

Manifestations of "Nostalgia" in Contemporary Algerian Poetic Discourse A Critical Study of Memory, Yearning, and Evocation in the Collection *Fields of Violets* by Poet Lakhdar Fellous

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Introduction: When Yearning Becomes a Poetic Construct

Abstract: This study explores the manifestations of nostalgia in contemporary Algerian poetic discourse, focusing on the collection *Fields of Violets* (1990) by poet Lakhdar Fellous as an applied model. Employing a descriptive-analytical approach that combines semiotics and literary criticism, the research investigates how nostalgia transforms from a mere passing psychological emotion into a complex poetic and semantic structure. The analysis covers five main axes: personal memory, collective memory, heritage intertextuality, nostalgic symbols, and the language of evocation. The study concludes that nostalgia in Fellous's poetry transcends negative or pathological longing, emerging instead as a "creative force" and a will to survive. By invoking childhood memories, feelings of alienation, lost civilizations, and shared human pain through intense symbolic language and profound intertextuality, the poet reconstructs the past not as a retreat, but as an aesthetic and objective mechanism to confront the present and its challenges.

Keywords: Nostalgia, Contemporary Algerian Poetry, Lakhdar Fellous, *Fields of Violets*, Memory, Intertextuality, Poetic Evocation.

Introduction :

Nostalgia is the yearning and eagerness for all the beautiful memories of life and the feeling of belonging. Nostalgia for the past is considered a process of recalling fleeting feelings and happy moments from memory, expelling all negative moments, especially when individuals face stressors and exhausting events such as distress and grief.

Poetry encompasses multiple and vast human themes; the most important is the poet's alignment with the reality of their homeland. This is followed by a feeling of belonging, succeeded by satisfaction or alienation fueled by yearning and longing, because the homeland is a dormant idea awakened by the delicate feelings of poets. If a person is emotionally connected to the place where they grew up and where their roots extend, their innate consciousness deepens by expanding the circle of their belonging to form a broad expanse where their human and natural characteristics are represented.

The concept of nostalgia has always been associated with yearning for the past, childhood memories, lost places, and departed individuals. However, when this concept enters the space of

poetry, it does not remain a mere passing feeling; rather, it transforms into a complex "semantic structure" that summons memory and reconstructs it in an intense poetic moment. For further insight, it is necessary to pause at the concept of nostalgia in psychology and literature and mention its types:

01/ The Concept of Nostalgia:

"Nostalgia" is a foreign word derived from the Greek language, composed of two words: ("Algos") which means pain, and ("Nostos") which means returning home. It first appeared at the hands of the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer in his medical clinic in 1866, while observing disorders suffered by some Swiss mercenary soldiers working for the French or Italian army. He found no biological explanation for them, so it initially meant the pain of being away from home (Hofer, 1866). It was also defined as: "homesickness, the longing to return to the country and family, and the term also refers to the longing for the past."

The concept of nostalgia is described as an emotion or longing that individuals feel towards the past. It has also emerged as a cognitive evaluation process by which an individual compares their experiences in the past and present, and it serves to motivate the individual and make them feel vitality and activity.

The first to use the term nostalgia was "Johannes Hofer," a Swiss physician, when he studied the behavioral symptoms of Swiss mercenaries and their existence far from their homeland. The symptoms ranged from despair to crying spells, loss of appetite, and suicide. He described it as a mental illness, diagnosing a dying young man's condition as homesickness; upon his release to return home, his condition improved immediately.

Accordingly, nostalgia emerged as a modern, independent concept as a psychological complex of cognitive and emotional states that appear in the form of longing, gratitude, and respect for people, objects, and the environment in which the individual lived in the past. Therefore, it is a mixture of memories, thoughts, and nostalgia for the past with all its experiences colored by joy, sorrow, bonds of brotherhood, friendship, achievement, giving, and mercy.

In its simplest definitions, it signifies a return to the past, a profound love for it, and the evocation of its characters, events, and places, with elaboration and detail in the memories related to it.

It can be defined as a feeling of happiness, as well as slight sadness, when thinking about things that happened in the past. Even if the past was less happy than the present, it represents the human entity.

