

Transcultural
**Journal of
Humanities & Social Sciences**

Print ISSN 4239-2636 Online ISSN 4247-2636

**Proceedings of the conference:
DIALOGUE AND EXCHANGE:
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE
IN THE HUMANITIES**

24-26 OCTOBER 2020

CAIRO/ EGYPT



BUC
BADR UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO
جامعة بدر بالقاهرة

Vol. 1, Issue 2

Winter 2021



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| ▣ Print ISSN | 2636-4239 |
| ▣ Online ISSN | 2636-4247 |

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Survival and Resistance in Alicia Kozameh's *Steps under Water* (1996) and Malika Oufkir's *Stolen Lives* (1999)

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Abstract

Political prison narratives express an extremely delicate and totally distinctive experience that has an unforgettable effect on the heart. Yenna Wu defines political prisoners as the prisoners who are "incarcerated due to their active and passive involvement in political activities [and] prisoners of conscience associated with non-political activities" ("Introduction" 1). Political prisoners' mechanisms of resistance and strategies of survival differ from one to another, yet they exhibit some affinities because of the remarkable commonalities of global political prison experience. The aim of this paper is to present a comparison of the aesthetics of resistance and survival employed by female political prisoners as presented in Malika Oufkir's *Stolen Lives: Twenty Years in a Desert Jail* (1999) and Alicia Kozameh's *Steps under Water* (1996). To investigate the ways in which female political prisoners maintain their sanity and humanity, this paper is based on Elaine Scarry's analysis of torture and Judith Herman's study of trauma.

Key words: Aesthetics, Resistance, Survival, Political prison, Torture, Trauma, Testimony, Oufkir, Kozameh

Introduction: Political prison narratives express an extremely delicate and totally distinctive experience that has an unforgettable effect on the heart, yet there is a contest whether political prison literature is a genre or subgenre. The term "genre" refers to literary works that could be studied conforming to "a fixed form . . . or a mode" (Jameson 109). Theorists argue that literary texts with "the same communicative purpose and audience" are homogeneous in terms of "structure, style and convention" (Bouwer et al 4). Yenna Wu, taking into consideration the homogeneity of subject, tone and mood, consider political prison narratives "a distinct literary genre" ("Introduction" 1). Similarly, According to Randa Abou-bakr, Ilena şora Dimitriu deals with prison literature as a genre focusing on its "autobiographical aspect" and "testimonial element" (8). Doran Larson considers political prison literature a "genre" because it deals with "a common subject" that is generally akin "to the strategies of power exercised within prisons

in general" (143). Moreover, Barbara Harlow considers it a subgenre of "resistance literature", a concept firstly used in Arabic as Adab al-Muqāwama by the well-known Palestinian writer, militant and critic Ghassān Kanāfāni in 1969 to describe a type of literature that is activist and rebellious (2). Whereas "resistance literature" deals mainly with the struggle against western imperialism, political prison narratives deal with "domestic colonialism" (Wu, "Introduction" 13). Hence, oppression encountered by political prisoners is caused by national regimes, not by western colonial powers. Although Harlow argues that prison literature diversify due to "the historical specificity of the collective strategies of the political resistance" (124), Wu contends that the torture and trauma suffered by political detainees surpass geographical boundaries and historical specificity as well ("Reviving Muted Voices" 23). Notwithstanding David Schalkwyk's claims that writing inside prison walls "is not simply to reflect the four walls of universal confinement, nor even to reflect on what is beyond those walls"(24), the prison

culture, the repression of political prisoners caused by confinement and the prisoners' strategies of survival have much in common since "a prison is a prison"(61), according to Sheila Roberts. The commonalities in political prison experiences do not mean the disregard of the differences nor do the differences mean that there are no similarities in these experiences. Hence, commonalities and differences must be taken into consideration as both commonalities and differences endow political prison narratives with diversity and uniqueness.

According to Judith A. Scheffler, all women's prison narratives are political texts that "reveal much about [female political prisoners'] social condition and status" (xxi-xxii); they speak for silenced female prisoners who are victims of society's repression. Female political prisoners challenged the claim that they are passive by resisting the oppressive regimes. In female political prison narratives, heroic actions are absent, yet the greatest heroism behind prison high walls is to survive and not to surrender to the jailers' humiliation. This paper addresses the mechanisms of resistance and strategies of survival that enabled political prisoners in the selected texts to survive their traumatic experience of incarceration. Elaine Scarry's philosophical analysis of torture and Judith Herman's psychological study of trauma provide the framework for this study. Writing, per se, is a mechanism of resistance against the patriarchal discourse of the state. It, also, provides political prisoners with a space to speak truth to power and recover from their traumatic experiences. Notwithstanding political and cultural differences, Morocco and Argentina witnessed a dark period when political dissidents were executed or disappeared. In addition, prisons were filled with political dissidents. Both *Steps under Water* and *Stolen Lives* are chosen because they mark a milestone in Latin American and Arab political prison literature respectively; they are based on truthful accounts of prison experience and introduce a wide variety of survival strategies and resistance mechanisms. Additionally, both

memoirs lead us to a clandestine world that too many know and pretend to ignore.

Argentina and Morocco: Contexts of Disappearances

After the death of the Argentinian president Juan Domingo Perón in 1974, his widow Isabel Perón became the president. Inexperienced, Isabel was unable to control the economy of Argentina, so the economy began to suffer from severe inflation. As a result of inflation and unemployment, people began to strike and protest implementing labor unions. During Isabel's presidency, the law collapsed and political violence increased. Hence, Marxist guerillas as well as the middle class fought against the government. Taking the advantage of this political unrest in order to regain the power, the Argentinian army, under the leadership of Jorge Rafael Videla, surrounded the presidential palace in Buenos Aires on March 24, 1976, overthrew Isabel and sent her into exile.

The period between 1976 and 1983, known as the "Dirty War" or the national reorganization process, witnessed violent clashes between the military regime and the people. Torture, assassination, rape and imprisonment were used as tools to silence the opposition, yet the regime alleged that these tools were used "to heal the social body from the cancer which they considered to be Marxism" (Dantas 33). As reported by CONADEP (National Commission of the Disappearance of Persons), the number of political prisoners increased and were kept in the 340 secret detention centers built throughout Argentina. The "Dirty War" lasted seven years in which 30000 disappeared. 30% of the disappeared were women exposed to all kinds of torture including rape, usually vis-à-vis their husbands, to force them to confess (Dantas 36- 37). In 1983, the War of Falklands between Argentina and the United Kingdom, that lasted three months, forced the downfall of the dictatorship and the "Dirty War" in Argentina.

