

**THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ALGERIAN PLACE IN SPANISH POETRY:
MAX AUB'S POEM "DJELFA" AS A CASE STUDY
A RECONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH**

أركيولوجيا المكان الجزائري في الشعر الإسباني: قصيدة "الجلفة" للشاعر المكسيكي ماكس أوب
نموذجاً: مقارنة وفق منهج إعادة البناء

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ABSTRACT

The exile space of the “Ain Sarar” detention center in Djelfa was not merely a place for holding German prisoners affected by the consequences of the First World War. Rather, it constituted for the Mexican poet Max Aub a profound space through which he explored the experience of exile and expressed its human and psychological dimensions in poetry. In his poetry collection *Diary of Djelfa*, Aub documented the years of imprisonment, transforming his personal experience and emotions into poetic works that offer future generations a deep understanding of exile. This study adopts the reconstruction approach to analyze space in Max Aub's poetry by combining Ferdinand de Saussure's reconstructive linguistic concepts with the procedural and socio-cultural development proposed by Miloud Homida in literary criticism, particularly in his article published in *Al-Bahith journal*. The method links the structural analysis of poetic texts with the archaeological reading of space through reconstructing the textual and cultural structure of place as portrayed and experienced by the poet during his imprisonment alongside Roger Garaudy. The study concludes that Djelfa appears not as a neutral geographical setting, but as a multilayered semantic structure reflecting exile, suffering, and historical experience.

Keywords:

Algerian Place; Djelfa Poem; Max Aub; Place Archaeology; Reconstruction Approach

الملخص

لم يكن فضاء المنفى لمعتقل "عين السرار" بالجلفة مجرد مكان لإيواء الأسرى الألمان المتضررين من نتائج الحرب العالمية الأولى، بل شكل للشاعر المكسيكي "ماكس أوب" فضاء عميقا لاستكشاف تجربة المنفى والتعبير عن أبعادها الإنسانية والنفسية من خلال الشعر. ففي مجموعته الشعرية "يومية الجلفة"، وثق أوب سنوات السجن وحول تجربته الشخصية ومشاعره إلى أعمال شعرية تقدم للأجيال القادمة رؤية متعمقة لحالة المنفى. تعتمد هذه الدراسة على منهج إعادة البناء لفهم المكان في شعر ماكس أوب، من خلال الجمع بين المفاهيم اللغوية لمنهج إعادة البناء عند فرديناند دوسوسير والتوسيع الإجمالي والاجتماعي-الثقافي الذي قدمه ميلود حميدة في عدد من أعماله، خاصة في مقاله المنشور بمجلة الباحث، حيث يقوم هذا المنهج نقديا على الربط بين التحليل البنيوي للنصوص الشعرية والقراءة الأركيولوجية للمكان، وذلك عبر استرجاع البنية النصية والثقافية للمكان كما صورها الشاعر وعاشها خلال فترة سجنه إلى جانب المفكر العالمي روجيه غارودي، بما يضع الإنتاج الأدبي لماكس أوب ضمن سياق تاريخي وفكري أوسع. وقد أظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن الجلفة لا تظهر في القصيدة بوصفها فضاءً جغرافياً محايداً، بل كبنية دلالية مكانية متعددة الطبقات حيث لا تقف عند قراءة منفردة وواحدة لذلك التاريخ.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أركيولوجيا المكان؛ المكان الجزائري؛ ماكس أوب؛ منهج إعادة البناء؛ قصيدة الجلفة.

1. INTRODUCTION

The experience of imprisonment has long been a source of creative expression, explored by many writers in both poetry and prose, reflecting profound suffering and multiple forms of hardship. Among such contexts, the French detention camps for German prisoners in Algeria stand out, particularly the Ain Sarar prison in the city of Djelfa. The Mexican poet Max Aub's engagement with this space is especially noteworthy. He dedicated a poetic collection, *Diary of Djelfa*, and a short story, *Cemetery of Djelfa*, to this city. These works constitute a coordinated literary discourse rich with multiple layers of meaning, allowing for an anthropological reading that excavates the depths of the region's significance. In particular, his poem *Djelfa, a Natural Landscape* portrays the place with profound semiotic and cultural dimensions, reflecting its archaeological and geographical structures.

his study adopts a reconstructive and retrospective approach, a methodology grounded in the theoretical concepts of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, particularly as developed in his book *Course in General Linguistics*, while also drawing on the procedural and critical frameworks proposed by Miloud Homida in

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his article «*Linguistic Structure, Geographical and Reconstructive Linguistics: Method of Reconstructive in Literary Criticism*» (Homida, 2025). Although the study is informed by Saussure's reconstructive linguistic perspective, it does not apply the Saussurean approach in its purely linguistic dimension alone; rather, it relies on its critical and socio-cultural extension within literary criticism as developed by Miloud Homida. Through this method, the study analyzes the impact of geographical factors on linguistic structure and recovers the poet's specific terminological layers, which manifest across the various levels of his poetry. These layers reveal the depth of the personal and human questions with which the poet grappled, including the unique dimensions of exile.

