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Part II  
North Africa

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# North Africa: An Introduction

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## The Nomenclature: North Africa, the Maghreb, the Mashriq, and Africa

The Egyptian poet Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi (1892–1955), who ran the pioneering literary magazine *Apollo* (1932–1934), reported that he used to find trouble publishing the poems sent to him by the now-iconic Tunisian poet Abu al-Qasim al-Shabbi (1909–1934). The reasons had nothing to do with the quality of the poems or their content; rather, it pertained to the hand script in which they were written. Al-Shabbi used a Maghrebi Arabic script which readers from Egypt and the Levant would find difficult to decipher. We can only imagine what would have happened had al-Shabbi been rejected on the basis of his script. One thing is for sure, he would not have had the reputation, appeal, and influence he has enjoyed over the Arabic poetic scene as a whole. This movement of simultaneous connection and gaps marked centuries of contact as well as separate development of the two sides of North Africa. In modern times, the first was made possible by the rise of the press and circulation of printed magazines and books particularly since the middle of the nineteenth century. The second was the outcome of patterns of colonization by which French came to dominate the Maghreb region while English, and Italian in the case of Libya, determined what people read, what languages they learned, and what kinds of institutions of literature they built. In fact, in academic parlance in North America and Europe, Maghrebi literature is usually taken to mean Francophone literature of the Maghreb. While North Africa designates a contiguous number of states, easily recognizable on a map with no significant natural barrier separating them, the representation of the region in academia as well as in the media rarely recognizes the region as one whole. North Africans themselves set their region apart from the rest of the continent and often adopted the western designation of Africa to mean south of the Great Sahara. Orientalism, as the western discourse on the Orient, as Said defines it, reinforced this division by relegating the North African Arab states to the Orient, never mind that Morocco, for example, is actually west of France and Italy. Painters and writers

still spoke of Morocco and Algeria as the Orient, so much so, in fact, that French, Italian, and Portuguese settlers in Algeria and Tunisia decried the “orientalism and exoticism” of their countrymen, and called themselves African in the sense given to the region by the Romans.<sup>1</sup>

In light of the above, an account of literature in North Africa could be both rewarding and challenging. With so many shared features and rich histories, the challenge is to ground these literatures in their specific conditions of production and circulation. Hence, the present chapter will proceed by first looking at the institutions of literature, such as publishing, the university, libraries, and so on. The makeup of literature in an area of such intense foreign interest and local stakes will be seen through the multidirectional traffic in order to account for the North–South movement of styles and ideas as well as the interregional entanglements, which took place largely under the umbrella of Arabic language. Yet, one needs to recognize that a key feature of Maghreb literature in particular is its multilingualism, a factor which revisits the extent to which monolingual criticism stood in the way of bringing out or, in some cases, repressed the impact of the multiplicity of languages on literature in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia in particular, but also to some extent in Mauritania. The modern history of the region shows that it has been all but stable, with the rise and fall of poles of influence and drastic changes in the social and political landscape. These will be addressed here with a view to sketching dominant, emerging, and receding tendencies in the literary fields of North Africa, a historical perspective which looks anew and critically into widely held assumptions, such as the rise of the novel, Egyptian dominance, and the hegemony of French in the Maghreb.

### Institutions of Literature

Literary criticism, publishing institutions, school curricula and patronage have undergone dramatic changes in the region, which impacted established modes of writing such as poetry and prose, and brought in new ones, namely, drama. The balance between the oral and the written shifted while new languages of writing entered the area. All took place within a drastic imbalance in power relations between North Africa and its European neighbors. This has led to the twin movement of emulation and rejection of a culture which was experienced as an invader and oppressor but also as a temptation or model. The medieval historian Ibn Khaldoun (1332–1406), who was a quintessentially North African figure, having lived in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt and thought about what related them and what divided them back in the medieval period, wrote in his famous *Introduction to History* that in the course of the changing fate of states and people, “the vanquished are always fond of imitating the victor.”<sup>2</sup> Yet change was not due to imitation alone but also to a forced imposition of ways and forms on people who already had their own. Faced with this massive threat, these people turned to their familiar heritage and found it wanting in adequately expressing the conditions and demands of a dramatically changed way of life.