Turning my attention towards Morocco, I find that the context in Morocco was, to some extent, similar to that of Argentina. After forty-four years under French colonialism, Morocco became independent on March 2, 1956. Muḥammad V became Morocco's first king and began to teach his son, Moulay¹ Ḥassan II, political maneuvers that influenced his thirty-eight rule over Morocco. Moulay Ḥassan II became the king in 1961. The 1970s started in Morocco with two successive failed coups led by Generals Maḍbūḥ in 1971 and Muḥammad Oufkir in 1972. The leaders of the coups were publicly executed and used as a spectacle for those who would dare to challenge the monarchy, yet the soldiers who participated in the coups whether knowingly or not were sent to Tazmamart, a notorious Moroccan detention camp. Moreover, the early 1970s witnessed many protests from students and opposition groups including *'Ila al-'mām* led by Abraham Ṣirfāty, *Li-naḥdim al-sh'b* and 23 March movement headed by Muḥammad Karfāty; members of these leftist groups were arrested, tortured, mutilated, disappeared and persecuted for years. Although they called for an egalitarian and democratic Moroccan society, they were accused of constituting a threat to national security.

Stealing Lives: Resistance and Survival

Latin American female political prison "memoirs thus blur the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction" (Treacy 133). They mix fictional with nonfictional elements to make their memoirs more powerful. In *Steps under Water*², Alicia Kozameh fictionalizes her three-year- experience of incarceration as a political prisoner during the "Dirty War" (1976-1983). Kozameh was born in the city of Rosario in Argentina in 1953. During the time of instability, she became politicized while government and leftists were constantly conflicting in the 1960s and 1970s as she expressed her political beliefs in students' demonstrations and joined the Workers' Revolutionary Party. She was arrested in 1975 and was sent to political headquarters of Rosario and later to Villa Devoto women's

prison in Buenos Aires. In 1978, she was released with the help of Amnesty International; she was exiled to California and then to Mexico. Even though she returned to Argentina in 1984, she, out of the several threats following the publication of *Pasos bajo el agua (Steps under Water)*, decided to travel to the USA where she resided once again in Los Angeles. Currently, she works as a professor at Chapman University. A fictionalized memoir, *Steps under Water* tackles Sara's, the protagonist and Kozameh's alter-ego, journey of resistance and survival. It begins shortly after Sara's release and flashes back. Sara, the narrator, seeks to remember every detail of her traumatic experience in order not to forget anything; Sara states:

I have been making a serious effort to remember certain episodes. But no such luck. It's like a sheet hung between my eyes and my brain. The reason for the memory loss is all right there: in the colors, the shapes, the greater or lesser clarity, the rhythms. The lethal potential of events. (Kozameh 96)

Hugo, Sara's husband, left for work but he never came back home. Instead, Sara's door was "caved in" and a group of cops "forced their way in" while Sara was taking a nap (Kozameh 10). Also, they tied her to a chair, asked her about her husband, beat her and took her to prison. When the "the rabid clowns" (10), to use Kozameh's epithet, stormed into Sara's house, they told her that her husband was murdered and one of the cops stole Hugo's leather jacket that became a recurrent motif throughout the memoir. Hugo's jacket became a symbol of torture and disability in the face of the authoritarian regime. After Sara's release, she panicked whenever she saw any man wearing a jacket similar to Hugo's. Certainly, this feeling towards the jacket reflects her altered mental state. Male characters, almost disappeared, are mentioned neither by names nor by titles. The structure of *Steps under Water* constitutes a puzzle that readers must rebuild step by step; the fragmentation of this

fictionalized memoir underlines the notion of being lost.

On the other hand, *Stolen Lives*³ is a firsthand account of Malika Oufkir's twenty-year experience of incarceration during the "Years of Lead" (1961-1999) in Morocco. Breaking the sacred atmosphere surrounding King Hassan II, *Stolen Lives* is a landmark in the genre of Arab political prison narratives because it is the first prison memoir to delineate the life and family of an Arab monarch. Unlike Alicia Kozameh, Malika Oufkir was not a politician. She was born to the king's right hand, General Oufkir. Aged five, she was adopted by King Muhammad V and later his son King Hassan II to be a companion to Princess Lala Mina, King Muhammad V's daughter. She lived in the king's palace in Rabat a life no other Moroccan could dream of. When Malika left the palace to live with her family, she fully enjoyed her elegant lifestyle, rode fancy cars, visited American and European cities, wore fashionable outfits and spent time with film stars like Steve McQueen and Alain Delon. Taken away from royal surroundings, Oufkir as well as her mother and five younger siblings were sent to prison in unfathomable conditions for a crime they did not commit. General Oufkir⁴ led the famous failed coup d'état in 1972 that targeted King Hassan II's life and he was assassinated. When Malika Oufkir demanded to see her father's body, her relatives refused to let her look at the body and covered it with a sheet since it is not allowed for a Muslim woman to see a dead man's body. Then, she insisted on having time with her dead father's body; the authorities left her alone with the body. She "counted the bullets on [the] body. There were five" (93). She felt perplexed and was not able to believe how her father by adoption could execute her real father, so she began to resent King Hassan II. "If I still respected Hassan II," expresses Oufkir, "I hated the despot he had become" (114).

During the "Years of Lead" (Sanawāt ar-Raṣās), many political dissidents were incarcerated without trials, tortured severely,

assassinated, disappeared, repressed and oppressed. Instead of incarcerating the political dissident himself, his family including a three-year-old child was incarcerated and this, of course, what distinguishes the Oufkirs' experience; *Stolen Lives* narrates, in a dramatic tone and a powerful language, an unprecedented experience of incarceration since there is no logic in incarcerating the innocent family of the political dissident instead of the political dissident himself⁵. The Oufkirs did not defy the political authorities, yet they had to pay for their father's dissidence. In this case, the prison is brutally used as a means of taking vengeance. Malika suffered intensely because her father by adoption, King Hassan II, killed her biological father, General Oufkir.

According to Yenna Wu's classification of the writers of political prison literature into professional writers and "cell-made" writers ("Introduction" 2), Kozameh fits into the second category as she wrote *Pasos bajo el agua* on rolling papers that she hid in her sandals during her incarceration. All her literary works were produced in Los Angeles from 1992 to 2004⁶. On the contrary, Malika does not fit into any of the previous categories. She met the professional French writer Michèle Fitoussi who coauthored her incarceration experience. Both Oufkir and Fitoussi used to meet three times a week and talk every day on the phone for nearly a year to finish the memoir. Malika Oufkir published a sequel to *La Prisonnière* entitled *L'Etrangère*.