This study will focus on selected levels of the reconstruction method that allow for an in-depth reading of the literary text. Priority is given to semantic analysis in relation to usage, social, and historical contexts, which enables meanings to be understood within the conditions of their production and circulation. In addition, speech act theory and pragmatic analysis are employed to uncover communicative intentions and to examine how context shapes meaning and affect. The analysis also includes a stylistic and artistic approach, emphasizing literary style and its impact on the reader's aesthetic and emotional response. Furthermore, attention is paid to social and external influences related to the author, as well as to the psychological worlds of the characters. Through this integrated approach, the reconstruction method seeks to offer a comprehensive reading that rebuilds textual meaning through the interaction of language, context, and psychological and aesthetic dimensions.

Accordingly, the research problem is formulated as follows: Do these poems provide a clear reading of the structure of place? And do they, through their diversity, embody the full influence of place on the poem's structure itself?

The objectives and methodology of this study are: to read the spatial system and its manifestations in language, to analyze the poetic structures and their relation to the place, to examine the components of place as a referential space, and to

interrogate the textual structure in terms of its creative origins, spatial and temporal significance, and the interplay between the real and the imaginary-between the excavations of language and the construction of place.

2. The Method of Reconstruction and the Archaeology of Creativity in Literary Criticism

Before engaging with the methodological critical manifestations of the method of reconstruction in literary criticism, it is necessary to briefly situate this concept within its fundamental notions in Saussure, particularly in comparative linguistics, where reconstruction is inseparable from the process of comparison, where Saussure states that: "The sole means of reconstructing is by comparing, and the only aim of comparison is a reconstruction" (Saussure, 1959, p. 218), where this principle highlights that it is a generative procedure aiming at restoring the underlying forms and structures in texts and not merely a comparison limited to a descriptive procedure, and here, geolinguistics plays an important role through its use of the method of reconstruction as it introduces deep research among the layers of meaning of the effect of place in the analysis of linguistic forms and their historical transformations, through mapping linguistic phenomena across geographical space, as it contributes to a deeper understanding of how variation, diffusion, and communication participate in shaping linguistic creativity.

2.1 Conceptual Foundations of the Reconstruction Method in Literary Criticism

The reconstruction method in literary criticism is grounded in an epistemological concern with uncovering the deep historical layers of language and meaning beyond their immediate surface manifestations. Rather than approaching the text as a self-contained structure, this method seeks to retrace the processes through which meaning has been historically formed, sedimented, and transformed. In this sense, reconstruction operates as a critical movement backward, toward the latent configurations that precede the final textual form. At this point, a further conceptual

clarification is required regarding the notion of archaeology as used in this study, since “the aim of reconstruction is, then, not to restore a form for its own sake this would be rather ridiculous to say the least-but to crystallize and condense a set of conclusions that seem logically to follow from the results obtained at each moment.” (Saussure, 1959, p. 219)

In this study, the concept of “Archaeology” is not employed in its traditional material sense, or as a synonym for anthropology. Rather, it is approached as a reconstructive textual method concerned with uncovering the layered linguistic, historical, and spatial structures embedded within literary discourse. Although archaeology and anthropology intersect in their concern with culture and human experience, they operate on different methodological levels: anthropology primarily examines the cultural and social dimensions of human communities, whereas archaeology in this context focuses on the stratified formation of meaning, memory, and spatial representation within the text.

As has been noted, “It thus focuses on contemplating the deep history of the language, which Saussure termed reconstruction. He particularly emphasized the importance of this method alongside the tools of comparison” (Homida, 2025, p. 206). This Saussurean perspective underscores reconstruction as a systematic inquiry into linguistic and semantic evolution, positioning it not merely as a historical technique, but as a foundational analytical approach capable of revealing the underlying logic governing textual production.

According to Miloud Homida (2025), the reconstruction method moves beyond mere historical retrieval to function as a critical process of conceptual reassignment. It is concerned with returning to an earlier formation of meaning in order to reassess it from a later analytical position. In this sense, “the reconstruction method refers to a later reassignment of something earlier, in that the reassignment seeks to determine the true concept of a term and how its various formations evolved across both temporal and geographical dimensions” (Homida, 2025, p. 206). This formulation

introduces reconstruction as a dynamic operation that does not simply restore origins, but actively interrogates the transformations a concept undergoes as it migrates through time and space. By foregrounding the interaction between temporal stratification and geographical displacement, Homida expands the scope of reconstruction into a methodological framework capable of revealing how meaning is reshaped under historical, cultural, and spatial pressures—thereby situating literary language within a broader continuum of human experience and creative evolution.

The reconstruction method, as further emphasized by Miloud Homida, does not remain confined to Saussure’s linguistic framework, which is often characterized by a certain structural closure within the specificity of the linguistic system. Rather, it extends beyond this limitation to engage with the language’s dynamic relationship with society. In this perspective, “the reconstruction method does not stop at Saussure with its linguistic dimension characterized by a kind of closure in the specificity of its linguistic system, but also touches on its relationship with society, including all of its cultural, scientific, economic systems, and its customs and traditions” (Homida, 2025, p. 206). This expansion redefines reconstruction as an interdisciplinary methodological space where language is no longer treated as an autonomous system, but as a living structure embedded in social practices and cultural formations. Consequently, literary discourse becomes a site where linguistic structures intersect with historical realities, collective memory, and socio-cultural forces, allowing reconstruction to function as a tool for uncovering the deep interdependencies between text, society, and creative expression.

