeed, their works serve as evocative depiction and powerful evidences to the intersection of personal trauma and collective struggle. Like many Moroccans poets and intellectuals such as Abraham Serfaty (1926-2010) and Abdellatif Laâbi (1942), Malika eventually chose self-imposed exile in France over the harsh realities of her own homeland.

In short, Malika Oufkir's narrative serves as a robust prism through which self and memory are embodied in the aftermath of trauma and displacement. Her journey, from a privileged childhood to decades of imprisonment and eventual exile, reflects the intricate interplay between personal identity and historical memory. Indeed, *Freedom: The Story of My Second Life* (2006) not only testifies to the lasting wounds of political oppression but also explores how memory shapes the reconstruction of the self. Through her experiences, Oufkir's story is morphed into a site where personal resilience and collective history converge in the sense that it offers a nuanced perspective on survival, identity, and the politics of remembrance.

2. The Embodiment of Self and Memory Through the lens of Malika's Exilic Narrative

By and large, this article investigates how self and memory are embodied in Oufkir's *Freedom: The Story of My Second Life* (2006). Caught between her homeland and Europe, and grappling with a sense of belonging neither here nor there, Oufkir is compelled to reinvent a sense of self and knowledge that challenges and contests provincial thinking, which reduces identity and memory to false dichotomies. To attend to the autobiographical construction of self and memory in Oufkir's *Freedom: The Story of My Second Life*, this article shall zoom in on two leitmotifs pertinent to autobiographical writing: the exiled autobiographical self and the autobiographical memory. Indeed, exile, as a removal from home, brings about an in-between state of being. This in-betweenness places the self in a position where self-narrating is articulated in terms that reflect both loss and adjustment, belonging and displacement. As such, the in-between mode of living provides a "narrative space" (Mūsawī, 2022, p. 179) wherein identity is constantly (re)shaped. Furthermore, this state of duality, as illustrated in *Freedom: The Story of My Second Life*, reflects the fragmentation and reconstruction of memory as the exiled self seeks to reconcile the dissonance between the life left behind and the life is being revived in exile. Certainly, the experience of exile in Paris emphasizes the kind of intrinsic predicament Malika is put into because of the conditions of displacement and fragmentation. It clearly reinforces her feelings of ambiguity, instability and non-belonging. Her existence has been confined to the margin and oblivion. In *La Prisonnière*, written with Michele Fitoussi, Malika told the fate of a child raised as a princess at the court of Hassan II. Yet now, Malika has been able to translate the condition of exile into a creative aspect and articulate it through her writing. Exile is her fate and she effectively turned it into a wealthy and abundant source of inspiration and hope. Malika's narrative appears to acknowledge that she found a home for her 'second life', as the title *Freedom: The Story of My Second Life* suggests, in self-imposed exile. For Malika writing eases the pain. It mitigates the fear of being oblivious to what is being revealed before her eyes. In the wide and opening vista of exile, Judith M. Melton reminds us in *The face of Exile: Autobiographical Journeys* (1998), that:

> Exile autobiographers inevitably have a sense that they are witnesses to history. They chose exile in response to external political events. The anguish and hardship they faced were a part of momentous political change. Although they were alienated, they did not

> act in isolation. They shared their frustrating experiences with others in the exile community. (Melton, 1998, p. 13)

The entanglement of the personal and the political is the central theme of Naima Hachad's *Revisionary Narratives: Moroccan Women's Auto/Biographical and Testimonial Acts* (2019) from which we read that life narratives of writers such as those mentioned above "contributed to the visibility of auto/biographical content, styles, and structures that undermine notions of honour and shame as they relate to inflexible gender roles and divisions between private and public spheres" (Hachad, 2019, p. 2). The private microcosm of the author often reveals the macrocosm of society, where ideas and ideals are tested, re-imagined, validated, or discredited. It is a world in which conflicts and adversaries, driven by compelling narratives, find their enactment in the larger society. Simply put, the world where power relations are performed. It is these intricate connections that matter much because what is central to this process is not merely to display the 'hidden' sides of the author in question but also to expose socio-political, religious and historical tribulations and pitfalls of a society that is in a constant state of (re)establishing modern forms of modus operandi and modus vivendi. According to Valérie K. Orlando, writing that seeks to change the socio-economic conditions of people and society-where writers' ideas and ideals unfurl first- is called "engaged writing" (Orlando, 2009, p. 22). Orlando, argues further that "the engaged Moroccan author confronts issues that represent the collective conscious both in and outside of his/her country. They are critical of themselves as well as how they are perceived by others, notably in the West" (Orlando, 2009, p. 23). Drawing upon Orlando's insights, it can be argued here that Oufkir's *Freedom: The Story of My Second Life* (2006), in its investigation of tensions and dualities constitutive to the self and memory, conforms with a great number of works of modern Moroccan prose in which the conflict between 'East' and 'West' is a paramount theme. To be torn between two worlds, to try to accommodate different cultural mores, norms and values in one person, to seek a coherent and adequate personal identity, after an unforgivable experience of torture and political violence, such is the common plight of the typical protagonist of this body of work. Malika's narrative explores the desire to set herself free from traumatized memory, but not in a way that detaches her from her family or uproots her from the cultural values of the nation she was born into, where identity and a sense of belonging have been shaped.

Malika Oufkir would remind us that uprootedness is, in fact, the worst kind of self-immolation to which one succumbs. Of course, the memory of the past remains present right up to the last breath, as we can read in this prominent line "memories are swirling all around me sometimes joyous and sweet, sometimes bitter" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 131). In essence, Oufkir's effort to liberate her-self from what she sees as "ghosts of the past" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 16) that haunt her memory and encumber her from being her true self can be read as a "second reading of experience" (Gusdorf, 1980, p. 38). Indeed, Malika recurrently uses the term 'exile' when she delves into these traumatic moments and experiences in her autobiographical narrative, as she lives in a persistent state of fluidity and feels constantly uprooted, despite the perceptible media success she continues to receive and enjoy in France as well as in the United State where she met with Oprah Winfrey. However, exile is not solely a geographic displacement of the author, but also spiritual, cultural and symbolic one. As an exilic self, Malika's personal, cultural, and even linguistic identity has eventually become

plural. In this perspective, the self in the modern globalized experience is inevitably plural, estranged and even ambivalent. In a typical manner, Edward Said reminds us readers in his *Reflections on exile and other essays* (2002) that:

> Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever. (Said, 2002, p. 201)

In her writings, Malika explores how gendered, cultural, sexual, and linguistic hybridity provokes in her autobiographical literary character an extreme sense of fragmentation, displacement and non-belonging. What is so essential in Oufkir's *Freedom: The Story of My Second Life* is her attempts to move on beyond the bogus binary oppositions that are regularly and politically played out to stifle dissenting voices that are calling for freedom, justice and respect of human rights. In short, the real tenor of Oufkir's journey into the 'world' she was denied access to for twenty years, most of which she spent in prison, is to (re)establish a sense of self that is neither absorbed into the traumatized past experiences nor an open register whereby inimical discourses against Moroccan national allegories might be articulated. Simply, Malika wonders and asks how, at a time when modern Western liberalism is at odds with the ethos of Islam, can an 'exiled' Moroccan woman negotiate Islam. How can a woman maintain her identity in a global world?

Being caught between two incompatible worlds like when she writes that "I was torn between East and West, speaking French with my parents and Arabic at the palace; expressions from the old-fashioned and highly refined dialect used at court made their way permanently into my speech" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 10), Oufkir delves deep into Moroccan history and culture in coterminous with her own upbringing in order to explore contemporary Moroccan women's multifaceted resistance against religious fundamentalism, nationalist zeal, Westernized liberalism, and patriarchal oppression from an exilic perspective. In other words, Oufkir's self- representation is multifaceted. On the one hand, it presents women as, to use Hachad's vocabulary, resisters "who actively participated in the production of a revolutionary political discourse and worked to construct an alternative vision of society in which women wield in Morocco" (Hachad, 2019, p. 28). On the other hand, it challenges narratives that put an excessive focus on provincialized self-definition at the cost of marginalizing and excluding 'Other' ways of being and knowing in the name of bogus binary oppositions. In search of the self, *Freedom: The Story of My Second Life* seeks to redefine the self in an entirely new intellectual lens. The breadth and weight of such (re)writing and (re)construction of the self are estrangement, displacement and fragmentation. In Orlando's wording, "such a desire for interlocking of self and other eradicate opposition and leads to a new configuration of the self" (Orlando, 2009, p. 66).