The metaphor in the ominous title for *Stolen Lives* uncovers a sinful act committed by the oppressive regimes as they steal lives when they imprison innocents without trials and they steal lives when they deprive the prisoners from their freedom. Being silent towards such atrocities renders us thieves of lives as those who commit the atrocities which stigmatize humanity. As for *Steps under Water*, the title represents an abiding feeling of confinement overwhelming the narrator even after her release from prison. The word "water" is a metaphor for liberty following "three years and

three months without seeing the nighttime sky" (Kozameh 142) and falling upon her from the sky. In addition, "the space between the prison and the military bus" (143) can be interpreted as liberty. The word "steps" signifies Sara's first steps from the prison to the military bus. Although liberty, like water, gave life to Sara, she felt uncomfortable in the new uncontrollable liberty that was similar to heavy rain. The phrase "under water" denotes that Sara, the protagonist, was still imprisoned below that freedom. To put it another way, although Sara is physically released, she is mentally imprisoned since it is "freedom under surveillance" (xvi). Even though Sara survived, she was not fully free. Hence, she explained to Elsa that she was "supposed to be alive, supposed to be free. But that's not how [she felt]" (53). Sara, also, compared herself to an audience member watching a movie about her life; however, she was emotionally detached from the actions taking place in the movie despite being in the middle of all these actions since each word and action she watched did not belong to her (54). Sara's newly gained freedom provoked "unremitting pain" (81) and a feeling of confusion. If incarceration stripped her of the normal life, freedom stripped her of the great collective body and the solidarity with the cellmates without which survival would have been impossible. Freedom, then, was much more like mutilation than liberation. Cristina reminded Sara how their collective commitment was essential in the fight against oppression:

Those other women. You and I are those women too. Repeatedly shown by life circumstances— which are not abstractions— that the world needs people willing to put forth their bodies, their time, their eternal existence, to try to strengthen human life. Those women. Who defined their enemy. Who concentrated on the fight. Women whom that enemy, having won the battle, physically holds in its grip. Along with you. Women who shared with you, four at a time, a cell meant for only one. (42)

Sara's consciousness was torn between the joy of being outside and the anguish of not knowing how to be anymore. She was more abandoned than ever in the world since she abandoned her companions; guilt weighed and freedom became an exile.

Elaine Scarry postulates that the expressibility of pain affects the political consequences of the previous inexpressibility of pain (11). The prison turned Malika Oufkir from a "spoiled brat" (293), as she describes herself, into a human rights advocate. Her morbid experience granted her with wisdom that enabled her to view the reality of life and have shrewd opinions about politics. Malika lost her prestige acquired by both her father's name and her relationship to the palace. She finally became "Chahbia—of the people" (288), as she calls herself. In the concluding pages, she admits that after surviving her long term incarceration, she "deeply love[d] [her] country, its history, its language and its customs" (288). The end of Malika's prison experience, thus, implied a total redefinition of life. In her memoir, Malika Oufkir does not only narrate her own suffering as the French title, *La Prisonnière*, may implies, yet she narrates the suffering of her family as well as a wide range of Moroccan victims. She, also, uncovers the atrocities buried deep down in the memories of the Moroccan people.

Sometimes, in political prison narratives, it is not necessary to denounce anything; the facts reveal themselves. The facts are not those of the authority but those of the subaltern buried and disappeared by the state. Hence, Kozameh challenges her readers to replace the untold with their own imagination. In her poignant narrative, Kozameh opts for fiction to narrate her traumatic prison experience and her struggle to heal from it. Surely, narrating her bizarre experience as well as her cell mates' is a strategy of survival and a mechanism of resistance since it presents a counter-discourse to that of the authority. Political prison narratives usually include thorough depictions of physical abuse and torture, yet Kozameh's memoir does not tackle

the descriptions of such horrifying practices. Torture is not the primary focus of the depictions of Sara's prison experience. Kozameh marginalizes the direct depictions of torture; she seems to touch the issue of liberty deprivation as well as torture orchestrated by the military dictatorship in Argentina.

Under horrific circumstances in prisons, the individual's body becomes his most precious possession. Hence, the prisoner's body is the central focus in prison narratives since it is the "object and target of power" (Foucault 136) as well as the locus of the prisoner's identity, thoughts and dreams. "A body," writes Foucault, "is manipulated, shaped [and] trained" to become "docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (136). Kozameh brings the female imprisoned body into meaning through capturing "both the materiality of the body and its transformations" (Foster 53).

Under dictatorships, the opposition is deemed harmful to the state and the political prisoners are stigmatized as subversives in order to render tyranny justifiable. Despotism regimes view the society as a diseased body by the dissidents, so getting rid of those dissidents is the antibody and it is the mission of such regimes. Defying such negative depictions specified to the female political prisoners in the official discourse, Kozameh, in *Steps under Water*, condemns past oppressions, registers resistance mechanisms and portrays survival strategies that enabled her to keep her sanity. The portrayal of her survived body enables her to find meaning, reconstruct her destroyed world and resist irresistible pain. She also establishes a counter-discourse to that of the regime, a discourse that enables her to heal, restore justice and constructs a collective feminist consciousness that allows the silenced Argentinian voices to be heard. For the Oufkirs, their bodies were their valueless possession as well as their major means of resistance. They played sports and danced in order to keep their bodies healthy and strong to bear the monstrous conditions behind prison walls. Using their bodies as a means of

resistance, they went in hunger strikes and attempted to commit suicide. The tortured body, per se, may narrate the story of the victims even more effectively than narratives. The Oufkirs thin bodies, broken teeth and shaved heads narrated their twenty years of incarceration even before they thought to unveil the atrocities they endured. Raouf Oufkir's septic mouth with only three teeth left and a "jaw graced with a single tooth" (Oufkir 253) manifested obviously how brutally he was tortured even more effectively than his narrative, *Les Invités* (2003), did him.

