

**From the Body of Power to the Power of Discourse: Transformations of Domination in the Novel *The Bash Katib* – Nothing Left for the President’s Scribe to Write by Amin Zaoui.**

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***Abstract***

*This study analyzes and interprets various discourses by examining the transformations affecting political power. It explores how the corrupted physical image of the ruling authority is translated into written discourse, allowing it to reproduce its influence. The weakening of the regime’s structure enables a marginal figure, the "Bash," to become a "shadow chief" through the dominant language. In this way, the Bash assumes an exceptional role, striving to sustain the rule of "Qazman Abu Niswan" and extend his political and biological longevity through the power of language.*

***Keywords:*** center, power, domination, discourse, body.

**Du corps du pouvoir au pouvoir du discours : Les transformations de la domination dans le roman *Le Bash Katib* -  
Il ne reste plus rien à écrire au scribe du président par  
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**Résumé**

*Cette étude analyse et interprète différents discours en examinant les transformations qui affectent le pouvoir politique. Elle explore comment l'image physique corrompue de l'autorité au pouvoir est traduite dans le discours écrit, lui permettant de reproduire son influence. L'affaiblissement de la structure du régime permet à une figure marginale, le "Bash", de devenir un "chef de l'ombre" à travers la langue dominante. Le Bash assume ainsi un rôle exceptionnel, s'efforçant de maintenir le règne du "Qazman Abu Niswan" et de prolonger sa longévité politique et biologique par le pouvoir de la langue.*

**Mots-clés :** *centre, pouvoir, domination, discours, corps.*

## Introduction

The novel addresses fundamental questions about existence, culture, and politics, transforming these issues into narrative worlds that shape its structure. It portrays human life and highlights how political existence is dictated by power in both material and symbolic forms. This power is subject to change, instability, and transformation due to external and internal influences. Consequently, the novel illustrates political shifts in hegemony and possession.

“*The Bash Kateb*” (The Chief Scribe) is an experimental novel that immediately engages the reader with its layered complexities. At its core is President Qazman Abu Niswan, representing absolute authority, while the Bash emerges as a new voice for the deteriorating regime – both politically and physically.

### Research Problem

To explore this topic, we pose the following questions:

- How does the power dynamic in *Bash Kateb* shift from the physical form of President Qazman Abu Niswan to the rhetorical form of Bash Kateb?
- Is the president’s stroke merely a biological incident, or does it symbolize the collapse of traditional authority?
- How is language employed as a tool to dominate and manipulate the narrative?

### Methodology

This study employs a qualitative focalization-based approach, analyzing discourse as an instrument of power. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s theories, it examines power as a dynamic relationship rather than a fixed structure. The

analysis focuses on symbols such as the stroke and explores language as a battleground for power struggles.

### **Objectives**

This study aims to:

- Examine the shift of power from the physical body (the leader) to discourse (Bash Kateb).
- Interpret the stroke as a symbol of the collapse of traditional power, using Foucault's theoretical framework.
- Analyze the role of language as a means of domination and manipulation in the novel.

### **Hypotheses**

- The stroke affecting "Qazman Abu Niswan" is not merely a biological event but symbolizes the decline of traditional authority, paving the way for the rise of rhetorical power embodied by "Bash Kateb."
- Language in the novel functions as a dual tool: it reinforces dominance through the central authority (as seen in Bash Kateb's role) while also serving as a mechanism for manipulating reality.
- The transition of power from the body to discourse reflects a vision of power as a decentralized and fluid dynamic network.

## **1. The Fall of the Body and the Rise of Discourse**

### **1.1. President Qazman Abu Niswan – The Resigned God**

In the novel, "Qazman Abu Niswan" is depicted as "the living body of sovereignty" (Foucault, 2003, p. 51). He embodies power and authority, maintaining an ever-present vigilance. His rule is absolute, and he considers himself the source of all authority, directly or indirectly. Any criticism of his actions or policies is perceived as an attack on the entire nation, as he equates himself with the country. Freedom be-

longs solely to him, and only he has the right to critique; no one else dares to exercise such a privilege. He maintains control over society, dictating their actions and thoughts. Every aspect of life revolves around his existence, making him the "only leader" (Imam, 1994).

### *Qazman and the Eunuch's Harem*

Qazman surrounds himself with luxury and excess, using state resources for his personal indulgence. He monopolizes power, reducing those around him to mere subordinates. "Advisors turned into eunuchs, both mentally and morally," as his overwhelming presence creates an aura of sanctity around him. The presidential palace transforms into "a harem," as described by the character "Bashi Kateb" in the novel:

"The Diwan of Pen and Establishment, of which I am the president with pride and honor, is located in the Mawlawi neighborhood. More than 130 advisors reside here, resembling the Ottoman caliph's harem. They live in fierce jealousy, competing to serve the owner of principality and civility, Moulay Qazman Abu Niswan. In this diwan, which I lead, our relationship with Moulay is like that of blind wives" (Zawi, 2019, p. 14).

This passage highlights Qazman's extreme narcissism, contrasting with the diminishing masculinity of the palace advisors. The presidential palace, meant to facilitate governance, becomes a space for the ruler's gratification. The advisors abandon their agency, symbolizing submission and obedience. Their loyalty transforms into a contest for the president's favor. They, like members of a harem, crave his attention, as depicted in the novel:

"The maximum she wishes for the Great Sultan is to be noticed and to have a relationship with him. She does not live or exist unless he looks at her. When the

Sultan turns his attention elsewhere and favors another, the beautiful concubine suffers from the sting of oblivion, standing at the brink of death" (Mernissi, 2004, p. 71).

In another passage, the novel illustrates how Qazman 's entourage idolizes him, particularly through "Al-Bash Kateb," who crafts the president's public image. One of his closest aides, "Hajj Moulay Bouazza," serves as the head of the veil and has been in Qazman 's service for twenty years. Despite this long tenure, he has only seen the president in person four times—each occasion coinciding with an election cycle meant to renew Qazman 's mandate. These elections are described as "fair and transparent," yet they merely reinforce Qazman 's absolute rule.