That twin response resulted in the most significant revisiting of the Arab and Islamic past in history, known as Nahda (revival or awakening), a movement which had its main hub in Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia from around 1860 but affected the whole region, albeit at a different pace and intensity. Part of Nahda was rediscovery of classical Arabic literature through printing, distribution, commentary, and attempts at new writing. Because the period was genuinely transitional, literature emerging from it was characterized by hybridity and search for adequate form and language. In this sense, the development of literature is not to be separated from the wider

reformist movement as a whole. Elites were quite small and worked often together. In Tunisia, the labor movement, the nationalist movement, and pioneering poets and writers were in close contact and formed a sort of critical mass. The group *tabia al-sur*, which was active in the 1930s and 1940s, included the pioneering short story writer Ali Dou'aji but also people working in music, theater, and poetry. The reformist Tahar Haddad, best known for his work on women in Islam and on the labor movement, was a close associate of the labor leader Muhammad Ali al-Hammi but also of the poet Abu al-Qasim al-Shabbi. In Morocco, the connection took place with the reformists led by Allal al-Fasi, while in Algeria this was with the reformist Association of Algerian Ulema in the 1930s. But while in Algeria and Morocco the reformist movement was largely *salafi*, in Tunisia it veered more toward radical reform, a fact which will have direct influence on the way these states and societies will develop especially in relation to personal status, the rights of women, and the labor movement. The poetry of al-Shabbi and his radical attacks against the Arabic heritage could be understood within this context.

But the linkages between reform and literature were certainly most prominent in Egypt. Institutions of literature cannot be separated from the emergence and development of the nation-state in each of these countries, and their very different histories and the shapes of the state itself. This is in turn linked to the colonial past. In Algeria, a globally significant case of settler colonialism and national liberation movements, literature has been marked by these two factors, resulting in a significant francophone literary tradition and a strong emphasis on identity politics. Egypt, on the other hand, has had the possibility of developing at a relative distance from direct colonialism but would witness a very strong pan-Arabist movement which affected literature in significant ways and spread to the rest of the region. That is, in a sense, one reason why Naguib Mahfouz emerged in Egypt and not elsewhere. In fact, the most ambitious projects for Arabic literature would emerge and develop in Egypt and then go on to affect the region as a whole. Indeed, in addition to Mahfouz, whose career as a novelist in particular is unparalleled in the region, mention should be made of Tawfik al-Hakim's (1898–1987) work to link Arab culture with the ancient Greek and modern European drama; Taha Husayn (1889–1973) in autobiography and in literary criticism; the realist novel and the short story with seminal figures like Mahmud Taymour (1894–1974) and, later, Yusuf Idris (1927–1991), and many others. All have been part of the canon and school curricula in the region but also unavoidable among writers.

Tunisia was more like Egypt in that it had a strong central state and a centralized education system, reorganized and strengthened by French colonial administration. With no major economic resources but a long history of institutions, after independence the state would dominate public life through a well-organized administrative system which regulated all aspects of cultural activity. Literature was to become a state affair. Habib Bourguiba, the country's first president, would "personally" oversee the publishing sector as well as cultural production through subsidies, prizes, regulations, and structures such as cinemas and public libraries. The emerging Tunisian state sought to fashion the citizen along the orientation of the state as modern, largely secular, and educated. Education reform was entrusted to a writer while the cultural sector was turned over to a foreign advisor to Bourguiba in the first instance, before having its own ministry, which it still does today. Unlike Algeria, which witnessed the "official" institutionalization of the Arabic language through an extensive program of state-run Arabization, Tunisia kept bilingualism at the official level, in tandem with the linguistic situation in society, with a deliberate effort to tip the balance toward Arabic. A similar situation occurred in Morocco.