Returning to Arabic studies, the term "nostalgia" corresponds to "yearning for the past" (Al-Haneen ila Al-Madi), which is a transition via memory and artistic taste from a current time and place to a previous time and place, to draw a comparison between them and to prefer the pastness of the past. Thus, "yearning" is an inclination towards a lost belonging that time has passed over, yet the person's imagination and conscience have not discarded it.

From this, we can conclude that the Western concept of nostalgia aligns with the concept of yearning (Haneen) in Arabic studies.

02/ Nostalgia in Psychology:

The term "nostalgia" first originated in the medical field, as previously indicated, and according to this terminology, "until 1850 AD, it was treated as depression and a mental illness requiring treatment, linked to place and painful homesickness." It then transformed into a means of psychological therapy, due to its ability to create a world more beautiful than the ugly present by invoking past happy moments to alleviate the severity and pain of reality (Boym, 2001). That is, it subsequently exited the realm of psychiatry to become a term circulated in daily life, relating to the feeling that stirs the soul when it yearns for its homeland while recalling the beautiful memories lingering in the mind and lost in that time and place.

Psychiatrists have considered it "a mechanism used by the mind to elevate mood and improve the psychological state; therefore, it abounds in states of boredom or feeling of existence... The mind summons good memories of the past with their warmth and emotions, giving it a boost to deal with current challenges... It is a psychological resource that people descend into to reclaim their lives and feel their worth; thus, it is a successful temporary countermeasure against depression." It is as if, through this, it transitioned from being a mental illness to a therapeutic mechanism for the pain of alienation and loss. Nostalgia is not limited to time alone, but stems from a conscious psychological tendency that drives the individual to escape moments of sadness, depression, and fear, desiring the comfort and reassurance that can only be attained by recalling moments of the past.

03/ Nostalgia in Literature:

After the term "nostalgia" became common in scientific and social fields, it also became one of the interests of the literary arena, both creatively and critically. It was associated with the phenomenon of writers' yearning—especially immigrants among them—for their homeland and all previous memories, whether pleasant or painful. Nostalgia appeared particularly in poetry, and then writers circulated it in all forms and genres of writing. In novels, it makes the individual remember old moments and memories through the events experienced by the novel's heroes, helping individuals to understand themselves and generating a feeling of happiness and sorrow simultaneously. In it, important memories from previous stations in life are discussed, or specific historical figures are invoked to create a positive or negative shock.

Some scholars have gone so far as to define "nostalgia" in literature as an inability to "... face circumstances, challenges, misery, and hardship; thus, the poet resorts to fleeing towards memories and moments of hope and optimism, as if it were an attempt to escape from the present and return to the past." It is the product of specific psychological factors that push writers to invoke the past to achieve psychological security and stability.

03/01: In Poetry:

In this introduction, one must go beyond the idea of nostalgia's presence in literature because literature, in general, is a breeding ground for human concerns, and nostalgia, in particular, is a human emotion. It cannot be isolated from literature because poets and writers have not only poured their opinions, thoughts, and visions into their creations and works, but also their overwhelming emotions. Across the chronological sequence of this literature, we find poetry topping the list of human creativity since the pre-Islamic era. Poetry was the register of the Arabs

(whether we believe in the ignorance of pre-Islamic poetry or not, it is our heritage, telling us the stories of the pre-Islamic era and conveying its values to us). Nostalgia has been evident in poets' poems from the pre-Islamic era until today, where poets would stand over the ruins (Al-Atlal). The ruin-prelude in ancient poetic odes was a custom or protocol followed by most poets (Hajjawi, 2018).

It can be said that "nostalgia" existed in ancient literature, and what proves its existence is the poet's return to the past. What drove them to summon its past memory is their bad present, in which they swallowed the bitterness of pain and the monotony of boredom. This is what made them resort to nostalgia, which, as we said, is a type of sad emotion and feeling generated from being away from home and homeland. From this distance and separation, we deduce the reason pre-Islamic poets stood over ruins and wept for their homes, a tradition passed down by poets to this day, especially what we touch upon in *Fields of Violets* by our poet Lakhdar Fellous.