The novel describes this dynamic:

"Hajj Moulay Bouazza has only heard Qazman 's voice over the phone. The president's voice carries a romantic rattle, whispered like Gabriel's call to the Prophet. Their entire interaction consists of speeches delivered through the phone. Hajj Moulay Mazuz boasts to his family and neighbors that he meets the president every morning and evening and drinks afternoon coffee with him when there are no guests" (Mernissi, 2004, p. 71).

The novel (Zawi, 2019, p. 74) highlights how Qazman creates a myth around himself, portraying himself as the sole leader without equal. He becomes the symbol of intellectual fertility and political wisdom, the only viable choice for leadership over two decades.

Al-Bash Kateb's depiction of the dialogue between Qazman and the head of the veil intertwines the sacred with the profane. Politics is shown as the art of the possible, where all means become permissible to maintain power. His claim that elections are fair is part of the official narrative that sus-

tains the regime. This discourse legitimizes authority and prolongs its rule, ensuring the president's continued grip on power.

Qazman Abu Niswan, a highly enigmatic figure, has appeared only four times in twenty years, primarily in connection with elections. His physical absence reinforces his symbolic authority. Authority, as a concept, does not require constant physical presence to be effective. Instead, deliberate absence heightens the submissiveness of his followers, who eagerly seek to affirm their connection with him. Rare encounters function as rituals that enhance prestige and control. Meanwhile, telephone communication remains the primary mode of interaction, making power more embodied in speech than in physical presence.

The "hoarse" voice, described as a "romantic rattle" and "Gabriel's call to the prophet," illustrates how discourse constructs a sacred aura around power. Discourse is not merely a collection of words but a tool for producing truth and knowledge that serves authority. In this context, the telephone voice transcends its function as a communication tool, becoming a symbol of transcendent power. This poetic depiction grants a metaphysical quality to the voice, compelling Haj Moulay Bouazza to accept his role as a loyal follower without requiring direct confrontation.

The novel presents elections as a "fair and transparent democracy." However, their association with the rare meetings of "Moulay Qazman" suggests that elections serve more as rituals than genuine democratic processes. This portrayal aligns with the concept of "pastoral power," where individuals are controlled through the illusion of choice. In reality, power remains concentrated in the hands of the "shepherd-

president," Qazman. Here, elections do not serve to challenge authority but rather to reaffirm and perpetuate it.

Kabir al-Hijab takes pride in boasting to his "family and neighbors" about fabricated meetings with the "boss" and his participation in "coffee of the afternoon." This display reveals a voluntary submission to authority. He seeks to elevate his social status by claiming proximity to power. This behavior reflects "subjective techniques," where individuals shape themselves as subordinates to authority – not merely due to coercion, but because they perceive it as a source of social and personal value.

The novel's compelling narrative immerses readers in a struggle of power and emotion. It states, "Al-Bash, the writer of 'The Lover of President' Kozman,": "I am jealous of the masterpiece and civility; I want it for me alone, in which these advisors, who number more than one hundred, do not participate. I happen to be angry from time to time when the head of the hijab assigns one of the advisors to do something for the masterpiece and civility, such as asking for information about a country, a personality, or a case from someone else that may have been requested by Moulay Kozman Abu Niswan. I withdraw to my house, wear the Tlemisani robes, the yellow Fassi language, the red Ottoman hat, and the white Tunisian socks. I sit during the night and day reading the Holy Quran and popular poetry, smoking Katami hashish, and listening to the voice of Kenozon on the third radio channel. Jealousy strikes a princess and returns the old woman young."

The advisors in the Diwan of Qalam and the establishment of Moulay Qazman Abu Niswan are likened to wives who share one man. During the height of jealousy, the narrator refrains from plucking his eyebrows and shaving his beard, despite the discomfort. He finds refreshment in pass-

ing a razor blade over his face daily, lathered with soap foam. On such days, he consumes only black couscous with white gravy, bitter turnip or yellow zucchini, olives, and dates. He drinks copious amounts of coffee and listens to the radio. These days, which he compares to the "blood circulation of women," evoke memories of the Zendel or Andal mountain pyramid, beneath which he envisions constructing a mythical city. This city resembles a beast with its mouth open to the sky, a terrifying sight used by mothers and grandmothers to warn children against wandering too far from home.

This passage highlights the contradictions of power, the self, and its clash with the world (Al-Zawi, 2019, pp. 75–76). It also reflects the conflict of the marginalized, centered within the heart of power.

Bash appears as a jealous writer fixated on "The President," an influential and powerful figure. His jealousy is not merely a personal emotion but reflects a struggle for possession or proximity to power. The narrator, "Bash Kateb," refuses to share the president's favor with other advisors, whom he dismisses as "the chorus of taxes." The novel employs allegorical language rooted in Islamic culture, likening this rivalry to polygamy, where multiple contenders compete for the husband's affection. This conflict can be interpreted as a metaphor for the distribution of power within a network of relationships. Bash Kateb sees himself as deserving of exclusive proximity to power but feels marginalized by other advisors who share this space within the Presidential Palace – the symbolic heart of President Kozman.

Al-Bash is a writer who feels excluded and useless. He believes his role as a "producer of knowledge" has been diminished, reinforcing his sense of isolation. In response, he re-

treats to his own house, where he dons talismanic robes, speaks in Fassi, wears an Ottoman hat, reads the Quran and popular poetry, smokes hashish, and listens to the radio. This withdrawal is not just a passive escape but a form of resistance. Bash Kateb refuses to conform to the hegemonic dynamics imposed by the advisors and Moulay Qazman Abu Nasswan. By returning to personal and cultural rituals—traditional dress, religious texts, poetry, and hashish—he reclaims his identity outside the framework of central authority, creating an alternative space under his control.

The narrator's varied traditional attire (Tlemceni, Fassi, Ottoman, Tunisian) carries deep cultural significance. It reflects a multi-layered identity, as if he is reclaiming his dignity by showcasing his heritage as an alternative to the political power he feels he has lost.