Yet development of institutions was by no means homogeneous or simultaneous across North Africa. The case of Libya is instructive. After extreme repression under fascist Italian rule, particularly

concentration camps and a massive death toll between 1929 and 1934, and following Allied occupation at the end of World War II, Libya was united in 1951 under the Kingdom of Idris with United Nations supervision. This was later followed by a military coup by Muammar Gaddafi in 1969. With the discovery of oil, Libya quickly turned into a rentier state, and a form of government which curtailed, and even prevented, the development of modern political and cultural institutions. The state attempted to shape its subjects and refocus their identity on pan-Arab affiliation while at the social level tribal allegiance continued (Ahmida 2009, 135). With the waning of pan-Arabism, Gaddafi took an African turn. But the approach remained largely unchanged: rule was top down and often unstable, linking institutions to the top of the state or its ideology, which prevented their organic development from within society. Literature was made to toe the state line and serve its project. Libya is a good example of uneven and somewhat disconnected, disjointed, or unsynchronized development. For it was not really until the 1950s with the discovery of oil and the implementation of new education policies that a reading public was formed. Low literacy and the prominence of poetry dominated until then (Ahmida 2017). Mention could be made of al-Sadiq al-Nayhoum's early work in the 1970s and 1980s, followed by Ibrahim al-Faqih and his well-known trilogy on alienation of western-educated intellectuals from their society, and of course the celebrated Ibrahim El Koni (b. 1948), with numerous books to his credit and a unique focus on desert life and mythology. More recently, mention could be made of the originality of Mohammad al-Asfar (b. 1960) who, rather like the Moroccan Muhammad Shukri, pays close attention to marginality in his society. Women writers had a late start, and with the short story at first, as in the work of Fawziya Sallabi, a former Gaddafi minister. More recently we have the example of Najwa bin Shatwan, the only Libyan to win the Arabic IPAF prize for her historical novel *Zaradib al-Abid*, as well as the rebellious Wafa al-Bu'isa, who challenges Islam itself in *Hunger Has Other Faces* (2009), a novel that stages a conversion into Christianity. It is worth noting that the toll of Italian occupation of Libya had a tremendous human cost but did not really affect Libyan culture as much as France did Morocco or Tunisia. The brutal repression of dissent, especially in the years 1977–1988, led to an exodus of writers abroad, like the poet Khaled Mutawa in America and Hisham Matar in the UK, the latter writing in English.

In Mauritania, poetry continued to dominate the literary scene, without itself being affected greatly, until much later than the country's neighbors. This is on the Arabic side. There are of course other forms of literary expression in *basaniyya* dialect and in Wolof as well as some Francophone production. But the main mode remains poetry.<sup>3</sup> Prose fiction took a backseat. And it was poets who in fact launched it, largely as a form of historiography: examples are the poet Ahmad ben Abd al-Qadir (b. 1941) who sets one of his novels, *al-Qabr al-mahjur* (The Forgotten Tomb), published in 1984, in the eighteenth century; and Baddi wild Ibnu (b. 1970) with his remarkable novel on dictatorship, *Awdiyat al-'atash* (Rivers of Thirst, 2012).<sup>4</sup>

Beyond these state-specific developments, a more important factor, I think, is the context of literacy within which literature was produced. Abdelkebir Khatibi, as lucid sociologist, observes in his 1968 book that "La littérature est certes une expression privilégiée, mais elle ne constitue qu'un moyen parmi d'autres pour communiquer avec les hommes et agir sur le monde. Il faudra définir alors pour les intellectuels maghrébins la place du mot dans la construction d'une culture nationale et préciser dans quelle mesure on peut *valoriser* son importance. Faute de cela, leur littérature risque de devenir une idéologie de simple récréation et d'évasion" (Literature is certainly a privileged expression, but it constitutes one means among others to communicate with people and act on them. Maghrebi intellectuals must define the place of the word in the construction of national culture and specify in what way we can *valorize* its importance. Without this their literature risks becoming an ideology or simple entertainment and evasion) (Khatibi 1968, 116).<sup>5</sup>