In her canonical book *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry points out that physical pain is "objectless" and "resists language" since pain is inappropriate "for the kind of objectification on which language depends" (17). When pain finds a voice, it begins to tell a story (Scarry 3). Political prisoners write to embody trauma resulted from torture, violence and discrimination to achieve healing and attain freedom. The act of writing helps trauma survivors rebuild and recreate their devastated world. It is significant in two ways: Firstly, it fills the gaps in the personal histories and collective memories of female political prisoners. Secondly, it establishes a kind of healing process. Both Malika Oufkir and Alicia Kozameh give voice to their painful experience of incarceration in their narratives. Stylistically and thematically, Kozameh depicts physical pain, denounces physical and psychological torture and presents how female prisoners can reconstruct themselves after trauma; she does not tell her personal story, yet she tells the story of all women "who defied the [intimate] enemy" and concentrated on resistance so as to survive the "imminent death" (Kozameh 43). Sara and her cellmate, Juliana, started the healing process by writing letters to each other in order to fully remember their outrageous past within a broader context. Despite being painful, the act of remembering is cathartic. Remembering through writing to a friend who had experienced incarceration helped Sara cope with her traumatic past and the painful present. In the same vein, Malika Oufkir uncovered her story to get rid of her distressing past. Writing

was a kind of freedom that enabled her to portray Morocco's past of oppression as a personal journey.

Kozameh employs various narrative techniques that highlight the fragmentation of *Steps under Water* (1996) to emphasize the incapability of language in rendering the horrific events she endured. Lacking a chronological sequence, the structure is circular as it begins and ends with Sara's "way back" home. To reflect chaos, Kozameh makes use of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polyphony. Ibrahim A. El-Hussari states that Bakhtin's polyphony is a concept where "[t]he author's voice . . . turns out to be one amongst others" (136). He continues that "each voice is viewed as an independent melody that fits within the harmonious opus produced in the multifarious world created" (136). The point of view swings between first, second and third persons; Kozameh shifts between the omniscient voice that has experienced the same conditions undergone by the character and the first person voice that demonstrates personal thoughts and emotions. Between the first person voice and the omniscient voice lies the collective voice of all female political prisoners. In addition, the tense shifts between past and present to reflect chaos and the linguistic connectors are rarely used. A clear-cut example of this shift is the following example:

How many footsteps, **she asks** herself? By how many millimeters had her mother's feet worn down the thickness of the floor tiles during those three and a half years? . . . **I get** so sick of thinking about everything in terms of numbers. Besides, nothing can ever be answered unless you have been there. **You have** to see, and then get the answer. (Kozameh 2; my emphasis)

Fragmented in nature, Sara's memories and hallucinations, as a "denunciation" and "diminution" of the inflected pain, reverse the destructive function of pain since they help her restore her voice (Scarry 50). Giving voice to

the complex inner universe of memories and emotions, Kozameh employs techniques of stream of consciousness, such as the indirect interior monologue and the free association, as shown in the previous quote. Fragmentation, as a literary technique, echoes Kozameh's/Sara's fragmented and traumatized state of mind as if memories interrupt one another. The technique of fragmentation is utilized to survive the psychological pain that has shattered her physically and psychologically and has been triggered by penning such horrible experience.

Kozameh describes the drastic processes carried out by the policemen to crush Sara as well as her cellmates such as the way she was arrested and beaten. Neither does Kozameh concentrate on violence in her novel nor she assign lengthy paragraphs to the depictions of torture sessions or the physical wounds resulting from such torture sessions. However, she draws attention towards psychological effects of physical violence. At the very beginning of the Oufkirs' incarceration, the chief commander, Bouazza, "belched and yelled" his absurd orders, that the Oufkirs must have followed, in order to subdue and frighten them (Oufkir 105). They "were made to get out of the car," in their way to prison, and stood in a line, in the middle of the desert following the instructions of the guards who were threatening them "with their Kalashnikovs" (104). They were stripped of all their belongings including books, jewelry, toys, photos and almost all their clothes (141). Brutally, the jailers invited them to watch a show of their belongings being burnt so as to devastate their integrity and identity (141). Psychologically, what the jailers burnt was not just belongings essential for survival, yet these belongings represented something resembling their memories and former selves. Close to the Oufkirs' hearts, these belongings constituted part of their integrity. During the "Dirty War," it was common to destroy or take away the assets of the detainee whether at home during arrest or at prison. In *Steps under Water*, the jailers destroyed most of the prisoners' assets to demoralize them. Sara remembers:

[T]he tea bags [were found] swimming in a bucket filled with detergent, bleach, and another strange substance that was best left unidentified . . . Toilet paper shredded by razor blades or scissors, and toothpaste, which the cops had gone to trouble to empty, tube by tube, into nylon bags, to verify that the paste didn't hide anything that was prohibited. They confiscated all cigarette packs. (Kozameh 34)

According to Scarry, "torture victims from many different countries" have testified "being made to stare at the weapon" before it has been applied to them (27). The guards threatened the Oufkirs with Kalashnikovs (Oufkir 141). Moreover, when Sara describes her perpetrators' body parts; she considers "pistols" (Kozameh 80) as a part of their bodies denoting that violence is related to every man belonging to the authoritarian regime.

If physical survival is important, psychological survival has the same significance. The destructive strategies of the jailers are confronted by counter strategies of survival by the inmates to keep their identity and integrity. The Oufkirs employed defensive mechanisms, such as denial and deception that refer to the urgent need of the traumatized to deceive themselves by evading the unbearable reality of a certain situation alleging "that the problem doesn't exist or the unpleasant incident never happened" (Tyson 15). Despite being "cut off from everyone and everything", Malika Oufkir "imposed a routine that was as normal as possible" (119) so that she could find a cause to live for, namely the well-being of her siblings, since everything looked unreal in their hollow life inside prison walls. She deceived herself that there was nothing disturbing in being escorted all the time because "[f]undamentally, this wasn't so much a change for [her] past life," yet a continuation of her past life in a house surrounded by guards; she never went "out without an escort . . . never opened a window without glimpsing one or several armed police" keeping an eye on her

(110). Employing the same coping strategy, Malika's mother pretended that they lived a normal life through playing with Raouf, her three-year-old child, as if he was in the kindergarten. She, also, cooked food for the rest of her kids while they were attending a school in which Malika was a serious teacher. Malika discovered that "selective memory or partial 'self-brainwashing' by filtering out the negative" could serve as a survival strategy in the face of extremities and "insert[ed] sporadic brighter scenes into the generally bleak panorama" (Wu, "Reviving Muted Voices" 33). Malika Oufkir sometimes recalled her "happy memories of . . . childhood" at the palace (114) and yearned for "everything and everyone [she] loved" especially while listening to the songs on the radio (107). Surprisingly, for twenty years, the Oufkirs kept deceiving themselves and waiting a salvation.