When the reconstruction method is transferred from its general theoretical level to its critical and applied dimension, it does not simply follow a ready-made analytical path. Rather, it offers a reading of the literary text as an entity formed through complex linguistic, cultural, and experiential accumulations. From this perspective, the text cannot be understood solely through its apparent structure; it must be approached by retrieving the processes that led to the formation of that structure

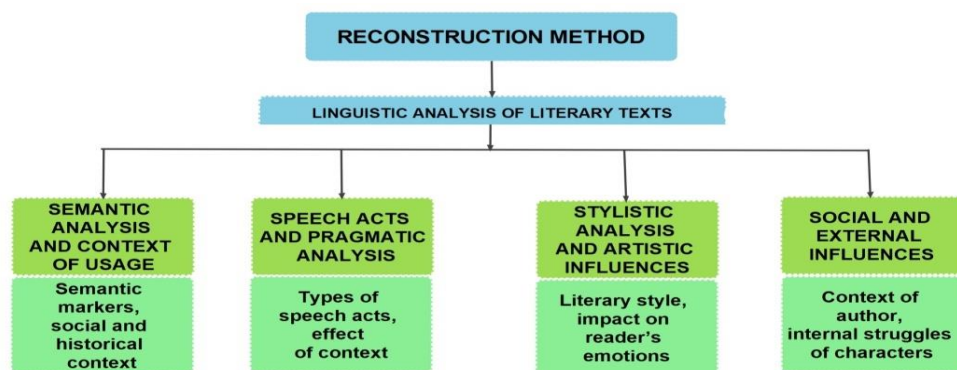
through language, both at the level of cultural significations and the human experience that produced it. Accordingly, the act of reading becomes a reconstructive act, one that reassembles the relationships linking language, its structure, context, and its transformations.

In its application to literary works, and following the approach of Miloud Homida, this method interrogates the relationship between language and place as a structural rather than descriptive relation. The Place does not appear in the text as a neutral backdrop for events or images, but as an embodiment of the linguistic structure itself, thereby becoming an active element in the production of meaning. Reconstruction of place, in this sense, involves retrieving its cultural, historical, and psychological presence, considering how it was represented in the creator’s consciousness, as well as how the text reshaped it through language. This allows the critic to uncover the layers of meaning that lie beneath poetic or narrative representations (Homida, 2025).

From this, we understand that the reconstruction method enables a deeper reading of the relationship between the real and the imaginary within literary works. Reality is not reproduced directly in the text; rather, it is organized within an imaginative structure governed by the logic of language and the vision of the creator, and then extended into visions that go beyond the creator’s own awareness. Through careful linguistic excavation, the critic can trace how experience moves from the level of lived reality to the level of artistic creation—how suffering, in all its manifestations, and human questions, in all their branches, are transformed into semantic structures that transcend the individual and open onto a broader human horizon.

Accordingly, and following the methodological approach presented by Miloud Homida in his important article, we will rely on the following branches:

Fig.1. The methodological framework of the reconstruction method



Through this methodological framework, when we attempt to apply the reconstruction method to Max Aub's poem *Djelfa (A Natural Landscape)*, this study will focus primarily on four analytical branches at the second level: semantic analysis, pragmatic analysis and speech act analysis, stylistic analysis, and social and external influences. These were chosen because they are most relevant to the nature of poetic discourse and to a focused investigation of the place's significance.

Semantic analysis, within its social and historical context, proves essential, as the poem manifests not merely as a geographical site, but as a space where language intertwines with historical memory, exile, and the colonial experience. Pragmatic analysis and speech act analysis reveal how poetic language operates beyond general description, offering a deep reading of the place, the emotional stances, and the communicative effects shaped by the context. Stylistic analysis is equally critical, as it allows us to understand how linguistic choices, imagery, and figurative language construct the natural landscape of this Algerian region. Finally, attention to social and external influences, including the author's personal experience and the psychological dimension of exile, provides a vital space for interpreting the poem as both an anthropological and human testimony. Together, these four dimensions converge to offer a comprehensive reconstruction of meaning that aligns with the poem's symbolic, psychological, and cultural depth.

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2.2 The Archaeology of Creativity: From Surface Structure to Deep Semantic Layers

Reading a literary work through the reconstruction method requires a deeper immersion into the analysis of terminological thresholds that open the way toward a profound understanding of place. This is achieved by comparing the core creative terms—those functioning as central thresholds—with what have historically been written about the textual space. Such a process leads us to examine semiotic indicators, along with all the explicit and implicit signs and symbols embedded within the text, as they contribute to the layered construction of meaning.

Within this conceptual framework, Michel Foucault's notion of archaeology, as articulated in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, offers a productive way of approaching creativity beyond its surface manifestations. Foucault proposes that analysis should «treat discourse as an archaeological artifact»¹, shifting attention from interpretive meaning to the layered conditions that structure discourse itself. This perspective allows literary creativity to be understood not as an immediate or transparent act of expression, but as a formation shaped by historical sedimentation, cultural constraints, and epistemic systems. Creativity, in this sense, unfolds through stratified semantic layers that require excavation rather than simple interpretation.