In short, the self that seeks shelter from critical field of knowledge in subjugating and marginalizing Others has not yet understood the fact that identity is not a fait accompli entity, but a rather process that engages people regardless of their race, gender, religion and political

leanings. Of course, this is not to suggest that identity is folded into a mere matter of cultural relativism, but rather that being and knowing are neither mere matters of provincial cultural, religious and social frames nor should they be detached from these frames and contexts. Indeed, this perspective, though it sounds paradoxical, allows for the recognition that while displaced and fragmented individuals are impacted by an immediate cultural and social environment, their sense of identity can be navigated under the rubric of a dialogic engagement with individual and collective experiences, histories and memories at both local and global scales of knowledge. In this view, the exiled autobiographical self emerges from displaced memories, experiences and histories that others share with us, entailing personal events experienced by people important in our lives, as well as collective events experienced and performed by the group we belong to. There is no personal history that can be disentangled from the whole experiences, histories and reminiscences of the family and the community alike. In tune with this exilic conception of the self, Judith M. Melton reminds us that "writing an autobiography becomes a way to reconstitute the self" (Melton, 1998, p. 81). This implicates that for many exiles in "trying to reconstitute the self, they perceived themselves to be before their exile. In such autobiographies, nostalgic pictures of childhood become powerfully consoling word pictures which allow the authors to reconnect to the past, in a sense to reconnect the memory thread" (1998, p. 81).

It follows that autobiographical writing has become a significant strategy of self-representation and reconstruction for Moroccans who are displaced into exile. Autobiographical writing is an effective manner to both situate the displaced self and reclaim fragmented identity. De facto, exile splits and disrupts one's sense of continuity and connectedness. For the exiled autobiographer like Malika, the links that give some sense of coherence and meaning to the present, the past and the future are all anchored in the experience of imprisonment, fragmentation and displacement that Malika has been through due to her father's attempts to dethrone the king Hassan II. The experience of exile has opened a new horizon from which Malika can rethink and reconsider her sense of self. As such, she looks to transcend the binaries that the postcolonial subject is drawn into because of an asymmetric encounter between two incompatible worlds. In this line of thought, the autobiographical self becomes a site of negotiation between personal narratives and broader socio-cultural and political forces of transnational context. In Malika's *Freedom: The Story of my Second Life*, the autobiographical self is deeply intertwined with memory and the ability to remember and recollect past events, emotions, and experiences. It involves not only the factual details of our lives but also more considerably the interpretation and significance we assign to those occurrences and practices.

2.1. The Exiled Autobiographical Self

2.1.1. Reconstructing the Self Through Exile and Remembrance

The idea of the self that emerges in many Moroccan autobiographies as a concern of what Aurelia Mouzet defines in her article "The Postcolonial Autobiography: Force Majeure?" as a "matter of cultural survival" (Lebdaï, 2015, p. 161) is marked by disruption and discontinuity. Indeed, the melding of the self with the other is a central theme in Malika's Freedom *The Story of my Second life*. She is haunted by many challenging questions such as where does the Self dissolve and the Other begin? What are the nuances that demarcate the

limits between the Self and the Other? As such, the feelings of displacement, fragmentation and non-belonging situated at the core of self-representation are succinctly articulated in *Freedom The Story of my Second life*. These feelings are indeed both destructive and constructive to her being in the world as we read in the following lines:

> Sometime later when searching for my lost identity, I returned on my own to Saint Germain des Prés, a neighborhood I used to know well. Instead of destroying my personality, prison preserved it, reshaping it a little, perhaps, but at least I never forgot who I really was. But now freedom has stripped me of my identity anonymous figures wandering through the streets of Paris. The outside world empties me out, and I feel like a handful of sand cast to the wind. (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 28-29)

Drawing upon this, I would contend that understanding the exiled autobiographical self and the understanding of others are involvedly interwoven in the continuous formation of individual and collective identities. Obviously, Malika's text suggests that exile is not a choice but a life style that seems to be imposed on individuals due to various social, political and cultural conditions. In this perspective, the self that we encounter in her narrative is wedged between Morocco where she was born, lived and imprisoned along with her family members for twenty years, and France where she eventually chose to settle. Accordingly, Oufkir's reflections on her identity under the rubric of post-traumatic experience accentuate the complexity of freedom as a double-edged experience for the exiled autobiographical self. Her narrative ardently discloses how exile (re)shapes the self, transforming notions of home, belonging, being, and knowing. In addition, the question of freedom is at the heart of Malika's autobiography. Hence, she writes, "was foreign to me, and naturally it tasted strange-even bitter- on my tongue" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 5).

Interestingly enough, the above passages highlight the fragmented identity of the exiled autobiographical self in the sense that they underline the paradoxical dynamics operating between post-incarceration and freedom. To ease the suffering of estrangement, fragmentation and displacement that consume her soul and mind, Malika finds solace in the act of returning to Saint Germain des Prés. The latter is a neighbourhood where Malika used to experience indelible memories. This act of return to Saint Germain des Prés indicates two things. At one level, it proves, to cite Smith and Watson, that "the self is split and fragmented, it can no longer be conceptualized as unitary. At a given moment what calls itself the self is different from itself at any other given moment" (Smith & Watson, 2008, p. 133). In other words, the self that we find in *Freedom The Story of my Second life* is an exiled autobiographical self that is both refined and redefined due to experiences of imprisonment and exile she has been through. It implies an existential search for continuity, connectedness, and reclamation of disrupted selfhood, mediated by the temporal and experiential rupture of exile. At another level, in acquaintance with the experience of being exiled, Malika takes on her imprisonment as a site of preservation, wherein the self, though resiliently restrained, resists erasure and experiences a process of self-construction. In this respect, the freedom that Paris seems to offer is conceived of as a source of confusion. In short, it is a condition that dislocates the individual within the obscurity and estrangement of the external world. The worlds Malika has been through are all coloured by paradoxes and incongruities which, ipso facto, has a crucial impact on her sense of self. Indeed, Malika writes "freedom has stripped me of my identity anonymous figures

wandering through the streets of Paris. The outside world empties me out, and I feel like a handful of sand cast to the wind" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, pp. 28–29).

This imagery deftly sums up the dispersion and fragility of identity in exile, where the exiled autobiographical self is depleted of meaning, estranged from cultural and social anchors and familial bonds, only to be morphed into a spectral figure navigating a landscape of indifference. The intricate entanglement between memory, space, displacement and fragmentation places great focus on the autobiographical self as a site of ontological tension, continually negotiating the dialectic of preservation and dissolution within the fractured narrative of exile. This juxtaposition of 'freedom' with Malika's sense of being stripped of identity as she puts it in the above passage embodies the paradox of liberation followed by a profound sense of loss. Basically, freedom symbolizes individuality, independence, self-confidence and self-consciousness. However, in the ambit of Malika's exilic experience, freedom is transformed into a source and condition of estrangement whereby the narrator is delinked from the sense of self-bound to her larger family, memory, homeland, culture, history and belonging. Evidence of this can be read in the following assertion "we hug; we breathe the air of freedom. Yet I feel far from myself. Only after reaching Eric's Parisian apartment, getting past the keypad code, a gate and a doo, do I realize that I am still in prison, inside my head. I have become my own jailor" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 25).

Such focus, this article argues, would provide and invite a new critical interest in Moroccan autobiographical construction of the self that seeks to look beyond the binary oppositions that are both misleading and ubiquitous in Moroccan life narratives. Their misleading aspect stems from the fact that the self in 'our' cultural imaginary is obsessed with the idea that the 'West' is the main source of our "historical retardation" ('Arawī, 1976, p. 2). In short, within this construction of the self, the remembered and the repressed, the local and the global are baked into a discourse that seeks to drive a sense of meaning and coherence for one's life not only from the traumatized past experiences but more significantly from being engaged in a productive interlocution with the Other. In essence, the exiled self that we encounter in *Freedom the Second Story of my Life* falls within Qi Wang's conception of autobiographical construction of the self in a manner highlighted in Wang's *The Autobiographical Self in Time and Culture* (2013) as the following:

> The autobiographical self comes to be constructed through the interwoven memories of self and significant others, in the participation of personal storytelling and family storytelling, and the myriad of narrative exchanges situated in particular interpersonal, cultural, and historical conditions. The autobiographical self then constitutes not only an individual identity of who we are but also a collective identity of whom we are related to" (Wang, 2013, pp. 25–26).