Obviously, taking care of the beautiful chicks and pigeons given by sympathetic villagers and guards was the Oufkirs strategy of survival. They found solace in befriending "those little creatures" which helped them "while away the time" (Oufkir 108). Malika Oufkir narrates that their "lives revolved around" these birds (124). Believing that those birds mirrored their personalities, each one of the Oufkirs gave his/her name to the bird that mirrored his/hers. "We each had our own bird, and we gave them names and personalities," Malika Oufkir recalls "We spent hours watching them . . . We watched [Halima, one of the female birds] and a male doing a courtship dance, kissing, pecking each other affectionately" (124-125). Perpetrators killed two pigeons daily and showed their bodies to the Oufkirs since they found out that those pigeons "boosted [the innocent Oufkirs'] morale" (141).

Kozameh unveils the hidden practices in the Argentinian society and the authorities' hypocrisy regarding such practices by making a distinction between the ordinary prisoners, who are accused of serious crimes including prostitution, murder, abortions and child trafficking, and the political prisoners. At the

very beginning, when Sara arrived at the police headquarters in Rosario, she was jailed with criminals whose attitude towards their conviction was much more optimistic than that of the political prisoners. Adriana accused of practicing child trafficking and abortion clearly showed this distinction: "You *politic*as are really cooked. We just cough up a few pesos. Maybe offer a couple of kids to the police station or court employees, those sterile bastards, and within a month we'll be up and running again" (Kozameh 23). Then, Sara was jailed with other political prisoners, in Rosario and Buenos Aires, whose political connection with leftist groups had led them to prison. *Steps under Water* does not include any indication to the main character's political ideology; yet, it is observed that Sara is a female political prisoner with a leftist ideology based on Marxism.

Survival insinuates a struggle to take control over the prison space and overcome the moral degradation instilled by the jailers. Barbara Owen points out that females' incarceration experience "is shaped by pre-prison experiences, the role of women in contemporary society, and the ways in which women rely on personalized relationships to survive their prison terms" (7). She, also, adds that "[w]omen's prison culture, then, is decidedly personal, a network of meanings and relationships that create and reproduce the ways women do their time"(7). In *Steps under Water*, Kozameh features a sense of community among female political prisoners built on a shared history of violence, trauma and the fear of death. Sara and her cellmates were double-marginalized because they lived in a patriarchal society ruled by despotic authorities and dominated by the stereotypical image that women's role in the society was confined to her home as a wife and a mother. Therefore, women who publically expressed their political views were harshly tortured. Female political prisoners were unified in a single collective narrative voice having a deep sense of belonging to an ideology and a country. *Steps under Water*, in effect, laid the foundations of a community of survivors who were released and scattered throughout the

world without cutting the bond that united them in prison; all of them were gathered by writing that, of course, contained their experiences and memories.

In the same vein, the Oufkirs, aware of the importance of their familial relationship in the journey of survival, "strengthened [their] bond as a family" (163); they invented a coded language that could only be understood by them to safely express their inner feelings. Although Malika, Raouf and their mother were locked in three separate cells, they devised strategies to communicate with each other. Locked away from their mother, Malika Oufkir and her two sisters "[despite everything . . . got along well" since Malika acted her mother's role and took care of her sisters (149). Raouf was incarcerated in a separate cell, so he smuggled a radio and used the amplifiers and the electric wire to "make a transmission network from cell to cell" (145). Malika narrates how the Oufkirs communicated inside prison:

To communicate with them directly, I used a length of hosepipe that I had stolen from the courtyard, seizing the opportunity when the guards' attention wandered for a moment. I had made a 'telephone line' through the wall separating our cells. During the day I hid it in Mimi's bed. The guards didn't dare search her because of her epileptic fits, which terrified them. They were simple souls at heart and were convinced she was possessed by jinns. With these crude but effective means, we were able to communicate all night. (145-146)

Their improvised sound system did not only enable them to communicate, listen to the radio as well as Malika's stories, but it, also, enabled them to devise their successful plan of escape. In her preface to *stolen lives*, Michele Fitoussi describes Malika as "a Scheherazade" with an "oriental narrative style" (3). Using the sound system, Malika created a story that delighted the Oufkirs, linked them, reunited them, saved

them and "helped give a pattern to [their] lives" (158). In addition, the characters in the story invented by Malika Oufkir did what the Oufkirs were deprived of, such as marriage, engagement and having babies, so the story helped the Oufkirs fabricate a new world behind the high walls of the monstrous prison of Bir-Jdid.

The radio helped the Oufkirs survive as it linked them up to the world. Additionally, through the smuggled radio, the Oufkirs listened to programs from France Inter, Europe 1 and RF1 that helped them survive and "maintain a link to life" (Oufkir 165). They hoped to hear their names mentioned in one of the programs to make sure that they still existed in the international realm and "could be reborn some day" (166). In an episode of Gonzague Saint-Bris's program, *Ligne Ouverte*, he hosted the French minister of foreign affairs, Michel Jobert, who was talking about Morocco and asked him about the Barbers and mentioned the name of General Oufkir. Though Jobert just mentioned the name of Malika's father, this filled her with hope and joy. The radio broadcasters' voices became familiar to the degree that the Oufkirs' considered those broadcasters their companions and "imagined what they looked like" without seeing their pictures before (165). The significance of the radio in their journey of survival affirms the importance of the voice. In fact, the radio played a major role in the development of Malika's personality and political vision; she appreciated feminism and wanted to become an activist one day since she admired Benoîte, Flora Groult, Muriel Cerf and Régine Deforges whom she aspired to follow. "Had I been free," expresses Malika Oufkir, "I would have followed those women . . . I would probably have been an activist" (167).

In *Steps under Water*, the traumatic experience of incarceration destroyed Sara's understanding of her identity, so she wished to affirm that the prison did not destroy her and she was "still the same Sara" (Kozameh 55). Her friendship with the other female political prisoners sharing the same cell enabled her to

reconnect with her past self. The friendship between Sara and her cellmates was not only a collective act of resistance against the oppressors but it was also a strategy of survival and healing. Sara showed how her cellmate, Cristina, "cleared up [Sara's] vision of the world" and broken "open the confines" of prison (82). It becomes clear that, Sara's incarceration experience was shaped by a shared suffering with other female women.