From this perspective, the archaeology of creativity is not concerned solely with reading meanings at the level of direct expression; rather, it focuses on uncovering the accumulated processes through which meaning is gradually formed within the text. What appears on the surface as a poetic image or a descriptive structure is, in fact, the product of successive semantic accumulations shaped by cultural and intellectual experience through language. For this reason, the task of criticism is not to extract a single, immediate, and fixed meaning, but to reconstruct the pathways through which the text organizes its semantic density. Creativity thus emerges as a cumulative, successive, and also fragmented process within its own frameworks, in

which language absorbs historical traces and personal experience before reshaping them into symbolic configurations.

Accordingly, moving from surface structure to deep semantic structure requires a precise investigation into how language operates beyond its descriptive function. Words do not merely name reality; they go further, reconfiguring it according to an internal creative logic governed by the poet’s position within history, language, and culture. Deep semantic structures reveal themselves through transformations of poetic imagery, deliberate repetition, sudden silence, and linguistic tension, all of which point to meanings that exceed the visible structure of written discourse. This archaeological reading enables us to perceive creativity as a space of negotiation between what is lived and what is said, between what is remembered and what is transformed into poetic form.

3. Reconstructing Place in Max Aub’s Poem «Djelfa (A Natural Landscape)»

The reading place in Max Aub’s poem “*Djelfa (A Natural Landscape)*” does not confine us to considering it as a neutral or merely descriptive geographical reference. Rather, through the reconstruction method, place is built within the poetic text as a multilayered space shaped by language, culture, and lived experience. The Djelfa region does not appear as a fixed or immutable location, but as a semantic structure through which exile, imprisonment, and historical violence are reorganized within poetic discourse. Reconstruction here reveals how place is transformed into poetic language and spatial reality within a symbolic structure, where personal pain intersects with collective history. In this sense, the poem reconfigures place as a space endowed with meaning and human depth, embedded in the inner layers of linguistic and imaginative construction.

3.1 Semiology and Contextual Reconstruction of Algerian Place

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In Max Aub's poem Djelfa, place is not presented as a neutral geographical space; rather, it is reconstructed semantically within a network of historical connotations tied to the colonial context. Djelfa appears in the text as a harsh, marginal space, marked by isolation and exclusion, reflecting the experience of forced existence within a confined colonial environment. Through poetic imagery associated with cold, silence, and the expanse of the plains, the place is transformed into a poetic representation of human suffering in the face of colonial domination and marginalization.

The place depicted in the poem is, in fact, the reality upon which its expressions, structures, and creative language are built. Although Max Aub did not solely belong to the city of Djelfa, he is among the poets who were connected to multiple places. He was born in France in 1903, at 3 Tréville Street in Paris, to a German father and a French mother. "His name coincides with that of his grandfather, Max Aub, who married Magdalena Marx; this union would later produce his father, Federico Guillermo Aub Marx. From the marriage of his father with Susana, Max Aub and his sister Magdalena were born" (Aub, 1998).

When the civil war in France came to an end, Max Aub was suddenly arrested and sent to several prison camps: Roland Garros in Paris, Vernet, and Djelfa, until 1942, when he escaped from the last camp to Mexico. In *Diario de Djelfa (The Djelfa Diary)*, we read in the margin of the introductory note by Exilio Gándel Vila from the book Epilogo bibliografico by the writer González Sánchez Maíli the following statement:

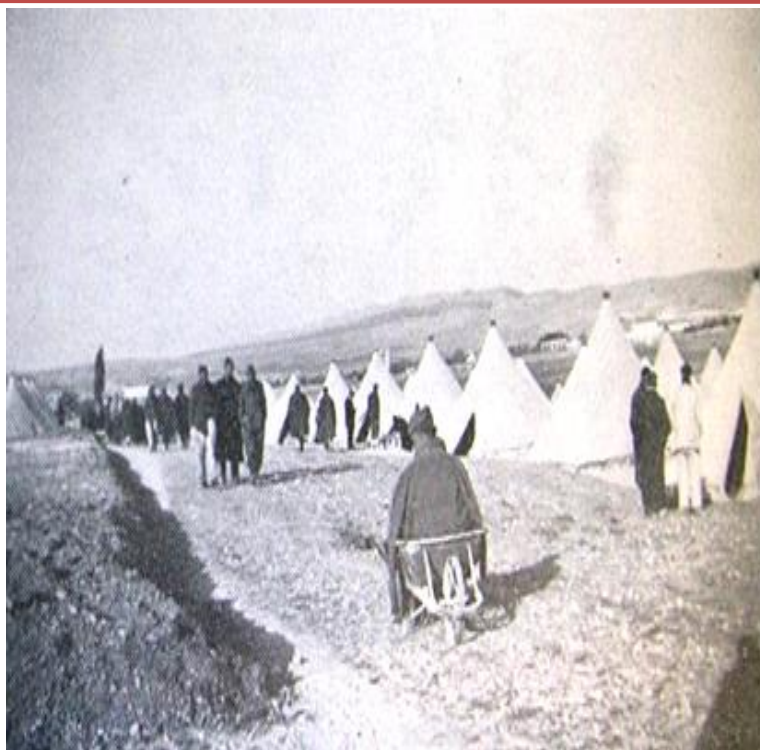
From November 1941 until July 1942, for nearly nine months, he endured humiliation and harassment in the Djelfa camp in Algeria. From there, he left on Monday, 18 May, with a permit issued the previous day and signed by J. Gaboussi, director of the Djelfa center (Aub, 1998, p. 09)

The anxiety of the new place emerges in the poem as a profound cognitive shock that disrupts the poet's initial representation of Djelfa. What was first imagined as a

barren and silent desert gradually reveals itself, through lived experience, as a radically different space marked by cold, fear, and exhausting labor. This rupture between the imagined place and the experienced one reshapes the poet’s relationship to space, which no longer functions as a neutral setting but becomes an active force imposing violence on the body and regulating the rhythm of memory and language. In this sense, place turns into a structural element in the production of poetic meaning rather than a mere geographical reference.

