

L'Autre côté: la mémoire collective dans trois romans  
d'Amin Maalouf

Catherine Ann Bagot

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## **The other side: collective memory in three novels by Amin Maalouf**

Collective memory is an expression which is used to describe the way in which societies reflect on their past and ensure their unity in the present. This thesis aims to show how narrative in general, and in particular in the novels of French Lebanese writer, Amin Maalouf, plays a crucial role in the transmission of collective memory.

The thesis demonstrates that narrative fulfills this function in three ways. Firstly, narrative gives meaning to past events. Secondly, narrative changes and evolves over time. Lastly, narrative ensures a continual exchange between individual and collective memory. Thus, in its capacity to sustain aspects of individual and collective memory, narrative expresses the values that unite society.

Central to our analysis of narrative in the work of Amin Maalouf is the concept of "l'autre côté" or "the other side". This is the expression used by Maalouf when referring to his passion for forgotten or uncomfortable aspects of Western and Arab cultural heritage. By informing the contemporary reader of the shared past, Maalouf strives to build bridges of understanding between the two groups.

Maalouf's novels explore themes of origins, of exile and of memory. In the three novels we examine, the narrative is centered on the life of the hero who, endowed with exceptional qualities, is tested by the political and religious challenges of his time. The personal qualities of the hero, revealed in his dealings with the crises which form the particularity of his time, determine the orientation of collective memory.

The first novel, *Léon l'Africain*, published in 1986, is based on the life of Hassan al-Wazzan who lived in Spain, Africa and Rome in the early

sixteenth century. Hassan tells the story of his family, and of the political circumstances which led to the expulsion of the Arabs from Spain. The second novel, *Les Jardins de lumière*, published in 1991, examines the life of the poet, doctor and philosopher named Mani who lived in the third century A.D. In the Epilogue of the novel, the narrator states his intention of challenging the misconceptions and distortions concerning the life of Mani. In the third novel, *Le Rocher de Tanios*, published in 1993, the narrator sets out to find the truth concerning the events surrounding the birth, life and disappearance of the young man named Tanios, who lived in the narrator's village in Lebanon at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Catherine Ann Bagot and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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