Accordingly, drawing upon Qi Wang's conception of the autobiographical self that resonates with Judith M. Melton's conception of exiled self for we know, as Melton writes, that "the exile looks to the past to reconnect to the network of psychological supports-homeland, cultural identity, worldview, native tongue-that he or she knew in a different time" (Melton, 1998, p. 82), I have chosen to introduce and examine the self in *Freedom the Story of my Second Life* as an exiled autobiographical self. In essence, the exilic autobiographical construction of the self as Wang and Melton suggest entails that the autobiographer's intellectual disposition is very much (re)shaped by social, cultural and spatio-temporal influences that transgress the limits set by national cultures. This perspective emphasizes the

dynamic and fluid characteristics constitutive to the formation of identity in exile, wherein the self is neither fixed nor utterly shaped and defined by mere traditional markers of cultural or national belonging. Instead, exile is turned into a state of persistent negotiation, where the autobiographer rewrites the self by responding to the fragmented realities and experiences of displacement and the transformative effects of transnational interlocution. In tune with this perspective, the self for Malika is located neither at home nor in exile, but in the writer's active engagement with the immediate unfolding events in order to set the self free from fear and agony that are tempted by both memories of imprisonment and the estrangement she plunges into while in exile. The following passage illustrates this point:

> In time Paris teaches me to fight back. Studying how free people go for the throat over the slightest annoyance, I learn the ropes. Sooner or later, my fear will vanish, and I will return blow for blow. At least I hope so, because no one can live constantly with fear, not even someone who lived tortured by it through her youth. (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 45)

Undeniably, the experience of exile has strengthened Malika's sense of self in a manner that challenges both the essentialist definition of identity and the notions that 'we' have crafted about home and belonging. In this narrative, Malika's constructive conception of the self is predicated on two things: imprisonment and exile. Basically, she was accustomed to travelling abroad before the events of the coup d'état in 1972 that led to the death of her father. In this respect, the exiled autobiographical self goes in tandem with memory in the sense that Oufkir's fear is both a personal reality and a collective echo of the political violence of Morocco's Years of Lead. Her attempts to both (re)establish a firm sense of self and overcome the fear that may obstruct such a journey resides in challenging the notions 'we' have about who we are, the ideas and the ideals we have learnt at schools, in the streets and at home. Clearly, the above excerpt highlights the engagement of the self in transformative life struggles, cultural displacement and the reconstruction of identity at individual and collective levels. The above opening statement illustrates that Paris is an infinite source from which Malika has gotten a great amount of inspiration, strength and power to carry on fighting her struggles. By this very capacity, it introduces exile in Paris as a transformative experience that refines her personality and enables her to express her being in the world in a way that is neither inimical to the European modes of being and knowing nor is a fuite en avant to the past wherein most people find shelter whenever they grapple with existential troubles and ruins.

In other words, Oufkir as an exile, to use Yael Prizant's words, seems to "float in between, dispersed yet present, fervently trying to incorporate two cultures into individual, reconstituted hybrid identities shaped by profound emotional ruptures and losses" (Prizant, 2009, p. 64). This state of in-betweenness allows Malika to navigate her sense of self in exile through a profound observation of the actions, behaviours and movements of her interlocutors whether at home or in the street. Caught between her former life that is marked paradoxically by privilege and torture, and the challenging realities that are caused by displacement and fragmentation in exile, Oufkir finds herself in a transitional position that both compels and encourages her to engage in a profound reconsideration and reflection on the disparities between her past and her present. With this in mind, it follows that Malika seeks to establish a subtle understating of her identity that is neither exclusively informed by and entrenched in her

past experiences, nor abruptly formed by the immediate circumstances she actually has to deal with here and now. Interestingly enough, her observations are morphed into a kind of modus vivendi whereby she can reconcile her discordant experiences. Accordingly, this strategy allows Malika to initiate herself into two absolutely different worlds. On the one hand, there is a world where social relations and bonds are structured in tandem with the French national culture. On the other hand, there is a world where she preserves significant elements of her past as highlighted in the following assertion: "I had been raised as a princess, but I came from the people. At the market I was often told I bargained as a Berber" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 126). This way, Malika is deftly able to graft a dynamic and multifaceted sense of self, or to use Fabio Sani's words "self-continuity" (Sani, 2008, p. 62) that evolves under the auspice of and in the context of exile.

In short, the self *in Freedom: The Story of my Second Life* is neither absolutely self-governing nor utterly culturally determined. On the contrary, it draws upon the tensions of the entanglement of the individual and the collective, the social and the cultural. Indeed, these tensions play a crucial role in (re)defining her conceptions of the self, and the standards and expectations she strives to live up to. Understandably, Malika declares that "I am almost a whole again, complete, a confused combination of my former carefree self and my neuroses of today" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 50). This declaration displays her resilience in rebuilding a modern sense of self that integrates her fragmented experiences into an exilic and new environment that is strange and alienable to her. In a sense, Oufkir's self-awareness reflects her efforts to navigate the condition of liminality, suggesting that the rite of passage affords her a space between who she was, who she has become, and who she aspires to be, all while engaging in ordinary life with others. In this respect, it is important to note that the self, as Susan Engel contends, "becomes incorporated, if only temporarily, into one's current sense of self. It travels from the inner reaches of the mind out into the world and then is folded back again into one's identity" (Engel, 1999, p. 81). The incorporation of displaced and fragment self into the world, the world that has dramatically changed in shape and content at both local and global levels, of 'free people' as Malika would have it, is marked by the proclivity towards consumption and estrangement as evidenced in the following excerpt:

> Alone lost in my seat as if I were floating out in my mind-ocean, I shiver to think that someone might stare at me, size me up, pass judgment on me. I am an outsider in this world of free men and women, a world I left behind so long ago that I have forgotten how to blend into it unnoticed. A feeling of oppression overwhelms me, flooding my entire body. (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 18)

This excerpt underlines the idea that the exilic self in *Freedom: The Story of my Second Life* is ensnared in a state of disorientation and estrangement while it struggles to integrate into the fabric of a world that has become strange, and unfamiliar. The experience of exile disrupts Malika's individual sense of fitting into a mere geographical location in the sense that exile casts her into an ostracizing and hostile, foreign and unrecognizable world. Stripped of familiar markers of identity and home, she finds herself delinked from the very fabric of a space that once appeared to define her existence. Exile, in this sense, is not a mere physical displacement but a profound rupture in her sense of self and belonging. In other words, the displacement that Malika is pushed into challenges her sense of self as she struggles to both reconcile with her

traumatized past experience and navigate a space that feels alien and difficult to understand as if she has never been there. For Malika, the self that is entrenched in a familiar and well-established context is now impelled to embark on a strange world wherein familiar and social bonds are auxiliary to numbers and codes that frame interests as she reminds us in the following subtle words: "I am translated into codes and numbers" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 56). Being displaced and pushed into an estranged world, Malika is now challenged to fight against a dual sense of loss. At one level, the loss of her properties, her home, her father and more importantly her memories. This is simply a form of dispossession. This loss is the source of crucial shock she will have to endure for the rest of her life. In simple words, the loss of belonging to a collective experience and aura defines and gives a sense of meaning and coherence to who she has become. At another level, she feels the inability to fully align with a new environment.