The body itself becomes a site of resistance. Bash Kateb ceases his daily grooming rituals, refusing to pluck his eyebrows or shave his beard. These acts, typically associated with bodily discipline, are now forms of rebellion. By neglecting these practices, he defies societal expectations and resists social domination. His dietary choices—eating only black couscous, drinking excessive coffee, and abstaining from various foods—further reinforce this defiance. It is as if he is punishing or reshaping his body as an expression of his rejection of the status quo.

The marginalization of the body—its exclusion through isolation and rejection—relates to a deeper fear of the body itself. This distinction between the soul and the body echoes remnants of classical philosophies, whether philosophical or religious. These ideas prompted Michel Foucault to expose the truth behind such perceptions, revealing the irrational nature of bodily exclusion. He analyzed this in the archaeol-

ogy of silence and his critique of historical thought (Al-Kibsi, 2008, p. 27).

The text continues to present President Qazman as a supernatural and exceptional figure symbolizing absolute authority and control over everything: "I do not know why the table of the office of El-Mu'izz , Moulay Qazman Abu Niswan, made of ancient Amazonian wood, always has plates filled with pistachios, roasted almonds and cashew nuts. It is a habit that he brought from the Orient, from the diwans of the Gulf sultans who he knew and lived in their arms about twenty years ago, authentic ceramic dishes always filled with these dry fruits that are said in the heritage books to give distinct sexual strength, and these benefits have been mentioned in the heritage books from One Thousand and One Nights to the books of the jurists like Ibn Dawood, Ibn Malik and Al-Suyuti, and God knows best. It always remains full as if no one is eating what is in it for fear of being told that it is sexually or intellectually impotent, and yet it is changed twice a day, and what is on it is thrown every time with a special trash bin for El-Mu'izz . El-Mu'izz does not have household waste, it is cleanliness and serenity as a whole. It replaces beautiful ceramic dishes with others with different drawings, and all of them are imported from the French Liège in large quantities twice a year, which is the city famous for making high-quality ceramics, the ceramics of kings, princes, movie stars, and singing (Al-Zawi, 2019, p. 72)."

The table of the office of "El-Mu'izz Moulay Qazman Abu Niswan", made of the wood of the Amazon forest, does not seem to be just furniture that symbolizes the workplace, but rather indicates the symbol of authority and domination. Amazon wood, a rare and precious species from a distant

world, also refers to colonial appropriation and the colonization of nature; the table here is not just a physical thing, but a discourse that expresses the status of "Qazman " as president, with the ability to evoke scarce resources and harness them to serve his image and polish them. The plates, always filled with nuts, add another layer of transcendental symbolism; they are historically associated with luxury and sexual power in the ancient Oriental heritage, serving as a tool to produce knowledge about the body and masculinity. This discourse about dry fruits as enhancers of sexual power is not just a popular myth, it is part of a cognitive system that serves and reproduces masculine power. "El-Mu'izz - Qazman ," as president, embodies this masculine dominance, and the dishes become a visible sign of his physical and symbolic power.

As for the reference that this habit is derived from the "Diwans of the Sultans of the Gulf", where "El-Mu'izz - Qazman " lived for twenty years, it reveals the transfer of cultural discourse through time and space. Discourses are not static, they are shaped and modified by historical interactions. In this context, we see how an Oriental tradition is imported into a new context (North Africa), where it retains its original connotation (well-being, sexual power), but is repurposed to enhance the prestige of President Qazman . Imported ceramic bowls from French Liège add another colonial dimension, combining Oriental heritage with luxurious Western production to create a hybrid discourse that reflects a cross-cultural authority.

If the knowledge associated with these dry fruits, as mentioned in the Heritage Books of *One Thousand and One Nights* and by scholars such as Ibn Dawood and Al-Suyuti, is not merely information but a tool for control, then knowledge and power are deeply intertwined. By linking these nuts to

sexual strength, a discourse emerges that establishes standards for masculinity and competence. Those who do not engage with this discourse risk being questioned about their sexual or intellectual abilities. The fear of "gossip" exposes a self-censorship mechanism. Individuals monitor themselves, fearing social judgment that might classify them as inferior.

Replacing the plates twice a day and discarding their contents into a "goat litter bin" adds another layer of meaning. This deliberate extravagance is more than a display of wealth; it is an assertion of control over resources and an emphasis on purity and superiority. The text states, "El-Mu'izz has no household waste; it is cleanliness and serenity as a whole." This reflects a narrative that sanctifies the leader's body, elevating it above the ordinary.

Importing ceramic plates from Liège, known as the "city of high-quality ceramics" and associated with royalty, nobility, and celebrities, reveals a global network of power and culture. This choice is intentional. It signifies the "goat's" desire to be linked with global elites, whether from the Eastern world, such as Gulf sultans, or the Western world, like the French ceramic industry. From Foucault's perspective, this intercultural dynamic illustrates how modern identities are shaped through overlapping discourses. External elements are assimilated to reinforce local power structures. As a symbol of patriarchal dominance, Qizman is seen as a force that requires no justification. The centrality of masculinity asserts itself naturally – it does not need explicit statements to legitimize its dominance (Bourdieu, 2009, p. 27). "Everyone perceives it through symbols that metaphorically express its hegemony."

## **1.2. President "Qazman Abu Niswan": From the Chair of Power to the Wheelchair**

The novel unfolds in a complex and intertwined narrative, capturing the dramatic shifts in power and its balance. President Qazman, once the absolute ruler, suffers a "brain clot." This event serves as both a physiological and political turning point in the country's history. The collapse of his body symbolizes the collapse of an authoritarian regime. It also introduces the possibility of transformation, where power becomes "a place of monitoring and craving, which in turn creates a series of tensions and political deviations" (Thomas & Ahmed, 2010, p. 33).

