

On March 30 2007, I forgot Abdelkebir Khatibi.

I will always remember this date. The only thing I had thought about for weeks prior to this date was that Abdelkebir Khatibi was due to arrive and that I was to meet him at the Chicago airport. But when the day came, I forgot him. Or rather, I remembered him too late. I arrived at the airport ready to welcome him but he had already arrived, the previous day.

My dismay at the discovery of my error and at the gravity of having forgotten Abdelkebir Khatibi can be easily imagined. Not only was he my guest, our guest, at Northwestern, for the first time, but also I had dreamt for so long of this encounter with the writer whose work had guided my intellectual path since my first year of graduate school. I wrote my dissertation on two of his novels and a poetic work, and at the time of his visit I was finishing the manuscript of my first book in which he was one of the central literary and philosophical characters. How then could I have forgotten Abdelkebir Khatibi?

For me, it is impossible to forget Abdelkebir Khatibi. Yet, this impossible thing happened. Perhaps, this failure of memory was the effect of an excess of memory: I remembered him too much. Before I forgot him, all I remembered was his pending arrival. Today, as I think about Abdelkebir Khatibi, I suspect that my memory of him will always be doubled: too much and too little, an excess of memory that memory may not always be able to bear. What I will always



ABDELKEBIR KHATIBI. Ph. Mona Mårtensson.

remember is the day I forgot Abdelkebir Khatibi. This fateful date of March 30 2007 forever binds my memory to him, to his arrival: my guest, my mentor, who was about to become my friend.

Luckily for me, no one understood this double bind of memory - too much and too little - better than Abdelkebir Khatibi. When I finally found him, a day late, he interrupted my profuse apologies with “mais quel est le problème?” In fact, every time my colleagues teased me in his presence about this forgetfulness, Abdelkebir would generously rise to my defence with his “mais quel est le problème?” He was on my side.

Abdelkebir was on my side because he understood the nature of my tattooed memory; for what else is *Une mémoire tatouée*¹, this autobiographical novel, if no one of too much and too little, one that suffers from its own excess and falters under the weight of this excess? The inscriptions of the tattooed memory are so deep and indelible that it becomes impossible to remember them in a timely fashion: a paradox of memory that Abdelkebir ever so elegantly disclosed to us in his writing. As I said, I did remember Abdelkebir

1. See Abdelkebir Khatibi's *La mémoire tatouée*. El Jadida: Editions Okad, 2007.

Khatibi but too early and too late. I suffered from the untimeliness of my memory, from its insufficiency, its disequilibrium, its lack of symmetry.

Years ago, I encountered Abdelkebir Khatibi through the pages of that remarkable book, *Amour bilingue*, a story of encounters missed, untimely, asymmetrical, and endless; a book whose reading never ends. I will always be reading *Amour bilingue*, over and over again. One always misses the mark of this book and thus reads it endlessly. A successful encounter is final. It cannot become a promise or an expectation. But a failed encounter, or rather, as in my story, an encounter marked by forgetting, is one that has no end; a memory that does not become oblivion. Could it be that by forgetting Abdelkebir Khatibi my memory guarded itself against forgetting him? Perhaps.

The years of my encounter with Khatibi's thought have made it impossible for me to think without him. So utterly intertwined with mine, his thought has joined the intimate lattice work on my memory, like a mother tongue. If the inscriptions of the mother tongue for Khatibi constitute the tattooed patterns of memory, it is precisely because this intimate language, never written, is always forgotten without ever being forgotten (see "Bilinguisme et la littérature" in *Maghreb pluriel*, Paris, 1983). I think with Abdelkebir Khatibi because Abdelkebir Khatibi gave me, gave us, the generous gift of *pensée-autre* (in *Maghreb pluriel*). And what else is "*pensée-autre*" if not the thought of insufficiency, of poverty in thought that becomes a promise and a possibility for thought: "*Une pensée qui ne s'inspire pas de sa pauvreté est toujours élaborée pour dominer et humilier; une pensée qui ne soit pas minoritaire, marginale, fragmentaire et inachevée, est toujours une pensée de l'ethnocide*" ("A thought that is not inspired by its poverty is always elaborated to dominate and humiliate; a thought that is not minoritarian, marginal, fragmentary and incomplete is always a thought of ethnic cleansing", in *Maghreb pluriel*, my translation). *Pensée-autre*: the incandescent link of thought and ethics.

I thought I would have another chance to meet Abdelkebir Khatibi at the airport in Chicago and looked forward to welcoming him again to Northwestern during the academic year 2009-2010. On March 16 2009, I learnt with infinite sadness that I will once more miss his arrival, and this time I will be utterly inconsolable.

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