These remarks on literacy and on history apply with equal measure to Egypt, and even more to Mauritania and Libya. Khatibi in *Roman maghrébin* concludes with three observations, which seem to me summative of the state of fiction in the Maghreb until the late 1960s when the book was published. Francophone literature was more interested in issues of alienation and identity than its Arabophone counterpart. Firstly, it was also more concerned with the aesthetic dimension. Secondly, there was a disjunction between history and the Maghrebi novel – as liberation movements intensified, novels were invested in ethnographies of daily life. And finally, proximity of literature to politics. “Tout se passe comme si le roman est condamné à poursuivre une réalité toujours insaisissable. Dans le cas où il essaie de s'appropriier l'actualité, il risque de perdre sa spécificité, de se cantonner dans le témoignage. S'il veut prendre une certaine distance par rapport à cette actualité, il s'agit pour lui de savoir comment et à quel niveau cela est possible. Plus que l'écriture et ses techniques, l'histoire est la bête noire de l'écrivain maghrébin” (“Everything happens as if the novel is condemned to pursue an ungraspable reality. In the case when it attempted to appropriate reality/actuality, it risks losing its specificity, and to be confined in testimony. If it wants to take a certain distance from this reality, it is uncertain how and at what level this is possible. More than writing and its techniques, history is *la bête noire* [Achilles' heel] of the Maghrebi writer” (Khatibi 1968, 113). Yet, this is not exclusive to the Maghreb. Egypt experienced the same trend, from the early so-called Pharaonic phase in Mahfouz to Husayn's “Islamic” novels and Jamal al-Ghitani's reworking of medieval history. Across the region, literature as form of knowledge about the self, the world, and the past endowed it with a pedagogical mission. Style became a matter of finding the more suitable or appealing way to get this education across: for example, injecting love stories and romances into historical accounts (Jurji Zaydan in Egypt, al-Bashir Khrayyef in Tunisia), and using familiar conventions of storytelling such as *maqama* and *ribla* or travel narratives (Mohamed al-Muwailihi in Egypt, Mahmud al-Masadi in Tunisia, Ahmed Taoufik in Morocco).

### Vectors of Literary Traffic

The foregoing account of the wide variety in literary practices and in patterns of development across the region points to the challenges facing any literary history. In fact, one of the vexing questions of literary history, and indeed of comparative literature as well, has been conceptions of directions in literary traffic. According to many, modern North African literature is chiefly the product of its encounter with the West while translation and adaptation can explain the shapes this literature has taken. Instead, the argument I put forward here is that traffic has been in fact too complex to explain by these factors alone. There is need for a multi-vectorial view by which the sources which went into the making of these literatures must include existing forms and modes (the indigenous past) – a past shared with the rest of the Arabic-speaking world but also unique to each country. Likewise, the West here should mean French, Anglo-American, as well as Russian, and indeed Italian. Moreover, one key factor since the late 1960s has been Latin American literature, which attracted Arab writers largely due to similarities in the political concerns in both areas. In turn, local culture in North Africa is actually far from being monolithic, comprising very different literary practices. In Algeria and Morocco, for example, the Berber component cannot be ignored; in Egypt visual culture witnessed a boom unparalleled in the region, which directly affected the novel in particular. Oral poetry and storytelling have been important across the region but especially significant in Mauritania and Libya.

Multilingualism in the region is dealt with in a later section of the present chapter, but it is both a source and an outcome of this multi-vectorial traffic, giving us the very different textures of literature in each country and forcing us to look for singularity beyond the recognizable common threads.

Egyptian presence was certainly important throughout, but was not always unchallenged. Taha Husayn (1889–1973) visited Tunisia by invitation from Habib Bourguiba who was then Prime Minister of the newly independent state in July 1957. While he was feted at the highest level, he lamented the state of relations between Egypt and the Maghreb: French occupation cut this area off from its sister countries in the east, he argued, but books were smuggled in occasionally or through France itself. Yet, Taha Husayn's view of literature and what Maghrebian writers should strive to achieve emanates from a view of the novel, the realist fiction in particular, as the parameter for the nascent nation-state and a companion to development as well as symbol of modernity. This would put him in conflict with the Tunisian Mahmud al-Masadi, who was advocating more abstract literature embedded in the literary tradition and world literary contexts.<sup>6</sup> For Husayn, literature was a tool of modernization and education and should therefore cater to the wide public through simple language and relevant themes.