As power shifts, the margin gains influence, particularly through the president's writer, Bash Kateb. Reflecting on Qazman's illness and its political ramifications, he states: "The day my master and civility, Moulay Qazman Abu Niswan, suffered a stroke, I cried for three days in a row. My tears were the color of blue and black ink. It was a demonic eye stroke. I did not taste the flesh of a bird or a lamb, nor did I drink ginger with honey.

I would sleep in a squat, watching the news on French TV channels, especially. At the same time, my ears were tuned to radio stations. I moved from one station to another every half hour, listening to detailed and brief news bulletins in French, Spanish, English, and Arabic.

In secrecy and haste, Moulay Qazman Abu Niswan was transferred to a military hospital in Rome. Although I despise the Romans and Christians, I said: What matters is that he returns safely. His fate should not resemble that of most senior officials, ministers, ambassadors, and colonels, who govern this country with hostile rhetoric against the Romans yet die in their hospitals. They return in wooden coffins, wrapped in the national flag.

I pushed aside thoughts of death. My lord was created for life and the sultanate, not for death, the darkness of the tomb, or its horrors. A very brief and vague telegram, as required by the circumstances, was carefully drafted and sent to the official news agency" (Zawi, 2019, pp. 99–100).

From the perspective of the French thinker Michel Foucault, power is not something that one individual possesses absolutely but rather a set of dynamic and ever-changing relationships shaped by practices and discourses. He argues that:

"It is not something that possesses and can be divided and distributed, but rather a kinetic practice that spreads and moves like a chain through the individuals it has shaped" (Al-Dawsari, 2019, p. 1195).

In the narrative, we observe that President Qazman, once a symbol of supreme authority – "My lord created for life and the Sultanate" – eventually loses this authority when he suffers a stroke. This health relapse demonstrates the fragility of power when it is tied to the body, an idea consistent with Foucault's analysis of power as something dependent on the control of bodies (bio-politics). When Qazman's body becomes incapacitated, power does not transfer through a military coup or an act of violence but rather through more subtle mechanisms of discourse and language – eventually shifting to the "Bash Kateb."

Discourse is not merely a collection of words arranged randomly; rather, it is a means of shaping truth and imposing control. The political game regarding power and its dynamics changes when Bash Kateb, initially a marginal figure, rises from being a mere subordinate writer to the architect of official discourse. This transition is initiated through a seem-

ingly simple but strategically powerful medium—a "very short and very vague telegram."

This telegram does not merely announce the transfer of Qazman to the hospital; rather, it serves as a tool that marks the beginning of Bash Kateb's control over information and its presentation to the public. Here, ambiguity is not a weakness but a strength—it allows him to retain control over public interpretations and expectations, reinforcing his authority as a de facto ruler operating behind the scenes.

Bash describes the ink with which he writes as turning into "pontifical blue and black," a highly symbolic transformation. Ink, as the tool of writing, represents discourse, and his tears symbolize his metamorphosis from a peripheral employee to a central figure—one who wields language to reshape political reality. As Qazman, the dwarf-like ruler, physically collapses, Bash Kateb rises through his mastery of crafting messages and directing the official narrative.

Bash Kateb emerges as a new authoritarian figure, controlling the flow of information:

"I slept sitting, tossed, and watching the news on French TV channels especially, and at the same time my ears on radio stations."

This behavior reflects his obsession with gathering knowledge and observing circulating narratives, giving him a strategic advantage. While Qazman remains absent in the hospital, Bash Kateb becomes the mastermind who knows everything and directs events through his control of information.

The novel also reveals a cynical contradiction that aligns with Foucault's critique of power. Qazman and his senior officials maintain control by promoting hostile rhetoric against "the Romans," yet he ultimately dies in their hospitals:

"The official discourse (anti-Romanism) is nothing but a tool for controlling the people, while reality reflects a complete dependence on the 'country of the Romans.'"

Bash Kateb, despite his personal dislike of the Romans, accepts this reality and exploits it to his advantage, demonstrating his pragmatism and ability to manipulate speech to maintain power.

The stroke represents a pivotal moment in the transition of power from President Qazman, who embodied traditional authority associated with the body and symbolism – "My lord created for life and the Sultanate" – to Bash Kateb, who represents a new form of authority based on discourse and knowledge.

With his illness, Qazman is reduced to a weak body lying in a foreign hospital, while Bash Kateb transforms into the mind that manages events, formulates narratives, and reshapes truth according to his interests. This shift reflects Foucault's idea of modern power, which relies not on physical strength or traditional symbols but on the control of narratives and information.

As political and popular movements gain momentum, the "sick president" is ultimately forced to resign. Ironically, he ruled the country through letters written by his shadow authority, Bash Kateb. In this regard, the novel states:

"Suddenly, the word 'urgent' jumps on the screen in a big red line: 'The ruler, by God, Qazman Abu Niswan, resigns.'"

Television broadcasts recorded images of the ruler, once adorned in luxurious damask and silk, now wearing a simple traditional cloak. He appears weak and frail, curled up in a chair, solemnly reading his resignation letter, as if contemplating his fate – one that had already been sealed by the very letters and phrases he was reading. Despite the rumors

of his hopeless health condition, he remains alert, aware that the revolution has moved against him, pulling him from the illusion of being "The Living Dead."

In a final ironic scene, Qazman is accompanied by the head of the House of War and the head of the Senate, who is expected to succeed him immediately after the announcement of his resignation. He seems sad, a man who once ruled surrounded by carefully selected women, chosen by his senior advisor in "self and feelings." The novel poignantly concludes:

"Everybody plays everybody!" (Al-Zawi, 2019, pp. 66-67).

Before his downfall, President Qazman tried to maintain absolute control by:

"Taking matters directly, ordering, ending, changing, and sometimes altering laws and regulations—more often based on whims and desires—always with the specific goal of preserving the status quo and consolidating it" (Nasif, 2003, p. 47).