"The sense that the perpetrator is still present, even after liberation," contends Herman, "signifies a major alteration in the victim's relational world" (91). Herman adds that "[t]he enforced relationship during captivity, which of necessity monopolizes the victim's attention, becomes part of the victim's inner life and continues to engross her attention after release" (91). After release, everything became "unfamiliar," "alien" and "hostile" to Sara and her *compañeras* (Kozameh 81). Sara felt disconnected from her own self and her life of freedom since she suffered from an "identity crisis" (88). "The success of disciplinary power derives . . . from the use of simple instruments;" argues Foucault, "hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and their combination in a procedure that is specific to it, the examination" (170). Female inmates are subjected to all these "means of correct training," as Foucault refers to them (170). They are frequently under patriarchal surveillance. Sara was not only broken and lost but she also suspected each and everything even her senses because of being kept under surveillance and panopticed even after release:

[I]n Rosario, to survive after prison in a city with one million people, when just by walking the streets at the same time you fatally encounter the same **faces**, the same **feet**, and consequently the same **pistols** (and if you don't see them, it's because they lurk, always on the **muscle**, under a sweeter or, of course, a jacket)— now, that was difficult. (Kozameh 80; my emphasis)

As presented in the previous quote, Sara felt that the populated city of Rosario was a big prison and no one could be trusted as all people looked similar. Similarly, when the Oufkirs escaped from prison, they were given the cold shoulder by their friends. Influenced by the state's discourse and their fear of the state in case of showing sympathy towards the Oufkirs, those friends deemed the Oufkirs culprits deserving their penalty. Therefore, the Oufkirs felt offended by their friends' reaction towards them, a reaction that contradicts the fact that they were innocent victims. After their release, the Oufkirs were kept under surveillance, as described by Malika Oufkir:

The police kept us a company day and night. We weren't sure whether the guards who never left our side were there to protect us or to keep us under surveillance. A chauffeur was placed at our disposal all the better to keep track of our movements. We were followed wherever we went, our telephone conversations were tapped, and they interrogated anyone who came into contact with us. Free, us? (Oufkir 279)

Unlike most political prison narratives that begin with the moment of the protagonist's arrest and detention, *Steps under Water* starts with Sara's "way back" to freedom and concentrates on her journey of healing and recovery. When Sara was released and brought back to her parents' home, she was saturated by the things that she missed for three years such as motorbikes noises, people's feet rhythm and the sunlight. However, Sara suddenly heard a cat meowing and became fearful as she remembered the image of the dead cats that she had seen during her childhood and the feeling of horror accompanying this scene. She remembered a dead cat that she had seen by the post office: "I got home and my throat was swollen, like [the cat's] corpse had lodged itself there, fat and yellow. Between the tongue and the esophagus. I went straight to the bathroom and threw up" (Kozameh 5). For Sara, cats connoted violence as well as legendary

resistance and survival⁷. She remembered abandoned "newborn . . . probably sick or dying" kittens that she had seen while going to her uncle's house with her father, the white cat with an open mouth that she had seen at the door of the butcher's (4). Then, it is natural that when passing a cat, Sara "los[t] her breath and then crie[d] out, and the screams [could] be heard downstairs" (6). She related the dead cats to the violence taking place in Argentina; she compared the execution of her uncle to the dead cats found in the street: "[M]y uncle . . . who couldn't possibly imagine he'd get cut down in the street, just like so many cats, though from paramilitary bullets instead" (4). Alicia Kozameh portrays the influence of the horrible image of the dead cats on Sara:

Sara follows her father down with the slowness you have to use on a stairway covered with sick cats, hanging, clinging from the banisters, soft or hard like dried rubber, if you don't want to step on them or touch them with your feet (7).

While being in prison, Sara befriended Elsa, another female political prisoner whose husband, Marco, gave Sara a job after her release. Unfortunately, Sara and Marco fell for each other, especially when Elsa was released as she focused her attention on her son, Lucas, to make up for the time she had spent away from him. By contrast, Sara felt depressed, lonely and lost since her husband was still in prison, she had no children and the person she had clung to in prison, Elsa, was busy with her son. Sara felt ashamed of her confidential affair with the husband of her friend with whom she shared a big deal of history; this appeared in her reaction to Marco's first kisses to her as she just repeats Elsa's name (Kozameh 60). Sara's previous reaction as well as Elsa's declaration, after ending up her friendship with Sara, that Sara would always be her friend (61) show the depth of a friendship born of the hardships behind prison walls, a friendship that is considered their major means of survival.

Collateral damage pervades *Steps under Water* since there is no character that escapes the trauma of incarceration even those characters that have not experienced incarceration. Sara and Elsa were influenced in tangible ways. Although Marco was not imprisoned, his wife's imprisonment irrevocably changed his life. He was abandoned twice: first, when his wife, Elsa, was taken to prison though this was not her choice. Second, when she was set free and became hyper focused on Lucas, her son. As a result, he cheated on his wife when she was free although he did not do this act of betrayal when she was imprisoned (Kozameh 49).

Kozameh has written *Steps under Water* as an act of resistance against the oppressors who tried to silence her. Kozameh declares that she has written her story "so that these events will be known." She adds that "[t]he substance of the story . . . is real . . . Either I myself or other *compañeras* lived it"(xvi). Kozameh's memoir is an amalgamation of reality and fantasy. To put it another way, it is a testimony since Kozameh focuses on the collective experience as well as the factual events she herself or her cellmates lived and a literary work including elements of fiction and creativity. A survival strategy, fiction enables Kozameh to narrate her traumatic experience and portray an inexpressible pain.

"Literature, spiritual tradition, or aesthetic education," Wu contends, "can provide succor to those facing extreme conditions" to preserve their besieged identities ("Reviving Muted Voices" 30). In *Stolen Lives* as well as *Steps under Water*, the space of violence and pain is intentionally transformed into a theatre for culture. Sara and her cell mates' artistic performances including play-acting, knitting, drawing and writing poems helped them philosophize their morbid circumstances and defy their oppressors. In addition, they listened to music, read books and retold films. Similarly, the Oufkirs improvised and performed plays, danced and sang together, through their sound system, a song of "exile and hope" performed by a "band of young

Moroccans" (Oufkir 116). They believed that it was composed for them to narrate their story. Malika Oufkir recounts:

A song rose up in the darkness. I led it, and soon my voice was joined by those of Raouf, Mimi, the girls, my mother, Achoura and Halima. The words sang of exile and hope, and of nocturnal departure. It was our story. '*Vouz avez poignardé nos vies*—You have cut through our lives like a knife,' went the chorus, 'but justice will always prevail.'(116, Italics in the original)