One key factor in this multi-vectorial perspective, conspicuous by its absence in scholarship, has been the movement of literature between North Africa and the rest of the continent. The issue could be looked at from the perspective of what we call the inter-African movement of literature. Historically, the two areas were not cut off from each other. In fact, trade and learning went hand in hand and are largely responsible for the spread of Islam southward and the circulation of goods and people, resulting in important social changes, including racial diversity and material culture. This is partially true of West Africa and Morocco and Tunisia, but also true of Egypt and East Africa. The perception that North Africa turned its back to the Mediterranean is only partially true since this did not result in a turn to the rest of Africa. Ecology is partly to blame, with the vast Sahara desert serving as an inhibiting barrier. But commerce and penetration of Islam from the north continued throughout the medieval and early modern periods. In modern times other factors intervened. But there have been bright moments when the north connected with the rest. Algeria and Egypt were its spearheads. This occurred in the context of the struggle against the colonial West, the rise of third-worldism and the non-aligned movement, all of which found in these two countries strong advocates and bases. That is why circulation and teaching of African literatures was concentrated in Egypt and Algeria. This also explains close contact with some Asian and Latin American literatures. In a way, French united the two regions of Africa, and the metropole allowed their interaction. We may think here of such figures as Albert Memmi, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Mahmud al-Masadi, Kateb Yacine, Abdelkebir Khatibi, Tahar Ben Jelloun, the Martinican Aimé Césaire, and the theorist of anticolonial resistance, Frantz Fanon. All of them formed what we might call the African intellectual community in France, at different times, despite their different identitarian concerns and different ways of relating to home and to host. Diaspora of course raises the question of readership and audience. In this, Maghreb literature in French is not different from that of the rest of the continent. This leads to the issue of the distinctiveness of the so-called Maghrebi literature even beyond the French connection. In fact, Khatibi sought an argument for a distinctive Maghrebi literature, multilingual but also tied by shared elements, including French, and the shared colonial experience. A lot of this has to do with the issue of language, to which I now turn.

## The Multilingual Imperative

To what extent can the literature of North Africa be called Arabic? The question may surprise since what sets North Africa from the rest of Africa is indeed the predominance of Arabic in this southern shore of the Mediterranean. But Arabic is not the unique language there and literature is not written exclusively in Arabic. French-language writing has been an integral part of the scene in Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria since the colonial period and continues to be so today. In fact, until recently, Algerian literature meant Algerian literature in French, so dominant has it been with towering figures such as Kateb Yacine and Mohamed Dib. Tahar Ben Jelloun and Khatibi are Moroccan while Tunisia has had a less vigorous output in French. Literary prizes in the three countries always include Francophone literature. A lot of the intellectual output at universities is still written in French. One reason behind this lies in a bilingual educational system which persists until today. Mauritania and Egypt, very different as they have been, are dominated by literature in Arabic. In the case of Mauritania, it is poetry in particular which dominates, in dialects and in standard Arabic.

The Maghreb in fact mediates Africa, the Arab East, and Europe, which made it the stage for linguistic confluence, a term to which I will return, as well as conflict. Forced monolingualism and the struggle for language justice marked the long colonial period and the phase of nation-state building, with violent exclusion and prohibition for the benefit of French in the first period, and a policy of top-down Arabization in the second. Both policies have been vigorously contested. The reality is that the Maghreb people live *in* languages, which include Arabic, local dialects, French, and various Berber languages. Their multilingualism is not the composite of the languages spoken or written in parallel worlds, but the entangled life of these languages. Yet, assuming the multilingualism of the region does not extend to the ways in which Maghrebi literatures have been approached locally and globally. In fact, institutions of literature, including literary criticism in the Maghreb and abroad, have been largely shaped by monolingualism. The rift between the two realities constitutes a methodological challenge which needs addressing.