However, the urgency of his illness cut short his dream of prolonged rule. His fate underscores the Foucauldian idea that power is never absolute, nor is it confined to a single individual. Instead, it circulates through discourses, shifting hands based on knowledge, language, and the ability to control information

The previous section of the narrative text focuses on the body as a site where power is both exercised and manifested. A clear transformation is observed in Kozman's body, shifting from "damask and silk"—symbols of luxurious, traditional power—to "a simple traditional cloak." Eventually, he appears as "a man in a rickety pouch on a simple chair." This bodily transformation reflects the disintegration of the power he once held. His body itself becomes a text, illustrating the decline of dominance.

The passage emphasizes the idea of "the play," which recurs in several instances, whether in describing Kozman as a "living dead" or in the concluding statement, "everyone represents everyone." Power is not a fixed entity but rather a performance based on symbols and rituals. Kozman, formerly surrounded by "carefully selected women" and an advisor on "self and feelings" affairs, played the role of an absolute ruler in the theater of power. However, the "revolution" – the Hirak – that "moved" and "awakened" him exposed the fragility of this performance. President Kozman's resignation is not merely a departure from office but an exit from the theatrical role he performed. This moment underscores that power does not reside in an individual but exists as a network of relationships that can be dismantled, reconfigured, and reproduced.

The movement (revolution) in the narrative plays a pivotal role in dismantling the authority of the resigned president, "Kozman." Here, revolution is not just an external event but a transformative force that reshapes relations between the ruler and the ruled. Kozman's resignation, following the revolution that "moved" him, illustrates how resistance generates new power dynamics. Meanwhile, the presence of the "President of the House of War" and the "President of the Senate" as potential successors suggests the continuity of power in a new form. This reflects the idea that power does not vanish but is redistributed, much like a phoenix rising from the ashes.

Despite his alertness, Kozman's rage and sorrow reveal the complexity of his relationship with power. He was once surrounded by women and luxury, embodying his authority. However, at the moment of resignation, he was stripped

of this context and status. This forces him to confront the inevitable, as conveyed in his final message.

Television, as a media outlet, plays a crucial role in shaping the discourse around power. The broadcast of recorded footage showing the ruler reading his resignation, with the word "urgent" displayed in bold red letters, is part of a strategy to manage the country's political crisis. This passage demonstrates how the media functions as a strategic tool to influence public opinion and construct a new narrative about the ruler and the revolution.

## **2- (Bash Kateb /Intellectual): From the Margin to the Power of the Shadow – The Dominance of Ink and Pen**

The balance of power shifts in favor of "the power of the shadow – the margin," represented by the character "Bash." He plays a pivotal role by using the power of ink and pen, operating behind the scenes. He writes letters that carry a borrowed authority, stamped with the president's name, directed at the world and the media. In this narrative, the margin is "illuminating from the outside to resurrect a narrative light in a layer of the body" (Qutnani, 2019, p. 31). Through this, political shifts and power dynamics are articulated, with Bash monopolizing knowledge. His control over discourse enables him to shape public opinion on national and international matters, especially after the president suffered a "stroke."

Bash is a writer who inhabits language—it is his home, his soil, and without it, he is lost. At times, language is entrusted to him; at others, he manipulates it like Don Quixote tilting at windmills. Language becomes a battlefield, and his pen turns into a spark of fire. The passage describes the chemistry of a political and emotional moment experienced by Bash, marking a turning point in the nation's history. He

reflects: "Why do I think about all this distant past residing under my skin as I prepare to write a dangerous and fateful message, the message of resignation or dismissal? Linguistically, the two words stem from the same root, 'dismissal,' but their meanings are entirely different. They conflict, they quarrel. The first—resignation—is based on a desire after satiety, an exhaustion of power and authority. The second—dismissal—is forced, driven by a wild desire that still clings to power. President Al-Mu'izz Billah, Moulay Kozman Abu Niswan, as I have known him for twenty years, despises the idea of anyone resigning under his rule. He is the only one who dismisses others; no one dares resign under his esteemed authority. Let alone being forced to submit his resignation. I see him asking me in a hoarse voice, barely audible, but I understand him even without words. Because I am Bash, the writer of the Office of the Pen and Construction. He signals me to draft the resignation—dismissal—and his blue eyes are filled with tears. For twenty years, he commanded, ruled, and decided life and death. What does it mean to be asked to resign immediately? It means dismissal. Here, resignation equals dismissal; they are identical in meaning" (Az-Zawi, 2019, pp. 69-70).

At the outset, Bash analyzes the words "resignation" and "dismissal," noting that they share a common root ("dismissal") but diverge in connotation. Language is not merely a tool for communication; it is a discourse that shapes reality and produces power. Resignation, as described, represents an individual's voluntary withdrawal ("satiety and a glut of power"), while dismissal is coercive, imposed from the outside, and linked to an unrelenting desire for authority. This linguistic conflict highlights how discourse defines the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. It frames what is

permissible within the system of authority, whose function is to "produce reality in its boiling and multiplicity" (Al-'Ali, 2008, p. 74).

Discourses define what can be said or thought within a given context. The discourse of power, dominated by Moulay Qazman , suppresses any counter-discourse, such as voluntary resignation, because it challenges his authority. Language, in this sense, becomes both a tool for producing power and a means of resisting it.

Power operates through a network of relationships. In the passage, Moulay Qazman is not the sole source of authority; rather, he is part of a system that relies on the subordination of others, including Al-Bashi Kateb and his associates. His statement, "He is the only one who sacks, and no one has the right to even resign," reveals an authoritarian discourse that reinforces his dominance by preventing actions beyond his control.

The fragility of this power network becomes evident when Moulay Qazman is asked to resign. This is reflected in his "rooted, hoarse voice" and "tearful" eyes, which indicate that his authority depends on the continuation of the discourse that upholds it. When this discourse collapses, his position within the network crumbles as well.

Bash Kateb, as "head of the Court of Pen and Creation," embodies linguistic and administrative expertise. He plays a role in shaping the discourse of authority. His ability to understand Moulay Qazman "even without pronunciation" demonstrates his adaptation to this system, making him an instrument of power. However, a turning point occurs when he is tasked with drafting a letter of resignation or dismissal. This act forces him to witness the breakdown of the very discourse he has long served.