Yet, she lacks the intellectual abilities and the desire to integrate into a new environment is also a condition she translates into a creative conduit to rethink and reconsider her sense of being and knowing. The narrator's sense of estrangement is deftly described as a feeling like an outsider in a world that, often against her will, gears her into territories she has never thought of as we read in the following excerpt: "I feel like a strange creature being exhibited for the civilized white man. I am introduced to and embraced by strangers full of superficial empathy" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 217). For Malika, prison and exile expose the cruelty human beings tend to cloud with systems of classification, exclusion and metaphors. Cognizant of the disguising façade modern familial and social relations embody, Malika plunges into a deep examination of false dichotomies that 'we' are accustomed to. In this vein, the only manner via which Malika reaches solace and peace with her traumatized inner self is when she retreats into landscapes of thought and memory although this turn to memory produces what Moroccan sociologist Abdelkebir Khatibi refers to as "unhappy consciousness and perpetual suffering" (Ḫaṭībī, 2019, p. 15). This state of unhappy consciousness that the exiled self experiences, coupled with the agony of being torn between opposing loyalties, spaces, cultures and histories, lay a weighty burden on Malika's shoulders, which can only be articulated through writing. This explains why Malika eventually declares "by writing the sequel to stolen lives, I know that I am freeing myself from misfortune and unhappiness. For better or worse, I am becoming a normal person. But that's not all. As you know by now, I like to step from the shadow and make myself heard" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 229). To be heard is, therefore, a matter of survival for both Malika and others who might have endured the same experience of imprisonment, displacement and fragmentation. As such, Malika's search for self in exile is predicated on the idea, as delineated in Melton's *The Face of Exile Autobiographical Journeys* (1998), that "the exile uprooted self is partially healed through the writing process" (Melton, 1998, p. 64). In other words, self-conception the exiled autobiographical self develops under the rubric of self-integration helps Malika solve difficulties of social interaction and accumulate knowledge about her exilic conditions. That is to say, the very act of self-writing helps her cast the shades of doubt onto the shadows of traumatized past to free herself free from the ghosts that seem to, writes Malika, "darken my mood, lingering for a few hours, even a day or two. These malevolent shadows deny my experience, rage about lies and exaggerations" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 120).

2.1.2. Exile and the Burden of Memory: A Self in Transition

Exile fractures the autobiographical self for it continuously creates a tension between belonging and estrangement. In *Freedom: The Story of My Second Life*, Malika Oufkir confronts the fear of disconnection and uprootedness from her homeland, memories, and identity. This way, her narrative disclosures the fragility of selfhood in exile. Her narrative reflects a profound struggle to reconcile past and present, home and displacement in an attempt to reshape identity in a liminal space where memory and longing intertwine. Ipso facto, the feeling of being separated from a large body of individual and collective experiences, histories and memories that constantly (re)define and (re)shape a 'national character' is the real threat of the self that is displaced into exile. Her fear of being distanced from home, disconnected from friends and family disturbs her existence and rises more challenging questions about the role family and society play in the process of establishing both personal and collective identities that are neither inimical to alterity nor reduced into extreme reductionist discourses and ideologies. By situating the self-concept of her being in the world at the intersection of belonging and difference, Malika's uncertainties explain the perilous and fragmented nature of selfhood in exile. This 'double belonging' discloses a perpetual tension between the desire to be at home, in a community, within culture on the one hand, and the tenacious consciousness of being displaced and estranged on the other. Hence, Malika's sense of identity becomes precarious. This precariousness is not a mere personal matter, but a remnant of an ongoing struggle the self has to bear in the process of (re)defining its being in exile and the world at large. The following passage highlights this point:

> I realized that I'd unleashed the fear that has tormented me for twenty years, the fear of my persecutors and their reprisals. Even though I am now far from my jailers, shielded by the media. I'm afraid everything could collapse around me in an instant. What exactly am I afraid of? I don't even know myself. Certain terrors are deeply rooted so that they defy all logic. (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, pp. 110–111)

In essence, the exiled autobiographical self is always longing for home. In *the Freedom the Story of my Second Life*, the self is represented as the continual struggle between spatial forces and identity. It is a struggle to make a home, (re)originate the fragmented self, and engender a space that opens onto other spaces, experiences, histories and memories. It is here, in the moving borderline of exile, where the exiled self stands neither absolutely ingrained in the memory of the birthplace nor fully comprised by the contours of the new world, that identity is symbiotically reshaped. This liminal and transitive position where the exiled autobiographical self is situated into is illuminated by Edward Said in his *Representation of the Intellectual* (1996) as "neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another" (Said, 2002, p. 49).

There is in Malika's autobiographical construction of the self a keen concern with the idea of in-betweenness as a 'safe space' from which to redefine the self in exile neither as the measure and yardstick of a fixed essential identity, nor as a passive construct of loss, dislocation, and fragmentation, but rather as an entity that is in a continuous process of becoming. In *Freedom: The Story of My Second Life*, this liminal space of the self and the "other", of the fragmented and the displaced, is the conceptual bedrock on which the concept

of self-integration in exile is grounded in Malika's narrative. In this line of thought, Malika's quest for a free self in exile falls within Said's aforementioned framework of the self. De facto, to be tied to the old, that is to a set of discursive structures that are constituted by Moroccan national culture and history from which Malika originates, is neither an excuse to doubt Malika's earnest efforts at being integrated into a new environment, nor an escape from the fact that exile has changed her sense of being and knowing. Within this purview, we can read the following statement:

> Like all uprooted souls, I am fascinated by other people's roots, to the point of envying some Parisians I meet, people whose greatest adventure has been to move to a different neighborhood. For them, I suppose, all these inherited rituals simply go without saying. Bread and wine: the body and blood of that France where I am having so much trouble feeling at home. (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 102)

Accordingly, this excerpt sheds some light on the estrangement the self experiences in exile. Hooked by the complexities of estrangement, the self is often split into many 'selves' that all coalesce into a kind of discourse that seeks to establish and contribute a sense of meaning and coherence to the exiled self. Malika's quest for self in exile through participation and engagement with 'others', typically Parisians, is imbued with envy and fascination, hope and despair due to two reasons. At one level, her sense of self is tragically and significantly informed and shaped by her horrific experience of imprisonment as indicated in her assertion that "for a long time I remained in a prison of my mind, a depressed and fearful recluse" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 15-16). This mnemonic aspect of her tormented experience underlines the fact that her journey into 'the world of freedom', as she would have it, is actually grounded in her ability to learn to (re)live life again as human being and rejuvenate some sense of social interaction and normalcy against all odds the exile might engender. It is important here to remember Said's declaration that exile in a such context becomes "a jealous state" (Said, 2002, p. 206) in the sense that the self is subject to contradictory, but complementary, readings and interpretations. In Malika's narrative *Freedom: The Story of My Second Life*, this paradox stems from the fact that the exiled autobiographical self lives on multifarious, and often times paradoxical cultural narratives, ideas and ideals that originate neither in exile nor in the country of birth.

As such, being estranged and displaced from one's home enables Malika to unlearn what free people take for granted as a definitive feature of their being in the world. In her wordings, Malika reminds us that "I've learned that my needs will never be the same as those of free people. Like them, I was once young and carefree, a blithe victim of fashion and consumer society. Today I know things that others sometimes take a life time to understand" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 76). Here resides the second reason why Malika's search for a pure sense of self is colored with her spirit to creatively transcend false dichotomies that define 'our' mental make-up. This reflection highlights clearly the tensions between loss and resilience, belonging and displacement, modern and traditional in a way that illustrates how exile can graft a profound understanding of identity at both individual and collective levels. The contrast she draws between what she once was 'a blithe victim of fashion and consumer society', and what she has become is very important to understand the fact that the self in exile is subject to disjuncture and rapture. Interestingly, in search of what may be the roots of the

self beyond the conditions and confines of exile, the self in *Freedom The Story of My Second Life* seems to be haunted by and absorbed into what is perceived as the conflict between the old and the new, between the 'East' and the 'West', faith and doubt that results in "the fragmented and schizophrenic decentring of the self." (Bhabha, 1994, p. 217).

From her exilic experience, Malika is eventually convinced that binaries such as 'East' verses 'West' are but the figment of our imagination. It follows that the very definition of the self we find in *Freedom the Story of my Second Life* stands as a form of bridge that connects two different worlds. With this being said, exile in Malika's narrative is morphed into a prerogative aspect of her being in the world. It becomes an inevitable condition to express the duality with which she lives life. She turns exile into a site under the auspice of which she explores the texture of identity at individual and collective levels. Not so oddly then, rewriting the self from an exilic experience continues to be an act of resistance of the immediate and the remote that rests on introspection and reclamation with respect to the fact that "the self is a progressive construct, continual in its self-redefinition" (Falola, 2022, p. 3). In short, the self that Malika seeks to establish de novo, from an exilic experience, is the self that is capable enough to reconcile with the past and speak it out to the rest of the world, as she emphasizes in the following note: "deep down I know that telling my story is an essential part of my rebirth. To exit once more in the eyes of others after being stripped of selfhood, I must speak. Write. And, yes, ask shamelessly to be loved" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 111).