04/ Types of "Nostalgia":

Scholars have differed in determining the types of "nostalgia" since the term was coined, due to the branching of its fields of affiliation on the one hand, and its connection to human feelings and perceptions of changing reality on the other. However, the most common and circulated classification is the one proposed by Holak and Havlena and Matveev, who contributed significantly to enriching research related to nostalgia. They presented four types of it, which researchers considered a source upon which they based their various subsequent studies. These types can be arranged as follows:

- **04/01: Personal Nostalgia:** Linked to individuals and their personal memories, this is what is called true nostalgia.
- **04/02: Interpersonal Nostalgia:** Related to events that the person did not experience alone but heard about and was influenced by, seeing them as better than the present.
- **04/03: Cultural Nostalgia:** Includes memories shared among members of the same generation.
- **04/04: Virtual Nostalgia:** Relies on imagination instead of reality, usually derived from fiction books and ancient myths.

From this, we conclude that the differing classification of "nostalgia" categories is due to the unstable perceptions of the human mind. This has led studies to propose a classification that limits "nostalgia" to two types: private nostalgia specific to the person, and shared nostalgia among groups.

In contemporary Algerian poetry, nostalgia has emerged as a prominent feature, especially among the generation of the eighties and beyond—that generation which lived through the contradictions of the Black Decade, urban alienation, and the loss of certainty. In this context, the collection *Fields of Violets* (1990) by the Algerian poet Lakhdar Fellous (1959-) stands out as one of the models that embodies this yearning in its multiple dimensions: yearning for childhood, for the homeland, for heritage, and for lost places.

Abdelhamid Hima says that "the alienated converses with the heritage character as a kind of alienation and feeling of deprivation" (Hima, 1985), which summarizes the nostalgic

mechanism for Fellous: a poet who converses with the past to rediscover himself in the present.

In this research, we will attempt to trace the (manifestations of nostalgia) in the collection *Fields of Violets* through five axes: personal memory, collective memory, heritage intertextuality, symbols of yearning, and the language of evocation, relying on a descriptive-analytical approach that combines semiotics and literary criticism.

Lakhdar Fellous... Biography and Collection:

05/ The Poet and the Collection:

05/01: Lakhdar Fellous - Upbringing and Formation:

Lakhdar Fellous (January 24, 1959) is considered one of the contemporary Algerian poets and represents one of the poetic figures of the eighties generation. He was born in the city of El Hamel (Algeria) and then moved to the city of Ain El Hadjel, where he grew up and lived his childhood and the rest of his youth.

He excelled in the field of poetry since his youth, obtained a baccalaureate degree, and passed through the University of Algiers, majoring in Arabic Literature, where he formed many concepts about poetry, thought, and art during his studies. He moved to Egypt, to the city of Alexandria, with the aim of obtaining a master's degree, but circumstances prevented that, turning the journey into a phase of creativity, and there he wrote the collection *Bunches of Yearning*.

Lakhdar Fellous was among those influenced by the poetry of the ancients, who constituted a diverse world for him, such as Al-Nabigha and Tarafa, and he was also influenced by the poets of the Umayyad and Abbasid eras. But he was soon amazed when he read modern voices such as Al-Sayyab, Youssef Saadi, Mahmoud Darwish, and Salah Abdel Sabour.

05/02: Definition of the Collection *Fields of Violets* (1990):

The collection *Fields of Violets* was published in 1990 by the National Enterprise for the Algerian Book (Fellous, 1990). It is considered one of the poet's most important publications and has been the subject of many academic studies, including a master's thesis ("Titling as a Strategy in the Poetry of Lakhdar Fellous") from the University of Biskra.

The collection is characterized by "its poetic language marked by ambiguity and difficulty in decoding its meanings hidden behind evocative symbols, which requires the reader to have the skill to read between the lines." It also relies on nature as a sanctuary from which the poet draws his words and phrases, making his poems "a lush garden exuding the scent of violets."

06/01/ Personal Nostalgia: Memory of Childhood and Alienation:

06/01/01: Alienation of the Self and Its Yearning:

"Nostalgia" for Fellous begins with the "alienated self," a self lost between the city and the countryside, between the present and the past. The poet, who grew up in Ain El Hadjel, then moved to Algiers, and then to Alexandria, carries his early childhood in his memory as a final refuge from the alienation of the city.

In the poem (Summer Signals from the Tower of Collapse), the poet invokes the image of palm trees and the sea as symbols of yearning:

Pull me, O palm tree, for the sea is behind me...