This song, in fact, revived their hope and inspired their spirits. Before performing their artistic shows, each one of the Oufkirs used to take a part to play. As "a stylized response to oppression" (Hart 488), Malika, even in the austere conditions at Bir-Jdid, carefully observed her sisters' demeanors concerning the etiquette of conversation, the hygiene and table manners so that they could take pride in themselves and maintain their humanity. Oufkir remembers:

I would not allow the slightest breach of manners, not even in prison, not even at Bir Jdid. We behaved properly at the table, we chewed delicately, we said 'please' and 'thank you', and 'excuse me'. We washed ourselves scrupulously every day, especially when we had our periods, despite the freezing salt water we were given every day in the middle of winter that turned our skin bright red and made us shriek. (149)

Judith Herman points out that the jailers' organized coercive methods of "disempowerment and disconnection" depend on "systematic, repetitive infliction of psychological trauma" so as to "instill terror and helplessness and to destroy the victim's sense of self" with respect to others (77). Malika Oufkir's memoir manifests "the prolonged, repeated trauma" of hunger inflicted by the jailers as a tactic to control, punish and

destroy the Oufkirs who were always thirsty and hungry (Herman 74). Being aware of how starvation degenerated them some political prison survivors, therefore, "became so ashamed" and "traumatized" by the intense feelings of "self-loathing and helplessness" (Wu, "Surviving Traumatic Captivity" 59). In the same vein, Malika Oufkir affirms that she was aware of how she and her siblings were humiliated degraded and turned into monsters as a result of prolonged thirst and hunger (150). "[F]ighting like stray dogs," Malika's three sisters were "licking the floor for crumbs that had dropped from the box" (152). The Oufkirs were preoccupied with food, so they "felt ashamed to have sunk so low" (153). Malika Oufkir accused Halima and Ashura of running "a mini black market . . . [and] swapping sugar or bread with the other cells" (151). As a result, Malika "made an inventory of food supplies," "confiscated them" and counted them down to the last chick pea" (151).

Herman explains that chronically traumatized people "develop an insidious, progressive form of post-traumatic stress disorder" (86). "The symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder," Herman adds "also persist" in survivors of chronic trauma (87). The Oufkirs, after release, experienced many symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); they locked their several pets in their bedrooms in order not to meet the prison pigeons' fate and they lined up in the café as if they were docile prisoners awaiting their rations. Malika used to wake up at night "tormented by nightmares or horrendous memories . . . [and] haunted by ghosts" (Oufkir 259). Additionally, The Oufkirs exhibited "the post-famishment syndrome"⁸ as a symptom of PTSD since they, even after their release, frequently felt starved. Oufkir narrates:

The Marrakesh Caïd (a 'chief' or a kind of mayor) and his deputy were responsible for our daily shopping. The first day, they suggested we write a list. We could have anything we wanted. I didn't immediately understand what they meant by

'anything'. A kilo of meat per week seemed sufficient for nine. Writing the word 'butter', or even thinking of it, was inconceivable. They couldn't understand my hesitation. I kept asking: 'Can we have fruit? Fresh milk? Chocolate? Sweets? Aren't they forbidden anymore?' (258)

Malika continues narrating the "post-famishment syndrome" attacking the released Oufkirs. Although they "ate non-stop" and kept scavenging for food, their "deficiencies were so serious that it was like pouring a drop of water onto sand" (259). At night, when she suffered from insomnia, she "tiptoe[d] downstairs where [she] . . . often bume[d] into another member of the family . . . going back upstairs with a tray laden with food." Then, they sat happily and gorged themselves together. Such merry nights, of course, satisfied them and "proved to [them] that [they] were no longer in gaol" (259).

Among the Oufkirs' main strategies of survival were their sense of humor and fertile imagination. Edurne Portella, in her book *Displaced Memories*, finds out that Argentinian female political prisoners employed humor as a strategy to "find courage and alertness to resist their oppressive situation" (76) Similarly, humor allowed the Oufkirs to survive the worst moments as they ridiculed the jailors' inability to crush their identities. They "laugh[ed] at the most painful things," and made fun of people especially themselves (Oufkir 163). Malika narrates ecstatic moments during their long-term incarceration such as that moment when their faithful cook, Halima, was given the haircut of the famous singer Mireille Mathieu as she was going to perform his song. The Oufkirs also devised a hidden transcript that enabled them to outwit, manipulate and deceive their tormentors exposing their jailors as mentally inferior, foolish clowns if compared to the intellectually superior, prestigious Oufkirs. Imagination also was a mighty survival strategy employed by Malika Oufkir. Oufkir reveals: "To survive, I travelled in my imagination" (109). She often brought her

geography book and took her younger siblings, who circled around her, into imaginary journeys around the world. Malika affirms that imagination enabled the mind to triumph over the body, and this mental triumph was, of course, indispensable for survival.

Scarry maintains that "through his ability to project words and sounds out into his environment, a human being inhabits, humanizes, and makes his own space much larger than that occupied by his body alone" (49). However, under authoritarian regimes, this space withers to an extremely narrow shell where an individual's voice gradually fades till it completely disappears since the perpetrators aim "to make the one, the body, emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, *absent* by destroying it" (49, italics in the original). Devastating Raouf's will, identity, and voice was the target of the jailers as he was General Oufkir's eldest son who would, according to the fiction of the state, take vengeance for his assassinated father. Raouf was tortured physically and psychologically; he intensely suffered in his solitary confinement. As a result, he "grew up unable to express himself," laments Malika Oufkir (122). "[T]orture contains language, specific human words and sounds," asserts Scarry, "it is a language, an objectification, an acting out" (27). Isolation and detachment from the hustle of life for a long time made the Oufkirs scared of any voice since they were enveloped in an overwhelming silence interrupted by the jailers' footsteps and whistles, the clinking of keys, "the singing of birds, the braying of a donkey . . . or the rustling of the palm trees in the wind" (Oufkir 148).

In her Ph.D. dissertation entitled "The Maghreb Goes Abroad," Mary Anne Lewis argues that "the overwhelming majority of the cultural and literary references [in *Stolen Lives*] . . . are [mainly] French"(114). Malika was "torn between East and West. At my parents' house . . . we spoke French, but at the palace Arabic was the rule" (Oufkir 57). Malika mentions various examples that show

the European cultural domination over Morocco and "set the tone for Europe as a savior"(Lewis 115). At the beginning of her memoir, when Malika remembers her luxurious life in the palace in Rabat when she was adopted by King Muḥammad V and later his son King Ḥassan II as well as her life with her elite family, she made reference to European brand names, such as Le Bon Génie, le Châtelaine and Je Reviens. The Alsatian governess, Jeanne Rieffel, for Malika and Lala Mina taught the little girls German. In Christmas, Lala Mina received an American car designed especially for her by Walt Disney. During holidays, Muḥammad V used to play *pétanque* with his chauffeur. King Ḥassan II arranged *Swan Lake* to celebrate his forties birthday.