When examining the earliest stage of this experience, the place appears primarily as a provisional space of confinement, composed of tents erected for prisoners in one of the coldest and most inhospitable regions of the territory. Instead of permanent and solid structures, these fragile shelters exposed detainees directly to extreme climatic conditions, particularly the severe cold of the high plains, thereby intensifying the violence of their confinement. The spatial configuration of the camp, based on temporary and exposed forms, embodies the logic of deprivation and fragility, in which the natural environment itself is mobilized as an extension of punitive power. This initial formation of the Djelfa camp thus reveals a profound entanglement between geographical harshness and institutional authority, where space actively participates in producing suffering and isolation. At this stage, place is reduced to the bare conditions of survival, anticipating its later transformation into a more organized detention site whose structural order does not mitigate, but rather consolidates its oppressive function :

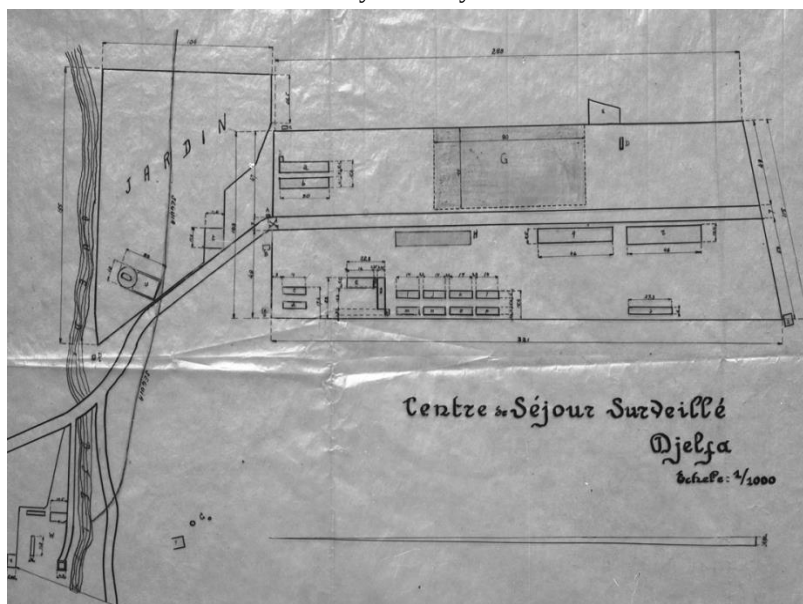
Fig.2. From March 1941 onward, approximately one hundred “marabout” tents were provided on loan by the army (Sicot, 2015).



The camp thus ceases to function merely as a site of detention for prisoners of diverse nationalities and gradually emerges as a paradigmatic space of punitive exile. It operates as what can be described, in Foucauldian terms, as a disciplinary dispositif, where space itself becomes an instrument of control, deprivation, and normalization of suffering. Within this configuration, the geography of Djelfa is transformed into an apparatus that regulates bodies, exhausts time, and reduces existence to bare endurance. From an Agambenian perspective, the camp produces a condition in which life is suspended between survival and annihilation, a zone where individuals are stripped of political belonging and reduced to exposed, vulnerable life. In this logic, even the local inhabitants appear, in the poet's perception, as subjects imprisoned by the permanence of place itself, bound to a geography they did not choose and cannot escape. Faced with such a spatial regime, Max Aub's presence within the camp could only be provisional: to remain was to submit to a

slow erasure, while escape became the sole act through which life could reclaim its possibility beyond the barbed wire.

Fig.3. From March 1941 onward, approximately one hundred “marabout” tents were provided on loan by the army².



When the novelist Abdelkader Homida chose to stand before the bulldozers that sought to demolish what remained of the Djelfa camp—an act carried out, as I understand it, in the late 1990s—this gesture may be read, in Foucauldian terms, as an enactment of *counter-memory*. As a conscious citizen and a committed journalist, Homida did not act from a position of symbolic heroism, but from an ethical responsibility toward a silenced local history. His intervention disrupted the official logic of erasure by opposing the physical and symbolic dismantling of a space marked by suffering. In this sense, his stance echoes a Max Aub–like refusal of exile as oblivion, where memory becomes a form of resistance rather than mere commemoration. Through a series of journalistic articles published in different newspapers, Homida reintroduced the camp into public discourse, transforming it from a neglected ruin into a contested site of meaning. Subsequent attempts to appropriate this history through retrospective heroization appear, by contrast, as

secondary narratives detached from the original counter-memorial act. From this perspective, reconstructing place does not follow a linear historiography; rather, it aligns with Foucault’s notion of counter-memory by attending to marginal gestures, fragile traces, and local acts of resistance that challenge the authority of imposed forgetting.