The passage illustrates how President Qazman refuses to accept his agents' resignations as a form of symbolic violence. By doing so, he nullifies their individual will and subjects them to his dominant discourse. However, when he is ordered to resign "immediately," this symbolic violence turns against him. The phrase "impeachment equals impeachment" underscores how the discourse he once controlled has now been used against him. Voluntary concession and coercion ultimately lead to the same outcome: "loss of hegemonic power."

Wherever power exists, so does resistance. In the novel, resignation represents a potential form of defiance against Moulay Qazman's authority because it allows individuals to exit the power network. However, the text reveals that this resistance is forbidden within the dominant discourse, making dismissal the only permissible option. When Moulay Qazman forces himself to resign, the discourse that sustained his authority collapses. His moment of resistance manifests in his weakness and tears, which contrast sharply with his former image as one who "orders, revives, and dies."

The passage demonstrates that power, as a discourse, is constructed through language and interpersonal relationships. Moulay Qazman represents the center of an authoritarian network that shapes individuals like Bash Kateb and subordinates them through symbolic violence. However, power is not absolute – it disintegrates when discourse shifts or when a counter-discourse emerges (resignation/dismissal). Bash, as both a writer and a producer of knowledge, is caught between submission and resistance. Meanwhile, the downfall of "Qazman" reveals that dominant discourses can collapse when they lose legitimacy. The

deposed president, "Deprived of a private space, or rather of an identity, [finds] a speedy death preferable to a slow one" (Verilio, 2017, pp. 92-93), illustrating his severance from the decaying body of political power.

## **2.1 Bash Kateb: Intellectual Authority, Language of Power, and the Space Between Center and Margin**

Bash Kateb is depicted as a linguistic being who cannot exist outside the realm of words. Language represents the "house of existence" (Heidegger, 1957, p. 25). As a model intellectual within the regime, he wields power through the written word. His messages, which once dominated public discourse, elevated the authority of the pen (Bash Kateb) after the collapse of political power (Qazman ), thus sustaining the mechanisms of governance. Bash, a writer shaped by power, thrives on its benefits. Now, he exercises authority indirectly through ink and paper.

The novel portrays Bash's obsession with language's secrets, its influence, and its presence in his writing. He states: "I am looking for the most ancient vocabulary. I am looking for the cacophony, the abandoned and the rare. With much pride, I revive words that no one uses anymore. In my letters, I planted words that aroused in Moulay Qazman Abu Niswan a curiosity mixed with admiration, making him smile and rejoice: chin, oak, batmania, punctum, punctum, illusion and intropellation, taca, ling instead of good living, puffing water instead of fresh water, the day of a nerve instead of a very hot day, lazur, lacta (cut off the hand), the longest of his other large eye, wide-eyed black-eyed eyes, spirulent (lame), silk-seller, wolves that have bereckled her son, shale (serving pilgrasses and being sick). I search for an escape from words. In the evening, I sit before the television, watching the national channel, awaiting the eighth news

bulletin. I feel delighted when I notice that the news anchorwoman, chosen for her eloquence and grammatical precision, struggles to pronounce a word she has never encountered before. Faced with this moment, I am ecstatic, overjoyed. Since Moulay Qazman Abu Niswan fell silent after suffering a stroke and could no longer speak, my letters multiplied in his name. Announcers and broadcasters were penalized for misreading the governor's messages, with salary deductions imposed. When I learned of this, I called the Director General and requested the decision be revoked, and my wish was immediately granted" (Zawi, 2019, pp. 94-95).

This passage underscores Bash's deep connection to language and his role in perpetuating authority through discourse. While Moulay Qazman's power erodes, Bash's influence remains intact through his mastery of language, which continues to shape the social and political narrative.

Bash describes his struggle with the chemistry of language, likening himself to an element dissolving into its semantic equations. His goal is to become a source of power and dominance. He expresses his passion through the use of old and forgotten words such as "chinchon," "ajaja," and "tomato." He takes pride in reviving marginalized vocabulary. This practice is not merely a linguistic hobby; it has a symbolic dimension that highlights the authority of discourse. In this context, language is more than a means of communication. It becomes a tool that allows a writer to distinguish himself from others, including socially powerful figures like a news anchorwoman. When he delights in her inability to pronounce an unfamiliar word, he asserts his linguistic superiority. This mastery grants him cognitive authority. The sense of joy and control he derives from this moment underscores the idea that power is not always im-

posed through force. Instead, it can be established through knowledge and control of discourse.

President Qazman Abu Niswan, once the central figure of official authority, suffers a stroke, creating a power vacuum. Bash Kateb steps in to fill this void with his linguistic intelligence and rhetorical skills. His actions can be interpreted as a strategic seizure of power through language. Initially, he writes letters to impress Qazman. Later, he begins writing them in Qazman's name, using the ruler's silence to assert his own speech.

Bash assumes the role of the writer of the forbidden command. He intervenes in the punishment of broadcasters when they fail to read messages correctly. Later, he retracts these punishments at his request to the Director General. This behavior demonstrates how Bash has become a central figure in the power network. He holds the authority to punish and pardon—two defining characteristics of sovereignty. Through these shifts, the senior writer establishes a new system of power based on his distinctive linguistic knowledge. Bash embodies a writer "who inaugurates the act of writing as an abusive path; of his symbolic power as a path resisting the silence, which occurred after the illness of the president" (Bouazza, 2014, p. 140).

Bash's linguistic superiority is not just a personal achievement. It is also a means of subjugating others, such as broadcasters, proving that his speech is more powerful than theirs. This pleasure, viewed from a psychological perspective, reveals a form of authoritarianism. Power does not merely impose itself; it thrives on the enjoyment of its practice.