And eyes that have not ceased to follow my steps in the six directions have settled

Wherever you are, you do not appear!

A homeland for virgin alienation and longing: my eyes...

Like the wall of the temple haunted by memory: my eyes

Like the burning of grass in the summer: my eyes

Like palm trees near the seashore complaining of the alienation of the house: my eyes

Pull me, O palm tree, for I am like a sea bird, longing..

This excerpt embodies the (nostalgic structure) par excellence: palm trees and the sea are invoked as lost places, eyes turn into "a homeland for virgin alienation," and memory (remembrance) inhabits the temple wall. It is a double yearning: a yearning for the place (the house) and a yearning for the time (summer).

06/01/02: The Language of Yearning: Repetition and Calling:

Fellous resorts to "repetition" as a nostalgic tool, repeating (my eyes) four times, and repeating (Pull me, O palm tree) twice. This repetition "achieves the movement and turbulence of events and gives a dynamic knot between the elements of the linguistic structure."

He also resorts to "calling" (O palm tree) as an evocation technique, reviving the lost place as if it is present and listening. This call constitutes "an attempt to depart to a reality contrary to the one he lives in."

06/02: Collective Nostalgia.. Invoking Heritage:

06/02/01: Babylon: The City of Yearning for Civilization:

Fellous does not only yearn for his childhood but also for the "past of the nation," to Babylon, its capital, and its walls. In the poem "A Rose from the Hanging Gardens of Babylon," the poet invokes the lost city as a symbol of Arab civilization eroded by days:

The tongue of the prince hanging from the midst of the storms

The sand of the frightening deserts

Between me and the gardens of "Babylon" like two guards

It has worn the rock as a mask..

And the wall has become!!..

And the city wall gazes..

Something is the face of the Tatars

Here, Babylon transforms into an "object of collective yearning." The poet stands "between me and the gardens of Babylon like two guards," besieged between the frightening desert sands (the present) and the gardens of Babylon (the past). The Tatars represent "evidence of ruin, destruction, and barbarism," which doubles the feeling of loss.

In the poem "Life and Death on the Walls of Babylon," he says:

You may insult..

But (Babylon) is my bright, beautiful dream

Let the fire burn the temples

So the winds may roll them into nothingness!!

(Indeed, this path is death and life)

Babylon here is not merely a historical city; it is a **bright dream** resisting nothingness,

embodying nostalgia in its deepest sense: not merely a negative yearning, but a **will to survive** in the face of perishing.

06/02/02: Job (Ayoub), the Image of Shared Pain:

Fellous invokes the character of **Job** in the poem "**A Lost Page from the Book of Job**," dedicated to Badr Shakir al-Sayyab. Here, nostalgia transforms into a **yearning for shared pain**, for a history of suffering embodied by Job:

A voice: Open, O intoxication!

For the ghoul is behind me, panting

Prostrate, he listened when the stone bites

I want to die, oh what a sin

This evocation embodies "intertextuality" in its profound sense: the poet converses with Al-Sayyab through Job, reviving a lost text (The Book of Job) to express his present pain. This constitutes a "manifestation of the self," where the poet unites with Job in his suffering.

07/ Nostalgic Intertextuality: A Dialogue with Absent Voices

07/01: Al-Sayyab: The Poet of Lost Yearning:

One of the most prominent features of nostalgia in the collection *Fields of Violets* is the **intertextuality** with poets of the past, headed by **Badr Shakir al-Sayyab**. The poet dedicates an entire poem to Al-Sayyab, invoking the "Book of Job" as a symbol of yearning for shared pain.

Fellous says:

A Lost Page from the Book of Job

This title embodies the "multiplicity" in intertextual functions: it refers to an absent text (The Book of Job by Al-Sayyab) to reproduce it in a present text. This evocation "reveals the atmospheres of many functions that accompanied the titling, starting with the referential function."

07/02/ Popular Heritage: The Memory of the People:

Fellous selects many of his titles from the popular environment, "and perhaps the reason for this is his attachment to his environment and his belonging to it." In the poem "**The Owl**," he invokes the bird that "appears only in the dark and whose voice incites fear," reviving a popular memory that associates the owl with bad omens:

The dust may clear..