Khatibi warned of this rift as early as 1980: “Tant que la théorie de la traduction, de la bilingue et de la pluri-langue n’aura pas avancé, certains textes maghrébins resteront imprenables selon une approche formelle et fonctionnelle” (As long as the theory of translation, bilingualism, and the pluri-language has not advanced, certain Maghreb texts will remain beyond a formal and functional approach) (Khatibi 1983, 179). In bilingual literature, Khatibi notes, “La langue étrangère, dès lors qu’elle est intériorisée comme écriture effective, comme parole en acte, transforme la langue première, elle la structure et la déporte vers l’intraduisible” (The foreign language, when it is internalized as effective writing, as a word in action, transforms the first language, structures it and deports it toward the untranslatable) (Khatibi 1983, 186). Being neither in one language nor in the other problematizes the position from which the bilingual (and multilingual) subject speaks. Khatibi calls it a position of “lucid marginality” – *une marge en éveil* (Khatibi 1983, 17), a position from which a decolonization based on what he, and the Algerian intellectual Mohamed Arkoun, called double critique, could take place (see Khatibi 1983, 12). This is a critique of the other and the self, of the dominating and Orientalist West as well as a recalcitrant and conservative local tradition.<sup>7</sup>

The aim should not be opposing a thinking in Arabic as the alternative, but thinking *in* languages. In this thinking, the foreign language is a fault line (*faille*) which needs to be named. “Encore faut-il en prendre acte, dans le texte même: assumer la langue française, oui pour y nommer cette faille et cette jouissance de l’étranger qui doit continuellement travailler à la marge,



c'est-à-dire pour son seul compte, solitairement" (One should take note of it, within the text itself: to take on the French language in order to name within it this fault line and this pleasure of the foreigner who must continuously work in the margin, i.e., for his sole benefit, in a solitary manner) (Khatibi 1983, 179). The term fault line is intriguing here and has a history specific to World Literature. In their attempt at a totality regarding non-western literatures, both Fredric Jameson and Franco Moretti speak of fault lines. The first sees one between local form and foreign content while the second sees the fault line between "the world and the worldview." In this discussion, I start from the premise that Maghrebis do not only speak in languages, but also write in languages, even when they adopt one language of writing. Any attempt at worlding as well as locating their literature in relation to global trends will have to contend with that. The Maghreb compels us to take into account the multilingual dimension as a fault line of its own, one which cannot be accounted for as a translation between languages or the substitution of one by another; but as confluency/*tarafud*, a form of confluence and interaction of languages within the same text.<sup>8</sup> The revolutionary situation in Tunisia and continued pressure for recognition in Algeria and Morocco which started before it, empowered a proliferation in multilingual literature, most prominently in dialects and Tamazight. In fact, there is a sense in which Maghrebi literature is becoming more, rather than less, multilingual. This expected return of the repressed, including reversal in hierarchy of dialects, relaxation of restriction on language use, proliferation of new idioms and metaphors, and reappropriation of previously monopolized languages, seems in contradiction with the tendency toward language hegemony at the global level.

Constitutions of Maghreb countries, especially Algeria and Morocco, have changed in response to public demands for language rights, recognizing Arabic as an official language and Tamazight as a national language in Algeria in 2002, and as an official one in Morocco. France practiced monolingualism at home and subsumed everything under French. With languages of the colonies, it practiced forms of exclusion and bans which can reach the level of language annihilation. Berber languages are multiple, about ten across the region, written in Arabic, Latin, or Tifinagh scripts. Morocco institutionalized the use of Tifinagh. The issue most debated remains whether to defend Arabic against French on the Berber question – for example in terms of script – or to accept the need to recognize and develop the language within the overall unity of the nation and as an aspect of decolonization (van Parijs 2011, 17–18). Some people speak of language wars, a war of words. Yet, one could reverse this in emulation of social reality itself or, rather, life and the social life of languages. Key principles toward that kind of justice include: recognizing linguistic diversity within state borders and considering languages equal; adopting a *lingua franca* to facilitate communication; learning minority languages; the principle of linguistic regionalism giving a community the right to use their language in their community. These principles should lead to peaceful management of language diversity; recognizing the other in his/her difference; spread of stability; mutual enrichment; a state built on constitutional citizenship rather than any other principle. In Algeria, for example, there are specialists of this literature at university level (Mohamed Akli Salhi, Professor of Amazigh Literature at the University of Tizi Ouzou and another department in Bejaia). There is also a national literary prize included in the Assia Djebar prizes. The Amazigh novel (or *ungal*) is a recent phenomenon. There were about twenty such novels, three of which have been translated from Arabic and French. Among these, mention may be made of Rachid Aliche's *Asfel* (1981) and Belaid Ait Ali's work.