The novel continues to explore Bash's world as a writer of internal and external affairs. His thoughts and ambitions shape his role as an influential intellectual within the power

structure: "With the impossibility of speaking to my lord and the impossibility of addressing the people directly, I, Ammar Al-Naskh, the second grandson of Ammar Al-Naskh, became the first man, the owner of the solution and linkage, greater than the head of government and even more important than the leader of the House of War. Given my extreme importance in the pyramid of power, I began to feel once again that the character of Yahya ibn Khaldun with a terrifying fate had returned to inhabit me, since I had seen the long introduction to the book in order to pioneer, written by the manuscript investigator about the end of Bash, the writer of Yahya ibn Khaldun and his relationship with Sultan Abu Hamo Musa II, I decided not to cross the corridor..." (Zawi, 2019, p. 106).

The text presents an extraordinary situation: President Qazman is unable to speak, and direct communication with the people is impossible. This raises the issue of a power vacuum and the symbolic incapacity of the regime's head. This void allows "Ammar the Second Scribe" to move beyond his traditional role as "Bash Kateb," a relatively marginal managerial position, to one of supreme authority. This transformation signifies an unusual dynamic. The protagonist ascends unexpectedly from obscurity to prominence. However, this ascent is not a celebratory one; it is fraught with anxiety and fear of what lies ahead.

Bash is not merely concerned with his political rise; he links himself to the historical figure Yahya ibn Khaldun. He believes, as he describes, that Yahya "returned to inhabit me." This connection between past and present adds narrative depth to the text. Bash is not just an individual experiencing his moment in history; he becomes a vessel for broader historical experiences. His reference to "dreadful

fate" suggests an awareness of the dangers associated with power and foreshadows its potential downfall.

The language of the text carries a formal and historical tone, using expressions like "the one with the solution and the connection" and "the pyramid of power." These phrases reinforce the impression that the novel mimics historical records or royal narratives. However, this formal style is interwoven with a personal voice, as seen in phrases like "I'm starting to feel again." This balance between the epic and the individual experience enriches the narrative.

The text refers to "Yahya ibn Khaldun," evoking the renowned historian Abdul Rahman ibn Khaldun. Yahya was a prominent figure in the Islamic Maghreb and an accomplished writer. He documented the history of Tlemcen and its rulers, earning recognition as one of the most important scholars of his time (Warda, p. 499). He led a tumultuous life, serving under two different sultans before meeting a tragic end—either executed or imprisoned, according to historical accounts. The narrator's reference to "the end of Bash's writer Yahya ibn Khaldun and his relationship with Sultan Abu Hamo Musa II" alludes to this historical context. It underscores the precarious relationship between writers and rulers. A writer can serve as an instrument of power but may also become a victim of it.

The narrator, Ammar Al-Naskh Al-Thani, is descended from Ammar Al-Naskh Al-Awwal and serves as a writer, placing him at the center of the historical connection between writing and power. Traditionally, writers in Muslim societies functioned as the memory of the regime and the architects of its discourse. However, they rarely held direct authority. His rise to "greater than the head of government" represents a reversal of this tradition, but it also carries the

looming threat of a fate similar to that of Yahya ibn Khal-dun.

Through this passage, the novel reimagines history, weaving the relationship between the writer and the sultan into a narrative framework. However, this depiction is rooted in real historical conditions. Bash's transformation from a marginal writer to a central figure can be read as an attempt to restore the voice of historically overlooked individuals, such as writers. It elevates them to a heroic status, albeit one tinged with uncertainty and an unpredictable fate.

The novel references "The Pioneer's Purpose" and the "Long Introduction" written by the manuscript investigator. This meta-narrative awareness highlights the act of writing about writing. It introduces readers to a layered narrative, where the protagonist, Bash Kateb, is not just a participant in events but also a reader and analyst of his own history.

Bash Kateb's political and linguistic identity expands dramatically. Once marginalized, he now gains power through language. This communicative and cognitive ability becomes the vital force sustaining the political body. The novel expresses this transformation in Bash Kateb's own words: "I am the one who breathes the radiant spirit in Moulay Qazman Abu Niswan Al-Mu'izz, who is sitting in his wheelchair between confusion and silence. I am the angel of the soul who distributes the days. Whenever Azrael hovers about the presidential residence in the area guarded by his army, he answers him with messages, so he goes north or south to catch a soul other than the spirit of Moulay. The Arabic language that is in my hand is capable of giving life and the tongue because it is the language of paradise, the language of the Qur'an, and the language of the six twists. Whenever I write a word in a letter or in a telegram of con-

gratulations or condolences, I feel like an angel sent from heaven to blow air into a pierced wheel, giving my lord every minute another minute, hour, or day in life and in judgment. My messages, which are I, are the divine energy that extends the life of my lord. I ask God for forgiveness. I am not a polytheist..." (Zawi, 2019, pp. 111-112).

Bash began his life in the Presidential Palace as a traditional figure within the administrative apparatus. Initially, he was merely a letter writer, responsible for recording orders and drafting official speeches. His role was limited and reflected the stereotypical position of an employee in an authoritarian system—an executive tool with no direct influence on decision-making. However, the text highlights a turning point in his transformation. Bash Kateb begins to recognize the power of language in his hands: "The Arabic language in my hands is capable of giving life and the tongue." This awareness marks the moment when he transitions from being a mere instrument of communication to a creator of meaning.

The novel depicts Bash Kateb using Arabic in an innovative and unconventional way ("strange and rare"), elevating his role beyond that of a simple letter writer. Through his composition of letters, official messages, and telegrams of congratulations and condolences, he shifts from being a mediator to becoming an active producer of symbolic authority. His statement, "My messages, which are I, is the divine energy that extends the life of my lord," signifies a qualitative transformation. He is no longer just an employee who transcribes dictated content. Instead, he becomes the creative force that sustains the ruler's presence. This transformation is rooted in his perception of language as a metaphysical tool ("an angel sent from heaven"), placing him at the center of the system.

Al-Bash describes himself as an “angel of the soul” who “distributes the days” and distances “Azrael” from “President Qazman.” This depiction extends beyond a simple administrative function, suggesting a quasi-divine role in shaping the ruler’s fate. This claim implies that he is no longer just a bureaucrat but the true architect of the discourse that sustains power. His letters are not merely administrative documents; they have evolved into a “divine energy” that preserves the ruler’s authority. This shift from the margins to the center is evident in his ability to influence political decisions indirectly. Through his writings, Moulay remains both symbolically and politically alive, making Bash Kateb a key figure in prolonging the life of an ailing regime.