Drawing upon this confession, exile is an opportunity that the displaced and fragmented writers seize upon and employ in order to express their selves in a language that speaks to both their personal experiences of estrangement and dislocation and the broader sociocultural and political contexts that give shape to who they are or become. Given the intricate interplay between the self and memory, context, as we read in Susan Engel's *Context is Everything: The Nature of Memory* "plays a huge role in determining the self one knows through one's stories about the past" (Engel, 1999, p. 87). Through this prism, the exilic context-based experience, as articulated in *Freedom the Story of my Second life*, can be read not as a mere condition of loss per se, but rather as a significant transformative space wherein the narrator reconsiders concepts such as 'home', 'belonging' and 'identity', all in a manner that challenges the dominant narratives pertinent to these notions.

Now, what is so central to Malika's autobiographical (re)writing of the self from an exilic perspective is that it comes at the intersection of the personal and the social, the national and the global. It is an arduous process of both rehabilitating and reconstructing the self in an entirely different light. The light that the self in *Freedom The Story of my Second Life* hopes to light up is enlightened by and written in a new register that pays respect to Life irrespective of language, gender, religion and/or all other frames that not only seek to define who 'we' are, but also set limits on 'our' minds and bodies. In this respect, we can understand why Malika's 'second life' in exile is marked by both fascination and confusion, ambivalence and admiration regarding Parisians' modes and modalities of being and knowing. This uncertainty that Malika underlines about the self that is being reconstituted in exile is explained as follow "although this new existence may be painful at times, with every passing day I draw closer to the daily life of those who live in freedom, because I am, simply, free. And I am beginning a third life" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 225). Fascinated by ambience of uncertainty, she continually

insists “I do not know if I can be happy. Time will tell, of course, unless I pass right by happiness without seeing it” (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 228).

Furthermore, a central feature of the self in Malika’s self-writing is its fragmentation in the sense that the self is always in utter need of the outsideness of another self as to be recognized and perceived as an “autonomous whole” (Melton, 1998, p. 73) taking into account the fact that in the context of exile integration remains the key and the trope to such experience. There is no way for the self to be realized as whole without others. That is to say, (re)presenting the exiled autobiographical self constitutes not only an individual identity of who ‘we’ are but also a collective identity of people we are related to in the sense that autobiographical self "is constructed through the interwoven memories of self and significant others, in the participation of personal storytelling and family storytelling, and in the myriad of narrative exchanges situated in particular interpersonal, cultural, and historical conditions" (Wang, 2013, pp. 25–26). With this in mind, the self in *Freedom the Story of my Second Life* is understood as an entity that progresses forward without being uprooted from collective experiences, histories and memories that Malika has endured and lived through whether in Morocco where she was imprisoned, tortured and was set free, or in France where she eventually chose to settle and rebuild a new life. Pertinently, she writes:

> With each word, I feel life surging through me. How astonishing it is, this sensation of coming back to life, of uttering one’s first cry at the age of forty-four, and above all, of being excited at the idea of beginning all over again! For I am not merely going on, I am beginning again. (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 114)

It follows that in *Freedom: The Story of My Second Life* the very idea of (re)constructing the self anew reflects a critical juncture where exile is both espoused and transcended in Malika’s search for an ‘ideal self’ that bridges the gaps between the past and present, the local and global. In this sense, redefining and reconstructing the self bring memory into the process in a way that allows the exiled self to reconnect with the past. This ubiquity of the self in exile and beyond is but a translation of Malika’s efforts to reclaim agency in a way that does not fix the latter to a specific space and time. By expanding her presence beyond the boundaries of a single setting, Malika seeks to maintain her right to establish her narrative and experience, not just as a victim of political violence, but as an active agent that is fully engaged in the construction of her own selfhood. In short, *Freedom The Story of my Second* Life is a journey to reconstruct the self in a language that embodies, what Said highlighted in his *The World, the Text, and the Critic* as “worldliness or circumstantiality” (Said, 1983, p. 34) of the self-being engaged in both local and global realities from exile as a transformative space. The following excerpt explains this point:

> Unlike many others in this free world, I feel fine around the homeless, even better, in fact, than I do around people with fixed domiciles, who inevitably make me nervous. The thing is the homeless do not cheat. They are wholly themselves, completely up front, and I recognize myself in their naïve and desperate way of perceiving the world. (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 82)

By and large, this article has sought to briefly elucidate the point that (re)writing the exiled autobiographical self in the context of exilic experience is not solely an act that is based

on mere individual experiences and memories, but a dynamic process that illustrates the historical and cultural developments pertinent to the country in which the autobiographer, in this case Malika Oufkir, is displaced. With this in mind, rewriting exiled autobiographical self, Malika's narrative can be interpreted as a form of cultural preservation and revival, enabling the transmission of ancestral knowledge, traditions and values across generations and geographies. This process takes into consideration the fact that the autobiographical self is "an individual expression and a cultural product" (Wang, 2013, p. 125) that reflects the kind of self-knowledge the displaced self seeks to reconsider in light of local and global experiences and realities. Chiefly, it is throughout the act of rewriting the self that the exiled subject is engaged in a process of self-knowing that relocates the self in a 'space' where it is capable enough to question ideological underpinnings of identity. More importantly, as a process that is predicated on language, culture and history, rewriting the self in the exilic context requires to consider that,

> The self which autobiography performs is the self who forgets as well as remembers, the self who dies as well as lives. It is the self that comes up against its limits, most especially the limit of the other by virtue of which and only concerning which the self knows who and where it is and thereby becomes "fierce with reality. (Gunn, 1982, p. 147)

Drawing upon Gunn's insights into the construction of the self, the exiled autobiographical self cannot assume total independence from the whole communities where life is lived and the self is imbued with ideals, values and virtues that give some sense of meaning and order to the self. As a matter of fact, through critical engagement with the past, autobiographical writers, such as Malika, are able not only to rewrite and redefine the self in a manner that enables them to adjust to a new environment but also to resist and disrupt the discursive violence constitutive to all realms wherein the self is constantly articulated.

2.2. Exile and Memory: Exploring Autobiographical Narratives of Displacement and Fragmentation

2.2.1. Memory as a Bridge: Navigating Exile and Selfhood

This subsection is designed to see into how memory is autobiographically represented in Malika's *Freedom the Story of my Second Life*. To do so, I have chosen to zero in on one aspect of memory, which is autobiographical memory. This narrative is an attempt to reconstruct personal and collective experiences of displacement and identity renegotiation. As she embarks into exile, Malika's narrative highlights the tensions between past and present shaped by imprisonment, displacement and estrangement. Navigating her sense of self through memory serves as a catalyst for introspection and redefinition of selfhood in the sense that her *Freedom the Story of My Second Life* presents her life course in exile as a retrospective and progressive reconstruction of her being in the world. In short, this subsection shall also explore how exile is introduced in Malika's *Freedom the Story of my Second Life* as a transformative force that conterminously strengthens and alienates her sense of being and knowing.

In the tradition of autobiographical writing, autobiographical memory is essential to sustain a sense of identity, self-awareness and continuity in life. In this respect, in a chapter titled "Autobiographical Memory," Robyn Fivush argues that "autobiographical memory is the core of identity" (Fivush, 2013, p. 13) which implies that the acts of remembrance and

recollection as essential components of autobiographical memory are very much informed by socio-cultural and historical contexts wherein identity is continuously shaped and (re)shaped. Autobiographical memory in particular, as Susan Engel proves in *Context is Everything: The Nature of Memory* (1999), has demonstrated a strong ability to grasp the intricate links between the establishment of the self, memory and context. In this perspective, Engel contends that,

> Autobiographical memory is on the one hand a deeply personal, subjective, and vivid construction of the past, a construction that reveals, creates, and communicates a personal identity. But we constantly use these memories in public transactions. To that extent we expect reliability, accuracy, and objectivity. What and how we remember has consequences for our own lives and the lives of those included our memories. (Engel, 1999, p. 22)

This being the case, autobiographical memory poses a real challenge in terms of its formation due to the proclivity it displays in the course of playing on the individual and the collective to account for one's being in the world. In this respect, this subsection shall take a further step to explore how self and memory are intricately weaved in Malika's *Freedom the Story of my Second Life* to rewrite her identity under the aegis of displacement and fragmentation. Certainly, the narrative is a form of quest through which the narrator reflects on the individual and collective dimensions of memory from an exilic perspective in a manner that discloses how the past shapes the present of a displaced self, and how memory is predicated on both personal and collective experiences. Evidence of this can be found in the following statement that reads as follow "we hug; we breathe the air of freedom. Yet I feel far from myself. Only after reaching Eric's Parisian apartment, getting past the keypad code, a gate and a door, do I realize that I am still in prison, inside my head. I have become my own jailor" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 23).