The eggs may hatch hordes of Tatars

And the locusts creep!

And the darkness gouges out the eyes of the olives

But the children will grow up

And every lost inch

Will extend its root..

Rising for Jihad!

Here, the owl transforms from a symbol of bad omens into a symbol of steadfastness. The children "will grow up" and the roots "will extend." This transformation embodies **positive nostalgia**: it is not merely a yearning for the past, but a **will for a future** that emerges from the roots of the past.

08/ Symbols of Nostalgia in the Collection:

08/01: The Violet: The Flower of Yearning.

The (violet) in the collection is not merely a flower; it is a (nostalgic symbol) par excellence. It blooms in (fields) that invoke the first place (the countryside), appearing in a context of yearning and longing where he says:

My companion, in his eyes a violet blooms

Sprinkled by longing, it trembled after a slumber

The (violet) here blooms in the (eyes) of the companion; that is, it grows from the inside, from memory, not from the outside. Longing is what (sprinkles) it and revives it. This embodies "nostalgia as an internal process": here, the past is not invoked as it is, but reinvented in a present moment of feeling.

08/02: Palm Trees and the Sea: Places of Yearning:

Fellous invokes (palm trees) and the (sea) as recurring nostalgic places. Palm trees appear in the poem (Summer Signals from the Tower of Collapse) as a symbol of origin and belonging:

Pull me, O palm tree, for the sea is behind me...

Like palm trees near the seashore complaining of the alienation of the house: my eyes

The (sea) here is not merely a place, but a "nostalgic space" that combines alienation and longing, departure and return. And he says picturing that:

The Night and Darkness: The Time of Yearning:

Night comes as a time for yearning and contemplation:

Do not sleep - O fields of violets - for I fear

The night when it flutters like a crow

The (night) here forms a "nostalgic space" wide enough for all fears and dreams, and the (crow), as a bird of ill omen in Arab heritage, lends the night a dramatic character.

09/ The Language of Nostalgia.. Between Evocation and Renewal:

09/01: Metaphor and Simile: The Vision of the Past:

Fellous uses "metaphor" and "simile" to invoke the past. The eyes are likened to (the wall of the temple haunted by memory), and the violet is likened to (the lighthouse when the darkness comes).

These images form intense (nostalgic moments), where the past (the temple, the lighthouse) intertwines with the present (the eyes, the violet).

09/02/ Advancing and Delaying (Foregrounding and Backgrounding): The Disturbance of Memory:

Fellous sometimes foregrounds the object before the subject, or the state (hal) before the subject (mubtada), causing a (syntactic disturbance) that parallels the disturbance of nostalgic memory. In the poem "Summer Signals from the Tower of Collapse," the poet says in this context:

Pull me, O palm tree, for the sea is behind me...

And eyes that have not ceased to follow my steps in the six directions have settled

Wherever you are, you do not appear!

The sentence (Wherever you are, you do not appear) lacks syntactic clarity, forming a

(linguistic reflection) of nostalgia: memory does not reproduce the past clearly, but presents it blurred and fragmented.

Conclusion:

The collection *Fields of Violets* by Lakhdar Fellous embodies multiple (nostalgic manifestations) that transcend negative yearning for the past to become a "will to survive" and "resistance against perishing." These manifestations are evident in:

- **First:** "Personal" nostalgia, where the poet invoked the memory of his childhood in Ain El Hadjel through the palm trees, the sea, and the lost house.
- **Second:** "Collective" nostalgia, where he invoked the past of the nation in Babylon and Job, expressing a yearning for a civilization eroded by days.
- **Third:** Nostalgic intertextuality, where he established a dialogue with Al-Sayyab and popular heritage, reviving absent texts in present ones.
- **Fourth:** Symbols of nostalgia, where the violet, palm trees, and the night turned into symbols of both yearning and steadfastness.
- **Fifth:** The language of nostalgia, where he used metaphor, simile, foregrounding, and backgrounding to create a linguistic structure that reproduces the past blurred, just as memory reproduces it.

Fellous, with this collection, proves that nostalgia is not a "disease" as doctors described it in the past, but rather a (creative force) that enables the poet to face the present with the roots of the past, and to build a future that emerges from a memory that does not die.

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