This literature emerged under negative conditions (orality, domination, minoritization, and stigmatization) (Bendjelid and Daoud 2010, 86). So writing in Kabyle is necessarily a militant activity or choice. These texts "at the linguistic level, give shape to, and realize the co-existence

of, several languages in an Algerian, and Kabyle, socio-linguistic context” (Bendjelid and Daoud 2010, 87). Writers create neologisms, calque phrases, archaisms, etc., and often give glossaries, which is not unusual in the Maghrebi literature. In terms of reception and readership, writers work with different ethics and aesthetics which are not necessarily shared by the oral audience. In terms of themes, they are concerned with identity, through use of history or language situations, among other concerns. The writers themselves are bilingual if not multilingual, which raises a wider question about Maghrebi literature as a whole, particularly in relation to French. In 1957, Albert Memmi argued that writers had no other choice but to write in French, and that this francophone literature was destined to be short-lived (Memmi 1985 [1957], 122). Yet, it lives on, even thrives today, maintained by patterns of migration, school curricula, and globalization. In 1963, Mostefa Lacheraf, a key Algerian intellectual and theorist of national culture, advocated using French as a language of culture and education, and bilingualism as a horizon for Algeria in the medium term (Lacheraf 1965). In this he agrees with Mahmud al-Mas’adi, writer in Arabic and architect of the Tunisian education system, an orientation started by the Sadiqiyya School and its graduates – al Mas’adi included – who formed the Tunisian elite of the colonial system as well as the nascent independent state. Abdellatif Laabi, leftist opponent to the Moroccan state, demystified this choice since the 1960s, speaking of the choice of language as something which goes through the crucible of the writer’s own imaginary, mythology, and reality to form their own personality. Yet, the Francophone Maghrebi novel impacted the development of the Arabic novel in the region.<sup>9</sup>

Writing in French inevitably raises the question of global readership and dissemination, and therefore the issue of intended public. Eileen Julien draws attention to the question of visibility by asking if the Euro-language writer is the only writer visible to postcolonial theory (Julien 2006, 677). What are the consequences of “ornamenting Euro-language texts with local languages” (678), she asks. Julien quotes Boubacar Boris Diop’s concern that “African languages are dying into French, enriching it” (678). According to her, “Ngugi and Diop signal their concern with the political consequences of ornamenting Euro-language texts with local languages. So we may ask, Can the sociolinguistic reality of diglossia escape the fate of commodified ornamentalism?” (678). To what extent is this applicable to North African literatures? Julien distinguishes between extroverted literature, meaning looking outwards, and usually written in a Euro-language, and inward-looking or local, not only in theme but also in language and style. She argues: “It is thus that the extroverted novel has had a disproportionate impact on thinking about Africa both *across* and *outside* the continent” (690). That is, novels are read to corroborate perceptions and provide information about the continent. There is also a danger of presenting tradition as “pristine, static, and cloistered” (679). Julien proposes to look at the ways in which the presence of oral genres in the novel operates as “an *appropriation* and *strategy* through which the writer attempts to resolve aesthetic and social questions” (679). To do this one needs to think of local form as dynamic and therefore “locate these texts in the vast field of cultural production and ... be mindful that the African past was not exclusively ‘oral’” (680). If one were to look at this within the wider issue of writing and orality, a long view could be useful. The memory of a multilingual past was used as anticolonial attitude by novels which pick up the early modern Mediterranean as a cultural space of multiple, mixed, and fluid identities. This is a key point for thinking multilingualism in the long view in the Maghreb. Some of this may have to do with, or should give account of, the Andalusian presence in the region, something which marked the three Maghreb countries more than any other part of the Arab world.