This assertion suggests that encounters between Malika's inner world and her external experiences—in prison, at home in Morocco, and exile—are pivotal in reconstructing her autobiographical memory, as the latter centres on "moments of interaction (or combustion) between the outer world and the inner world. Our memories of the personal past seem to capture the quality of our relations to others, or in some cases the lack of that relation" (Engel, 1999, p. 103). In this respect, Malika's memories of the personal, the individual and the collective past shape and define the quality of her relations with her fragmented self and the selves of others alike. With this being said, her autobiographical memory can be interpreted as a persistent effort to rearticulate her experiences in order to communicate them with others. To put it differently, *Freedom the Story of my Second life* is grounded in autobiographical memory so as to give a sense of order and meaning to both events that have taken place in the past, and the ones that are being experienced and remembered here and now. More importantly, recalling Engel's contention that autobiographical memory "begins early and in a social context" (Engel, 1999, p. 27) is essential to understanding the 'here' and 'now' of memory in Malika's narrative.

The feeling of estrangement that Malika underlines in the above excerpt highlights the idea that autobiographical memory is very much predicated on collective experiences she and her family lived through. Recognizing that her existence in the world feels strange and alienable, both at home (Morocco) and in exile, reflects a significant dissonance between her sense of freedom and her yearning to free her memory from the ghosts of the past that restrain

her soul and body. It is at this critical juncture that we are able to see that autobiographical memory in *Freedom the Story of my Second life* plays a pivotal role in the process of constructing the self in exile. Of course, this narrative helps Malika in the process of investigating and mapping the trajectory of her life in exile. It acts as incentive to memory, a way to speak to the disrupted and the estranged in a way that encourages dislocated subjects, such as herself and her family members, to rethink their being in the world against systems of exclusion that continuously work to push the subalternized to the margin of society.

Here, it is important to remember Melton's conception of the intricate interconnections between self, exile and memory. In this respect, we read in his book *The face of Exile Autobiographical Journeys,* that "autobiographical memories are important, but the disrupted context of the events of their memories plays a significant role in how the self is recollected" (Melton, 1998, p. 81). On that note, the narrator Malika finds acquaintance and accompany in being with homeless people because their world, although it lacks critical aspects that contribute to stability, safety and well-being, it does not promise dubious ideals that likely govern and condition the lives of so-called free individuals. In short, the process of recollecting the self enables Malika to draw a juxtaposition between her fragmented existence with the precarious lives of the homeless. Malika's personal memories of imprisonment, fragmentation, and estrangement—recalled through her experience of exile—serve as the foundation for an empathetic identification with the struggles of homeless people, whom she perceives to share the realities of exclusion, scarcity, and resilience. The following passage highlights this point that:

> Unlike many others in this free world, I feel fine around the homeless, even better, in fact, than I do around people with fixed domiciles, who inevitably make me nervous. The thing is the homeless do not cheat. They are wholly themselves, completely up front, and I recognize myself in their naïve and desperate way of perceiving the world. (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 82)

Interestingly enough, this passage pinpoints to Malika's preference of homeless people on the account that their lives are not, according to Malika, tainted by false intimacy, cheating and hypocrisy that she finds in the world of the so-called free individuals. The underlying idea of this passage is that "autobiographical memory has important relationships with emotional life. Experiences that are not lived with a significant level of emotional involvement do not activate an adequate level of attention" (Smorti, 2020, p. 25). As such, the nuances that Malika draws between the kind of factual authenticity she ascribes to homeless people, and the agony and fraudulence she attributes to the "domiciles" as she calls them, suggest that autobiographical memory does two things. At one level, it plays a crucial role in the way her identity is being reshaped. Indeed, the experiences that she has been through are both vividly remembered and invite great attention thanks to the profundity they illustrate regarding the human condition. At another level, her autobiographical memory acts as a filter through which the dynamics of social interaction are interpreted and played out. In short, the preference of the homeless ways of living and being marks two things. On the one hand, it highlights her profound attachment to the past. On the other hand, it emphasizes the present of this past in understanding her experience of displacement and estrangement.

At this junction, autobiographical memory is a good place from which to attend to the intricate interplay between the past and the present at the level of memory construction in Malika's *Freedom the Story of my Second Life* with regard to fact that autobiographical memory "contributes substantially to building the sense of self of the individual and his or her identity" (Smorti, 2020, p. 55). Having said that, we can understand why she sadly declares "I have never understood why I feel threatened by crowds outdoors, whereas they never bother me the metro-except during rush hours, when free people are packed together like sardines, and the smell of my neighbour's breath can be sickening" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 62). Through the prism of autobiographical memory, this confession points to the vestiges of past experiences as well as the effects they have on Malika's self-knowledge of the interpersonal boundaries and of the shared spaces wherein they are all performed. Accordingly, the experience she expresses in this quote is a form of reading of the past and her place in a historically, socially and culturally specific time and place. Specifically in the sense that Malika's life experiences and memories are informed by and grounded in places very few people have access to.

Of course, the instinctual discomfort in rush-hours metro is connected to sensory reactions in the sense that it underlines how bodily experiences can dredge up 'mute' associations with confinement and fragility. This accentuates how memory construction entails not only mental recollections but also embodied reactions in a manner that shapes Malika's comfort and/or discomfort in social settings. The implication of these feelings for autobiographical memory in *Freedom the Story of my Second Life* is that how Malika thinks about what she is doing has a great effect on both her intellect and the way she engages in the process of remembering given that, as Waters and Fivush demonstrated in their study on "Sociocultural and Functional Approaches to Autobiographical Memory" (2013), "for a memory to be autobiographical, there must be an awareness of a self in the present recalling a self in the past" (Fivush & Waters, 2013, p. 221). In this vein, the statement 'I remember', which is so ubiquitous in *Freedom the Story of my Second Life*, has an indisputable status for we know that we can question and doubt facts but not memories. The following statement is redolent of this interpretation. Malika states that: "I remember that in this world, people will never have enough time, not even the time to know anything is missing" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 98). It follows that through her autobiographical journey, Malika deciphers people in her life, lieu of memories, close friends, close and remote casual accountancies and strangers alike. The descriptions we find in her narrative are embroidered with a continuous questioning of the whereabouts and vicissitudes of her life 'then' and 'now', her own intentions and those of others. Of course, the past and the present that she has experienced as personal historical moments are interchangeable in her narrative given the fact that in autobiographical memory "personal periods are blocks of time dominated by a particular set of event features, with landmark events signalling the transition from one period to the next" (Berntsen & Rubin, 2012, p. 161).

Urged on by the spectre of not being able to cope with the speed of modern life both in Morocco and France, Malika's discomfort in crowded spaces highlights the idea that memory extends beyond individual experience to include socially constructed frameworks. Indeed, the ambiguity she refers to in terms of the juxtaposition she draws between outdoor crowds, which makes her feel threatened, and the metro highlights the fact that personal memories and past

experiences have a critical impact on the way she perceives social settings. This, in turn, amplifies the feelings of vulnerability that are consuming her soul and body as illustrated in the following assertion "this is the world of freedom, and it exhausts me, eating me from inside. Perhaps just too soon, or maybe I will stay broken forever" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 28). This combination of feelings of vulnerability and substantiality in terms of autobiographical construction of self *in Freedom the Story of my Second Life* demonstrates, to cite Harald Welzer's insights into autobiographical memory, that the later allows us:

> Not only to mark memories as our memories; it also forms the temporal feedback matrix of our self, with which we can measure where and how we have changed and where and how we have remained the same. It also offers a matrix which allows us to coordinate the attributions, assessments, and judgments of our person that our social environment carries out almost ceaselessly. (WELZER, 2010, p. 292)

In this respect, we can understand why Malika declares "even today I am still a ghost, though the ball and chain I trail are now invisible" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 17). In essence, autobiographical memory and the construction of the self go hand in hand in the sense that no autobiographer can get engaged in a search of exploring her or his past self without having a memory at the work. In *Freedom the Story of my Second Life*, memory becomes a kind of repository of knowledge whereby the self is enabled to both navigate the past and involve in the present that is being (re)shaped before Malika's eyes. This interconnection between past and present that is conjured up at the level of Malika's autobiography emphasizes that the nature of the self and memory are conjoined in the act of remembering. The invisibility of the ghosts that continue to haunt Malika's memory blurs the line between the past and the present. As such, it illustrates the crucial weight of the ordeal Malika endured in the prison on her efforts to challenge the unforeseeable circumstances while adjusting to new environment. That is to say, when the self and memory are autobiographically interwoven, they can help us to "arrive at a better understanding of a given problem and also how our memories help to set the course for our behavior and goals in complex social situations" (Berntsen & Rubin, 2012, p. 139).