The novel further reveals another dimension of this power shift. Bash Kateb’s letters extend beyond the confines of government offices and into society, where they “provoke thousands of discussions in cafes among Arab intellectuals.” This suggests that his speech is no longer restricted to administrative corridors but has become a social force, animating public debate and reinforcing Moulay’s presence in popular consciousness. This effect grants Bash an informal authority, transforming him into a creator of knowledge and controversy about language (“grammar and morphology, adorning and punctuating”). Consequently, he transcends the role of a stereotypical functionary and becomes a figure who shapes public perceptions of authority. He is regarded by the elite as a writer who strategically “mixes political feelings with their work, fully aware of what they are doing” to maintain the hierarchy and structure of the political system, despite its contradictions and fragile authoritarian nature (Benda, 2020, p. 144). Bash Kateb contributes to reproducing hegemonic discourse, reinforcing authority, and legitimizing

power (Belali, 2023, p. 87). As a writer, he manipulates language and public perception, constructing an illusion of triumph within a reality marked by repeated defeats and disappointments (Toumi, 2017, p. 136).

Al-Bash asserts his symbolic power when he enters the dark rooms where political discourse is crafted in an absurd manner. The scene describes the Prime Minister, acting as Moulay Qazman e Abu Nassouane's representative, presenting a sealed envelope to the ruler of another country. The envelope, bearing the presidential insignia, is displayed before national television cameras as the Prime Minister solemnly declares, "This is a written message from your brother, His Excellency Qazman e Abu Nassouane. I have the honor to convey it to you and inform you at the same time of his peace and wishes to your people." The passage continues, revealing Bash Kateb's awareness of the power of religious references in political messaging: "Whenever people believed in my messages and thought that governance was proceeding smoothly, even though Moulay Qazman Abu Niswan had been absent for seven years, I realized that Arabs and Berbers only respond to religion. Thus, I never wrote a letter, message, or congratulatory telegram without including a verse from the Book of God or at least one prophetic hadith. In this faithful Muslim country, every Arabic writing is immediately associated with true religion, Islam" (Zawi, 2019, pp. 148-149).

The text highlights the pivotal role of Islamic religion in constructing political legitimacy within the collective imagination. The statement that "Arabs and Berbers only touch religion" reflects a deeply rooted cultural idea: religion is not merely a matter of faith but also a social and political force that ensures obedience. The use of Qur'anic verses and prophetic hadiths in official messages is not just rhetorical em-

bellishment; it is a strategic tool to link political authority with the sacred, reinforcing public acceptance and discouraging opposition. This pragmatic use of religion aligns with a historical tradition in Islamic societies, where rulers derive legitimacy from the caliphate or imamate. Writers like Bash Kateb serve as linguistic and cultural mediators, reinforcing this legitimacy.

The symbolism of the “tightly closed envelope with the presidential insignia” carries significant weight. It represents more than a method of communication; it embodies authority and secrecy. The secure seal and official insignia emphasize the confidentiality of political decisions and their concentration within the ruling elite. This further solidifies Bash Kateb’s dominance, as he is the one who crafts these messages. The televised staging of this scene reflects a culture of theatrical diplomacy aimed at impressing and controlling the populace.

The novel also alludes to President “Qazman Abu Niswan’s” absence for seven years without diminishing the people's faith in his rule. This demonstrates the power of political symbolism, suggesting that a ruler’s physical presence is unnecessary as long as his discourse is preserved and his image remains intact in public memory. Here, Bash Kateb emerges as the decision-maker behind the scenes, acting as the voice of the absent ruler and governing by proxy.

In traditional societies, the role of the writer—or the Bash—was uniquely significant. He was not merely an enforcer but a creator of discourse that shaped public perceptions of governance and political matters. In the text, Bash Kateb appears as an architect of power, constructing a narrative grounded in religious references. This reflects the anthropological role of writing as a tool of intellectual domina-

tion. Bash's writing evolves from a routine administrative function into a ritualistic act that reinforces social structures built on obedience, faith, and implicit acceptance of authority.

Bash Kateb believes that religion is the "opium" of the masses. However, he is not merely a messenger conveying the ruler's words; he actively formulates them, selecting religious texts that enhance their persuasive power. This mastery of language grants him indirect control over how decisions are perceived. He understands the psychology of the masses and the impact of religious rhetoric on their reactions. According to this logic, he is constrained by fundamentalist perceptions, which dictate that "if the transmission is accurate, reason and insight must bear witness" (Toumi, 2023, p. 502).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the text *Bash is a Writer, the President's Writer Has Nothing Left to Write* presents a unique and complex narrative imagination, embodying a dynamic shift of power from its physical form—represented by President *Qazman Abu Niswan*—to its rhetorical form, embodied by *Bash Kateb*. The critical approach highlights that the stroke suffered by the president was not merely a passing biological incident but a profound symbol of the collapse of traditional authority and the fall of the ruling body. This event paves the way for the transition of power from physical dominance to discourse and language.

This transformation aligns with Michel Foucault's vision of power as an unstable, dynamic relationship. The novel demonstrates its ability to encapsulate and reimagine politi-

cal and existential conflicts within symbolic and literary worlds. In this text, language emerges as a central tool of domination and manipulation, where *Bash Kateb* uses discourse to reproduce power and extend its influence in the wake of the ruler's physical decline. Here, language is not merely a medium of communication but an elixir that sustains the body of power, granting it new dimensions beyond material constraints.

The narrative underscores the centrality of discourse as a battleground for conflict and the restructuring of authoritarian relations. This renders the novel an "empirical fantasy" that engages with the contemporary dilemmas of hegemony and its transformations. Thus, this analysis does not merely interpret the text but also opens broader perspectives on power as a fluid and evolving network—one that transcends physical boundaries to reside within the chemistry and symbolism of language.

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