In the reconstructive approach, the semiotic marker becomes a central tool for understanding the text. Its role goes beyond merely pointing to objects or places; it reveals the deeper relationships between language, human experience, and the historical and cultural context. By analyzing these markers, we can trace how multiple layers of meaning are formed within the text and recover the semantic structures that reflect the symbolic and cultural depth of the literary work:

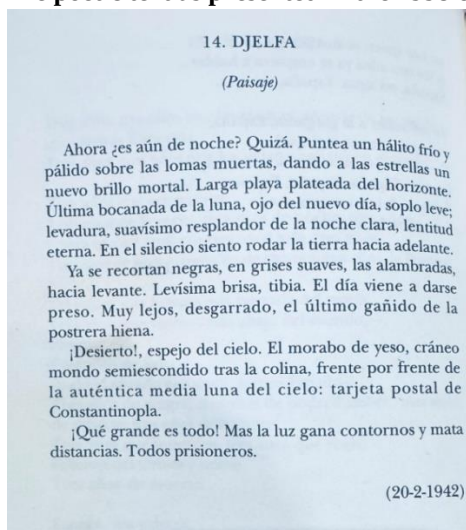
- **Place as a Punitive Sign:** Djelfa is not presented as a natural space but operates as a sign of power, transforming geography into a mechanism of control and punishment for its inhabitants.
- **Nature as a Semantic Mediator:** Environmental elements such as cold, silence, vastness, and emptiness function as signs encoding isolation and deprivation rather than simply describing the setting.
- **The Tent as a Sign of Fragility:** The shift from permanent buildings to tents reveals the precariousness of the prisoners’ existence, exposing the human body to both authority and the harshness of nature.
- **Place as Counter-Memory:** The poetic and historical evocation of Djelfa reconstructs memory, turning the place into a marker that resists erasure and oblivion.
- **The Transformation of Reference into a Linguistic Structure:** Djelfa does not merely refer to a geographical location; it is reconstructed within the text as an integrated semantic structure within the poetic language.

- **Tension between the Real and the Imaginary:** The spatial sign emerges from the reorganization of reality within an imaginative framework, allowing the text to transcend direct reality and construct a complex creative structure.

3.2 Stylistic Structure and Reconstruction of Thresholds

When we examine the stylistic structure of Max Aub’s *Djelfa (A Natural Landscape)*, our attention extends beyond the surface of linguistic or aesthetic devices. It engages the formation of textual and terminological thresholds, which serve as gateways to understanding the place and its intricate semantic layers, enabling a reconstruction grounded in historical and stylistic reading. From this vantage, the poem is not a mere sequence of words or poetic images; it is a living space, layered with meaning, shaped through human experience, historical contingencies, and cultural memory. By tracing these thresholds structurally, we uncover the ways in which language operates across multiple levels of significance, revealing the dynamic interplay between stylistic choices and the semantic density of the place, while simultaneously accessing meanings that resonate within its diachronic linguistic and historical context.

Fig.4. The poetic text as presented in the 1998 edition³.



The image represents the poem *Djelfa (A Natural Landscape)*, as it seeks to construct a clear vision of place, which in turn offers a concise and explicit insight into the reality of life in that region, during that period, and under those conditions. Based on the text, we attempt here to identify the thresholds of entry into the place and into the world of exile:

Djelfa: It is the central threshold in the poem. The spaces presented by Max Aub in his work *Diary of Djelfa* carry a vast spectrum of meanings that convey the specificity of this place and its significance. The formulation of this title, therefore, falls within a creative synthesis that emphasizes critical considerations, primarily the meticulous opening of the text through a precise lens. The city of Djelfa serves as the first threshold that gathers the poet's diverse experiences in this poem. The city had functioned as a prison for the countless victims of war, and within its spaces, significant literary works emerged, notably Aub's pioneering poetic collection. Such major works reflect the distinct structure of the text, relying on an epistemological and socio-historical coherence as a condition for their continuity.

The threshold of the title within this important creative framework lies in the specificity of the place/prison that the poet situates in his poem *Djelfa (A Natural*

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Landscape), indicating a precise reading of the geography of pain, fear, disorientation, and despair. The place operates as a persistent, continuous factor, with the poet linking the significance of the title, the place, and the text itself. The title's meaning encompasses the particularity of the daily experiences that Aub encountered and engaged with in this place/prison, incorporating them into the creative text. He begins his poem with «Now, is it still night? Perhaps»⁴ immediately launching into a direct depiction of the place, opening a horizon where the unexpected emerges within the expected.

Diary of Djelfa activates a creative process that meticulously reads all relational dynamics within the place's specificity, inside a closed society governed by strict and lethal rules. This structure continues to resonate because it rests on a unified vision of a group of individuals forming a society with its own ideas and aspirations, expressed through multiple mechanisms that could be examined in a separate study.

Hálito frío (A cold breath): Starting from the first threshold—the threshold of entry into the textual space—a dense sensory presence emerges, defining the natural and geographical dimension of the region as apprehended by the poet from the very first moment. The breath here does not signify a passing breeze, but functions as a spatial signifier: a cold and pale effect that envelops both body and consciousness, confronting the poet with the harshness of the site as he stands on a rocky hill in the area of Aïn Sarar, where the camp is located. Through this threshold, the space asserts its own semiotic logic: the wind operates as a marker of exile and isolation, signalling the tense and conflictual relationship between the human subject and the spatial field—a relationship structured not by containment, but by collision and trial, where the geography itself becomes a medium of signification.