Within this large perspective, autobiographical memory in *Freedom the Story of My Second Life* consists of a smorgasbord of episodes and events that highlight the way the autobiographer Malika engages the past in the present in a way that helps her reintroduce order and meaning to her life in light of times and places that are in themselves disruptive, stranger and precarious. Certainly, imprisonment and displacement have torn her existence apart to the extent that her sense of self and personal memory are ostensibly transformed into a source of obstruction thereby discrediting her from the very idea of belonging. As such, the vestiges of isolation she experienced in prison combined with the disorientation of displacement she eventually gets enmeshed in, both in Morocco and France, disrupt the continuity of her 'narratives' and bring about real challenges to her 'second life'. These challenges create intense adversities she will have to confront to establish a modern sense of self and lead a normal life. Notwithstanding these trials and tribulations that resonate with what Smith and Watson introduce as "creative self-engagements" (Smith & Watson, 2001, p. 128), Malika strives to rebuild her identity as a woman, particularly a self-exile woman. Succinctly, she weaves

disparate episodes of her memory with key moments of hope and faith in a way that insinuates a profound sense of "autobiographical consciousness" (Mandel, 1980, p. 49) constitutive to autobiographical memory. The following excerpt from *Freedom the Story of My Second Life* highlights this point:

> While I was away, the world has learned to do without faucets, sinks have learned to see their customers coming, sinks have learned to see their customers coming … Dear God, have I been asleep for an entire century?
>
> For a long time, when I thought about what it would be to be free, I wondered about the world outside and whether I would ever be able to adopt to new ways of thinking, to take part in conversation and figure the latest slang, the abbreviation, the clues. I didn't know if I would still be able to fit in with the people of my generation, if our shared memories from so long ago would be enough to sustain that connection … I don't' know whether to be fascinated or distressed, but one thing is clear: I am a child, an infant in an adult body, and if this disorientation keeps up, I will have to learn how to use fork all over again. (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, pp. 54–55)

Accordingly, Malika takes a further step to highlight how the temporal disjuncture that stems from her joining freedom plunges her into a profound experience of disorientation and estrangement. In so doing, she accentuates the gap between her past self that is shaped by torture and violence within the world/walls of prison in Morocco, and a new world that has completely moved forward in her absence. The shift she observes in terms of the way social relations are played out baffles her mind and rubs her thinking. However, her mental make-up has been established within the traditional Moroccan family under the aegis of privilege afforded to her inside the palace where she was treated and "raised as a princess and playmate" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 8). This could not save her from being ambushed into another, perhaps one could add unforeseen, ordeal. This adversity comes out as she gets involved de novo in the world of 'free people'. The world that she once revisited and concocted in her dreams and memories while in prison. That world is now marked by a drastic change, all in her absence. Modes and modalities of 'free people' are no longer defined by the same traditional principles and norms, but rather by a set of sophisticated yet lofty skills at the service of dishonesty and egoistic interests. The word freedom that fully took her attention for a long time is unfathomably now blasé. There is no escape from this ordeal, but to confront it. In Malika's *Freedom the Story of My Second Life*, this struggle takes place at the level of memory.

2.2.2. The Weight of Memory: Identity, Displacement, and Resilience in Oufkir's Exilic Narrative

This subsection seeks to delve deep into the intricate interplay between memory, identity, and the fragmented self in Malika Oufkir's autobiographical narrative. It highlights her struggle to reconcile the trauma of imprisonment and exile with the challenges of reintegration into a rapidly changing world. Through her recollections, Oufkir reveals the tension between past and present, hope and despair, as she seeks to redefine her sense of self amidst the disorienting realities of freedom. In Malika's *Freedom the Story of my Second Life* memory emerges as a pivotal force. Simply, memory involves reshaping her identity and enabling her to navigate the complexities of personal and collective history, while confronting the erasure of femininity, desire, and belonging. Ultimately, her story underscores the resilience required to rebuild a life fractured by displacement and loss. With this in mind, the previous

long passage hints at this point in the sense that at the heart of it we find that Malika is seeking to understand the tensions between reintegration into a current fluctuating environment. This, in turn, requires internalizing an array of novel social norms and parameters, and a huge reservoir of memories that ignite the ghosts of the past. Through her quest into a 'second life', she is always reminded of the past as she eloquently puts it in the following eloquent words "prison still weighs me on me like an invisible shadow" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 152). Hence, it follows that the above passages are suggestive of the struggles Malika has continually fought in order to reconstruct palpable links between her personal history and a present that is in a state of constant transformation. In short, this transformative change in her life, or "disorientation" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 54) as Malika puts it, underlines that individual identity is neither separable from collective experience, nor indeed a static entity, but rather an ongoing process. It tells us that Malika's sense of self is grounded in memory and that the latter operates not in a void but in a command and presence of the self. One is derivative of the other. This negotiation between the past that is remembered, and the present that is experienced is essential for autobiographical memory to operate accurately. William Hirst and David Manier have the following explanation for the intricate interplay between memory and the self at the level of autobiographization of both. In their article titled "Remembering as Communication: A Family Recounts its Past", they write that:

> Autobiographical memories are expressed in and shaped by conversations. Principles of communication, such as the importance of context and meaning, affect both how and what we remember, both to ourselves and others. Conversational roles play an important part in this process. Only by analyzing remembering as an act of communication can we begin to understand in all its complexity autobiographical memory - how humans tell the stories of their lives to themselves and others. (Hirst & Manier, 1996, p. 288)

Drawing upon Hirt and Manier's characterization of autobiographical memory as a process that engages the autobiographer in a dialogic interlocution with both individual and collective past experiences, histories and memories, Malika's recollections convey multifaceted aspects that speak to the remembrance of her life. These recollections symbolize the conflict between hope and despair, faith and doubt, agony and relief, deterioration and rejuvenation as they are displayed in her search for a sense of self that echoes neither the past nor the present. With an eye toward a society where Life is the capital per se, Malika oscillates between the past and the present. On the one hand, there is the past that took a precious part of her life, her youth. On the other hand, there is the present, which daily bombards her with 'fetishized journeys' full of everything except life. But, for her life to sprout anew she finds out that the past, her past, needs to be explored to find out where past experiences and memories meet with hopes and dreams her present promises. Certainly, autobiographical memory lies at the heart of this process for it translates individual and collective experiences and histories into "a site for the individual and cultural construction of truth" (Fivush, 2013, p. 14). There are many of these identifications in the following lengthy passage:

> But each night, when I told my stories, in order not to disappoint my audience or myself, I insisted on true love over carnal pleasure. How many nights, alone in that dark cell, on that ratty mattress, did I dream of making love only to wake saddened and embittered in the morning? I soon learned to stop thinking about it, or at least to think about it less often, for fear of hurting myself even more deeply.