Malika experienced gender-based human rights abuses whether physically or psychologically. Malika, her mother, her younger sisters and the two female aides were deeply humiliated by their gender. When they had their menstrual periods, they were offered no sanitary pads, so they "cut hand towels into strips and used them over and over again"(Oufkir 149). Menstrual period is a gender signifier of female inmates' bodies. Women, therefore, were humiliated by "long delays in delivering sanitary napkins" and "[a]llowing the women to soil themselves with their menstrual blood"(Slymovics 96). Rape has been and remains the most abusive method of torture; Malika Oufkir tackles different forms of torture including rape; she recounts her success in stopping a guard who attempted to rape her:

He pressed himself against me, and began to grope my breasts and bite my mouth. He lifted up my blouse. I could hear him panting like a rutting animal, he smelt bad, his breath was offensive, his body was crushing me, but I was incapable of fighting back. I was powerless: I couldn't scream or defend myself in any way without frightening the others. Raouf would probably have tried to kill him and would doubtless

have come off worst. I endured his assault for a few minutes without him obtaining what he wanted, then I pushed him away as calmly as I could. I was shaking and my heart was thumping, but I was determined not to let it show. (172)

In *Steps under Water*, resistance is multifaceted. The memoir manifests numerous examples of individual and collective resistance. Initially, Sara hardened her stomach when the guards hit her during her arrest (Kozameh 10). Sara managed to warn her companions not to come near her house, even when the soldiers were at her house, since she claimed that her nose was bleeding and asked for a handkerchief hung from the bedroom window. Despite the fact that, in the car that took her to prison, female prisoners were forced to lower their heads between their legs so that they could not see their way, yet Sara managed to stretch her neck and understood that they were in town (15). While transferring to Villa Devoto, Sara disobeyed orders by looking at her fellow inmates on the plane (94). The communication through little papers hidden inside the iron was a kind of collective resistance (27). Sara managed to save her poems by copying them in cigarette paper. Then, she hid them in the lining of the straps of her summer sandals and gave the sandals to her father during his last visit (36). Communication was forbidden and impossible in Villa Devoto, so prisoners resisted the lack of communication by finding parallel means of communication; thousands of prisoners used the telephone for communication in Villa Devoto. Knowledge was also a mechanism of resistance that enabled the prisoners to reclaim power. Through the telephone, they knew that the doctor refused to enter the prison to treat their comrade, Patricia. Consequently, the women organized resistance without delay through the deafening clang of tin cups against the prison bars to demand aid for Patricia. Kozameh describes this episode:

Last night: right after falling asleep we awoke as if going down on a sinking

ship. From the ceiling we heard knocks that told us to answer the telephone. They gave us the latest: Patricia with her legs stiffening up . . . So about an hour later, nine hundred out of the thousand and something out of us that make up our wards— metal tins in hand but not yet banging them together— began to shout. We called out for the female guards, we asked to speak with the Chief of Security. No go. Then the banging began. We beat the cups into scab metal. (116)

Judith A. Scheffler contends that "[w]omen prisoners' lack of, need for, and joy in humans companionship are major themes in" women's prison literature (127). *Steps under Water* "depicts two major coping strategies: the formation of relationships and the establishment of communication" that are increased as a result of the miserable environment of prison (124).

Conclusion

To conclude, patriarchal oppressive regimes claim that violence against female political prisoners is justifiable since they entered the political realm belonging exclusively to men. According to Ismail Frouini and Brahim Benmoh, "[t]he 'regulatory practices' . . . like 'body search' and physical violence" exerted on female prisoners accentuate that female political prisoners have experienced "a gendered trauma and violence" as a severe punishment for "transcend[ing] the socially established borders of politics, dissidence and activism" (45). Notwithstanding the Psychological and physical violence, female political prisoners employed various survival strategies and resistance mechanisms that enabled them to do their times behind the high walls of prison to maintain their sanity. Experiencing a gendered trauma, Female political prisoners are incarcerated to be crushed, oppressed and suppressed, yet they become more resilient and activist. The act of writing is, in effect, an act of resistance since the written word is a weapon against

hegemony. In effect, political prison memoirs are a challenge to the authoritarian regimes all over the world. Like Scheherazade, through writing, Malika Oufkir and Alicia Kozameh bear witness, tell stories to keep themselves, and provide the voiceless, traumatized female political inmates a voice and a space to uncover the atrocious acts of the hegemonic regimes during the Lead years in Morocco and the Dirty War in Argentina. Additionally, Beverley argues that writing testimonial novels is a means "of mobilizing international opinion" to put an end to violence (84). All in all, political prisoners' main mechanism of resistance is, de facto, the determination to survive the austere conditions behind prison walls.

ENDNOTES

¹ "Moulay" means "my master" in Arabic.

² The first edition of *Steps under Water* (2004) was originally written in Spanish under the title *Pasos bajo el agua* and was published in Buenos Aires in June 1987.

³ Malika Oufkir's *Stolen Lives: Twenty Years in a Desert Jail* was originally written and published in French under the title *La Prisonnière* and then translated into many languages, including Arabic.

⁴ In *Stolen Lives*, Malika does not give attention to her father's brutal deeds as a military commander who played a role in the assassination of the leftist Moroccan politician Mehdi Ben Baraka in 1965, yet she concentrates on his tenderness as a father instead.

⁵ In some cases, a member of the dissident's family was detained for few days to force the wanted dissident to appear. In Moroccan prisons, a family member of the dissident was sometimes incarcerated and tortured when the police failed to arrest the target dissident. Ismail Frouini and Brahim Benmouh mention Oum Hafid who was arrested and tortured instead of her husband whom the police was not able to arrest (50).

⁶ Kozameh published seven novels, two anthologies, a collection of short stories entitled *Ofrenda de propia piel* in 2003 and a book of poetry.

⁷ There is an ancient proverb that says: "A cat has nine lives," yet the Arabic proverb claims: "A cat has seven lives," so a cat can endure and survive disasters as well as death.

⁸ The "post-famishment syndrome" is a term coined by Cong Weixi as a kind of "post-laogai syndrome" to describe the continuous state of feeling starved after enduring severe hunger (Wu, "Surviving Traumatic Captivity" 70).

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