Lomas Muertas (Dead Hills): In Max Aub's poem *Djelfa (A Natural Landscape)*, the "Dead Hills" function not merely as geographical features but as spatial signs imbued with the harshness of the barren landscape and the profound isolation it enforces. These hills are presented as bare plains, sparsely dotted with

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local vegetation and entirely devoid of trees, which allows the poet to symbolically equate death with the absence of greenery and life. Aub transforms these hills into visual markers of imprisonment, turning nature itself into a text. The hills gain a symbolic dimension that embodies the tense relationship between humans and space—a relationship that moves beyond simple depiction to encompass confrontation, struggle, and interaction. Through this representation, the reality of the place reveals the desolate expanse upon which the prison is situated, conveying the experience of hardship, fatigue, and solitude, while highlighting the intersection of individual memory with the historical and geographical fabric of the region.

Desierto (The Desert): In Max Aub's poem *Djelfa (A Natural Landscape)*, the desert does not appear as the imagined space the poet had anticipated upon hearing the name of the region. What initially reached him as “the desert” evokes, in the collective imagination, heat, dryness, and an endless expanse of burning sand. Yet, upon confrontation with the place, this expectation collapses. Instead of heat, Aub encounters an intense and sometimes lethal cold, which immediately disrupts the inherited cultural image of the desert. Here, the desert functions as a spatial sign whose signifier is unstable and deceptive: it names a place, but its lived reality contradicts its symbolic reputation.

This climatic reversal transforms the desert into a semiotic marker of disorientation and exile. The place resists fixed representation, oscillating between extremes—scorching heat on certain summer days and sudden evening rain that never fully abandons the region. Such instability does not merely describe meteorological conditions; it encodes the uncertainty of existence within the camp itself. The desert thus becomes a linguistic and experiential structure through which the poet registers the violence of displacement, where nature refuses to conform to expectation, just as exile refuses any form of psychological or spatial stability. In this sense, the desert is reconstructed not as a natural backdrop, but as an active sign that unsettles meaning, memory, and the body alike

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El Morabo de Yeso (The Plaster Tent): The tent functions as a spatial symbol charged with the notion of exposure, embodying vulnerability, openness, and the violence of authority. Its conical shape and pale, plaster-like color erase any sense of safety or protection, transforming the tent into a symbolic sign of fragile human existence. Unlike solid architectural structures, the tent signifies instability and provisional life. The site chosen by the French authorities is located on a cold, pale rocky plateau, devoid of buildings and inhabitants; the local population lived instead on a flat area facing this plateau. As a result, the prisoners' bodies remain constantly exposed to climatic harshness and disciplinary control. The material itself -easily eroded- further operates as a signifier of human fragility under conditions of forced confinement.

Todos Prisioneros (All Prisoners): The Place as a Total Carceral Sign: In this fifth threshold, "todos prisioneros", the poem expands the logic of confinement beyond the visible limits of the camp to encompass everyone entangled within this space. Imprisonment here is not restricted to the detainees alone; it extends to the authority that administers the camp and to the local Arab and Kabyle populations who inhabit the surrounding region. All are rendered prisoners under the dominion of a cold, fragile, and unforgiving place. The spatial sign thus functions as a totalizing marker of captivity, where geography itself exercises power. Even after the physical disappearance of the camp, the place remains imprisoned within unchanged geographical and mental conditions. The persistence of marginalization, ignorance, poverty, and degradation transforms Djelfa into a long-term carceral space, revealing how confinement survives institutions and continues to shape lives through the enduring violence of place.

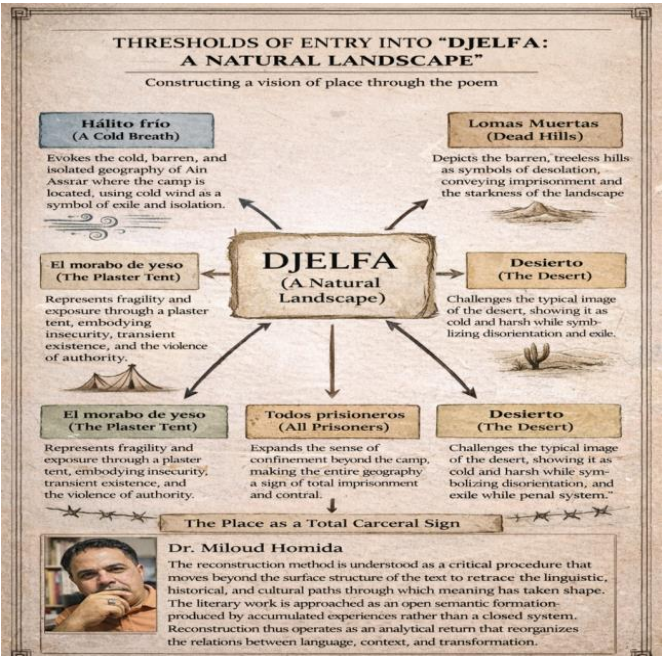
This expanded understanding of imprisonment finds a clear resonance in Michel Foucault's conception of the carceral, where punishment no longer resides exclusively within the walls of the prison but circulates through space, bodies, and everyday life. As Foucault observes, modern power operates by diffusing

disciplinary mechanisms across an entire social field, forming what he famously describes as a “carceral continuum” that exceeds the institution itself⁵ In this sense, Djelfa cannot be reduced to a detention camp alone; it functions as a spatial configuration in which control, deprivation, and exposure are normalized through geography. The place itself becomes a regulatory structure, anticipating the logic whereby space disciplines prior to any direct intervention of authority.