> Over twenty years, I've forgotten little by little what it means to be a woman, desirable and desired. I don't know how to smile, laugh, or dance for a man who looks at me with longing in his eyes. I no longer know the arts of seduction. My body seems to have lost its primary function: I am no longer a woman, just an eating, drinking, sleeping, walking machine. A body... I barely think of myself as having one.
> I have to relearn everything about being a woman, from the beginning. When men turn around to check me out, my cheeks flush, my hands shake, my toes go cold-a real production, the Blushing Virgin, an act so rare these days that I would probably make a fortune in a circus. I am an old virgin, a curiosity, a museum piece. My regained freedom leaves me dizzy and oddly empty. I dream of love, desire, pleasure, but I'm afraid and ashamed of my own fear. I'm pathetic. (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 176)

This lengthy passage illustrates a deep intersection between autobiographical self-construction and the role memory plays in the process of shaping identity both at individual and collective levels. Reading through these lines one can go further to presume that autobiography for Malika is, in its essence, an art of memory. It is precisely at this critical junction between self and memory that we begin to see autobiographical memory taking on a pivotal role in tracing the trajectory of Malika's personal life. It encapsulates the shades and the shadows of the interlinks between her past experiences and her present self which is already in a constant move. Through a form of what Engel calls "combustion" (Engel, 1999, p. 103) between the conditions of the inner world and the realities of outer world, Malika is adroitly able to dispel and expose the darkness that shrouds her being in the world. As the memory unfolds, Malika oscillates between hope and despair, faith and doubt. Her body lacks the vivacity that life commands to embrace it. It is a sort of body that no longer invites human touch. It has been transmuted into an apathetic shape empty of life. The aura of it is indifference. In this pendulum-like movement of her quest for a life worth living beyond the weighty burden of the past and the chaotic outfit of the present, Malika seems to plunge into a journey that requires a profound reconsideration of definitions, ideas and ideals she has firmly crafted in her life, whether inside prison or in the world of 'free people', and even beyond for that matter. In so doing, she will be able to both reconnect herself with other selves and reintegrate into the fabric of modern society. It is at this point that 'we' come to grasp that, as Craing R. Braclay and Thomas S. Smith emphasize in their article titled "Autobiographical Remembering: Creating Personal Culture", for memory "to be autobiographical it must acquire certain kinds of meanings, especially meanings associated with feelings of connectedness" (Conway et al., 2011, p. 80).

Simply put, the above except cited from *Freedom the Story of My Second Life* offers a deep understanding of resilience, vulnerability and the struggle for self-redefinition in totally different 'times' and 'places. In her search for the self that operates under the aegis of modern parameters of social relation, memory plays a crucial role. This crucial role stems from the fact that memory allows Malika to take into consideration all the ins and outs of the matter. The latter is the state of estrangement that results from her inability to love, to dance, to smile and to progress towards a future. Essentially, her pursuit of self-discovery has confirmed her that awareness, particularly self-awareness, of the past and future are intimately related because both draw upon and refer to the same knowledge held in memory. By that very fact, she sadly

mourns the loss of her connection to femininity and sexuality in a jargon that suggests that her fate appears to be already sealed off somewhere between the walls of prison and the matrix of modern society. Apparently, her lack of desire brings about mental fatigue, frustration and fragmentation into her life. In short, the fact that her dreams of love and desire are informed by and transitorily confined to the experiences of imprisonment proves that memory is morphed into a site wherein her sense of self begins to sprout anew. This is precisely what Harald Welzer spoke of when he writes that autobiographical memory,

> Allows us not only to mark memories as our memories; it also forms the temporal feedback matrix of our self, with which we can measure where and how we have changed and where and how we have remained the same. It also offers a matrix which allows us to coordinate the attributions, assessments, and judgments of our person that our social environment carries out almost ceaselessly. (WELZER, 2010, p. 292)

Furthermore, the tension between an unsatisfied desire coupled with unhappy memories and emotional repression as expressed in the following evocative expression "I've forgotten little by little what it means to be a woman, desirable and desired" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 176) is redolent of perpetual vestiges of imprisonment, displacement and loss that exceed the personal to echo broader leitmotifs of disorientation, marginalization and identity erasure. To forget what it means to be a woman is implicative of losing memory, ipso facto, a sense of self. Poignantly, being torn apart between the traumatized past and a perplexing present, Malika's yearning for love and empathy seems to solely amplify her bitterness. Eventually, this resentment compels her to stifle emotions and desires in order to avoid being treated and looked at as someone with an uncontainable sense of insolence and vulgarity. The experience of imprisonment coupled with the exilic condition has utterly baffled her sense of self leaving her feelings estranged from the societal norms of womanhood.

Upon her release, the freedom that Malika fought to earn, for over twenty years, is now transmitted into a source of estrangement. The world she figuratively concocted while in prison appears to be at odds with the real world she is now plunged into after her release. Her anticipation that there exists a free world where virtue, love, and empathy are the key impetuses that govern life at its individual and collective aspects is nothing but a mirage of her wishful thinking, a fantasy. This is because life in the modern world is defined in terms that place excessive focus on the reification of everything through a huge number of machines such as advertising. That is why Malika declares plainly, "I have to say that since my return to the outside world, I have been dismayed by the way advertising has taken over our lives" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 66). Nevertheless, there is also in the above lengthy passage a hint at Malika's sense of resilience to withstand what I introduced as a 'double ordeal' that she has been put through. Being cognizant not only of what happened but also of the challenges that are confronting her 'here' and 'now' is evidence of what Mark Freeman introduced as "autobiographical consciousness" (Freeman, 2001, p. 286). This refers in *Freedom the Story of my Second Life* to the idea that the recourse to the past in order to impregnate the self with a sense of coherence and meaning is profoundly interwoven with memory. So, the statement "I have to relearn everything about being a woman, from the beginning" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 176) implies that memory plays a crucial role not only in the (re)establishment of self-consciousness that allows Malika to deftly question experiences, histories and memories from

which she originates, but also to unlearn what it might mean to be modern women and 'free subject' without being uprooted from collective Moroccan culture and history. It follows that Malika explores her intellect to shy away from fear that continuous to have a grip over her memory. This self-concept is referred to in the following statement "I'm afraid, and ashamed of my own fear. I'm pathetic" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 176).

3. CONCLUSION

Examined through the prism of Malika's reflections on fear, hope, love, faith, and life in general, with a particular focus on her personal experiences, the autobiographical memory in *Freedom the Story of my Second Life* is basically predicated on and "organized by transitional events, events that change the fabric of daily life" (Berntsen & Rubin, 2012, p. 176). Accordingly, the autobiographical construction of the self and memory in *Freedom the Story of my Second Life* are derived from and shaped by Malika's engagement with daily events and occurrences. There is a huge reservoir of personal experiences and memories in this autobiographical narrative that all mark the shifts Malika has been through, both while in prison and after her release. Certainly, these transitional events preserve her sense of self-continuity and retain her identity from being erased and sublated into an estranged world, 'a free world' as she cynically puts it, wherein people "worship money so much that they end up quite sincerely believing that it can cure all ills" (Oufkir & Coverdale, 2006, p. 233). In this way, Malika's trenchant observations of habitually prosaic aspects of daily existence, as a 'space' wherein identities are reshaped and meaning is constantly regenerated, play a significant role in the way memory and the self are interwoven in *Freedom the Story of My Second Life*. In this respect, autobiographical memory agues Willem A. Wageraar in his article "Is memory self-serving", serves "the updating of the conceptual self in a highly adaptive and efficient manner, and makes us optimally equipped to deal with the singularities of everyday life" (Wageraar, 2008, p. 203).

In short, in *Freedom: The Story of My Second Life*, Malika Oufkir's autobiographical memory is defined and shaped by an array of transitional events that introduce significant shifts in Malika's life, particularly during her imprisonment and eventually after her release. These events, which redefine her sense of being and knowing, accentuate her reflections on fear, hope, and love. Malika's observations on daily life serve as a kind of medium through which she navigates identity. As such, it offers a significant commentary on a world where materialism is pushing virtues and values to the margin of history and narration. Malika narrative underscores the adaptive nature of autobiographical memory in establishing a coherent sense of self amid profound changes of world already precarious.

In addition to these reflections, Malika's narrative highlights the role of memory in bridging the gap between the traumatic past and the possibility of a future shaped by resilience. The transition from incarceration to freedom illustrates not just a physical release, but also an emotional and psychological struggle, where memory becomes a discursive apparatus of preservation, survival and empowerment. The very act of writing her autobiography serves as a reclamation of power in the sense that it enables Malika to reinterpret her experiences and assert control over her life story(ies). This is evident in her ability to shift through the trauma and extract meaning from the darkest moments of her imprisonment. Through this process, she reconstructs her identity not just in response to the harshness of her circumstances, but as a

testament to her ability to withstand and rise above them. In this way, the *Freedom: The Story of My Second Life* also is transmitted into a form of resistance, not only to the body incarceration imposed on her but to the forces of forgetting and erasure. Therefore, the shifting nature of her autobiographical memory provides a strong critique of how identities are shaped and reshaped by external forces, while also reaffirming the resilience of the self in reclaiming its agency through memory and narrative.

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