This is precisely what Michel Foucault points to when he states “The frontiers between confinement, judicial punishment and institutions of discipline, which were already blurred in the classical age, tended to disappear and to constitute a great carceral continuum that diffused penitentiary techniques into the most innocent disciplines, transmitting disciplinary norms into the very heart of the penal system” (Foucault, 1995, p. 297).

To synthesize the preceding analytical stages and to render their conceptual progression more visible, the following mind map offers a visual reconstruction of the poem’s spatial logic. Rather than serving as a mere illustration, this diagram functions as a cognitive framework that organizes the poem’s key thresholds of entry into place, exile, and confinement. It brings together the semantic, experiential, and symbolic dimensions through which Djelfa is gradually constituted as a carceral space within poetic discourse. By mapping these interconnected thresholds, the schema clarifies how natural elements, architectural forms, climatic conditions, and collective experience converge to produce a unified vision of place as a total sign of imprisonment. The mind map thus translates the interpretive process into a spatialized structure, mirroring the poem’s own transformation of geography into meaning:

Fig.5. Djelfa: Thresholds of Space and the Reconstruction of Exile



In studying Max Aub’s poem *Djelfa (A Natural Landscape)*, the reconstruction approach has allowed us to trace the complex ways in which the spatial—and to some extent social—contexts of the poem shape its literary meaning. Each threshold we examined, from the city of Djelfa itself to the symbols of cold, the Dead Hills, the desert, the plaster tent, and the total experience of imprisonment represents a site where historical, geographical, and social forces intersect, transforming the landscape into a complex network of signification that we have sought to unravel. The poem does not merely depict place; it reconstructs the lived reality of exile, confinement, and profound vulnerability, embodying a vision in which space itself becomes a medium for meaning-making. By carefully reading these thresholds, the reconstruction approach highlights the dynamic relationship between human experience and environmental specificity, revealing the socio-historical layers embedded within the text. This perspective aligns with Miloud Homida’s observation that “the reconstruction approach opens new horizons for understanding the impact of social and cultural contexts on the formation of literary texts,

enhancing the ability to analyze literary works as products of the societies that produced them” (Homida, 2025, p. 208).

4. CONCLUSION

This study has sought to demonstrate the critical value of the reconstruction method as a comprehensive and dynamic approach to literary analysis, capable of moving beyond surface description toward the deep semantic, historical, and spatial layers that structure literary meaning. By grounding the method in its conceptual foundations—from Saussure’s linguistic reconstruction to its expansion within socio-cultural and epistemological frameworks as articulated by Miloud Homida—the article has shown that reconstruction is not a mere return to origins, but a critical reconfiguration of meaning across time, space, and experience.

Through the application of this method to Max Aub’s poem *Djelfa (A Natural Landscape)*, the study has revealed that place in the poem functions as a central structural principle rather than a neutral geographical reference. Djelfa is reconstructed as a multilayered semantic space where exile, imprisonment, colonial violence, and human vulnerability converge within poetic language. The analysis of spatial thresholds—Djelfa as city/prison, cold breath, Dead Hills, desert, plaster tent, and total imprisonment—has demonstrated how natural elements and architectural forms are transformed into semiotic markers that encode power, deprivation, and historical trauma.

One of the key findings of this research is that reconstruction enables a reading of place as an active producer of meaning. Geography, climate, and spatial organization operate as disciplinary forces that shape both bodily experience and linguistic expression. In this sense, the poem anticipates Foucauldian notions of the carceral continuum, where confinement exceeds institutional boundaries and becomes embedded in space itself. Djelfa emerges not merely as a camp, but as a total carceral sign whose effects persist even after the disappearance of the physical structure.

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The study has also shown that the archeology of creativity provides a productive framework for understanding poetic discourse as a stratified formation. Meaning in Djelfa is not given immediately; it is the result of successful semantic accumulations shaped by lived experience, historical rupture, and linguistic transformation. Through semantic, pragmatic, stylistic, and socio-historical analysis, the reconstruction method has allowed us to trace how suffering, displacement, and marginalization are reworked into symbolic structures that transcend individual experience and open onto a broader human horizon.

Ultimately, this research confirms that the reconstruction method offers a powerful critical lens for reading literary texts as products of their societies, without reducing them to mere sociological documents. It preserves the autonomy of poetic language while situating it within its historical and cultural conditions of possibility.

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6. Notes

¹ Foucault, M, l'archéologie du savoir, Paris: Gallimard, 1969, p. 182.

² Same source.

³ Max Aub , Diario de Djelfa, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁴ Same source, p.50.

⁵ Foucault, M, Discipline and Punish The Birth of the Prison, T: Alan Sherida, Vintage Books, USA 1995.