## Dominant, Emergent, and Receding Voices and Forms

Looking from the present perspective, it seems that literatures of North Africa somehow coalesced into one direction by which the novel became the privileged site of literary expression. This view exposes of course the danger of teleology in literary history. The novel and prose writing have indeed become the most coveted modes with considerable institutional support and apparatus, which range from publishing and criticism to prizes and public recognition of novelists and novels. Poetry receded but did not disappear, and in fact, in places like Mauritania it is still the dominant mode. Today, poets are perhaps not as celebrated as film and television stars and not as honored as major novelists, but they continue to occupy a place in public consumption and conscience, a situation that has no parallel in Western Europe or North America. With the constantly dynamic politics in the region, poetry has been a more suitable means of expressing public mood and giving voice to contention and discontent. The so-called Arab Spring testifies to this trend. Al-Shabbi and Awlad Ahmed in Tunisia, the return to colloquial protest poetry in Egypt (Fuad Nigm, Abnoudi, and new voices) are but examples of this dynamism.

The advent of the internet and the proliferation of social media, uneven as it has been across North Africa, speeded up what we might call a democratization of writing by which more people, from more diverse backgrounds, began to write and disseminate literature outside traditional channels. This development likewise involves a public whose tastes have been changing fast, bypassing traditional institutions of literature and forms of patronage. Self-publishing, promoting, and creating one's own readership have become almost a norm in countries where it has been both expensive and bureaucratically inhibiting to publish. More women and more youth, who are particularly adept at new technology, entered the literacy sphere.<sup>10</sup> This speeded up the influx of emerging writing and gave less-known writers more clout. Established writers could not ignore this new context and moved to it, rather *en masse*, by establishing direct links with their potential readers through Facebook pages and blogs. The Algerian writer Ahlem Mousteghanemi, most famous for her 1993 novel *Memory in the Flesh*, boasts more than 12 million followers of her Facebook page. She uses this forum not only to disseminate her work and promote her image but also to coach emerging writers and fans. Self-publishing, which was not uncommon since many writers simply bore the cost of seeing their work in print, became easier through the internet.

Drama, pioneered by Tawfik al-Hakim, mentioned earlier, has kept a steady place in cultural production, with most of the performances actually in local dialects. In addition to major Egyptian voices such as Yusuf Idris (1927–1991) and Salah Abdessabour (1931–1981), who promoted poetic theater, a tradition of play writing took hold in Tunisia and Morocco in particular. Some of it revisited history and heritage models of writing such as the work of Moroccan Tayeb Siddiqi (1939–2016), who was one of the most influential and prolific Arab playwrights, and Tunisian Ezzeddine Madani, best known for his historical plays. All of this occurs within a world where structures of control remained largely unchanged at the political level but changed drastically at the levels of economy and technology. North Africa has been on a quest for an elusive autonomy of the literary field. Literature remains marginal to people's interests and as a cultural good, compared to television, for example. Its struggle for autonomy is not necessarily shared across the region. There is no book industry proper and no market sufficient enough to sustain literary production. State intervention remains important, crucial in many places, to subsidize publication costs. Writers remain amateurs (there are no real professional writers in the region). Not even Mahfouz was able to live off his craft. Literature wants to remain relevant to the lives of the people of the region and autonomous at the same time. Except perhaps

for Tunisia, there is really no freedom of expression properly understood. After going through phases, literature remains tied to the state of the North African states and peoples. The attempt to mediatize literature and commodify literary production remains timid. Other than occasional instances, largely fueled by mega prizes funded by the Gulf states, together with the accompanying media spotlights in book fairs and galas, the Arab citizenry remains by and large a non-reading public as far as the Euro-modern practice of reading for pleasure is concerned.

Some issues remain virtually unchanged. A conference devoted to the Arabic book held in 1974 highlighted the issue of book circulation and distribution on the one hand and, on the other, limited readership largely due to institutional restrictions, lack of tradition of reading for pleasure, and the tight link between education (curriculum) and reading practice. Forty years on, the 2003 UNDP Arab Human Development Report reveals how similar issues remain dominant. Among these, we may mention the following: absence of copyright laws; absence of a culture of reading for pleasure among children and adults alike, and the dominance of religious books and school-related material in book fair sales.<sup>11</sup> Within this context, translation, which was instrumental in the development of the region's literature during the early period, has seen a revival. Writers have been increasingly seeking readership outside North Africa, which gave translation, into English in particular, considerable importance. Linking English translation to the so-called Arabic Booker Prize is a case in point. The literary and cultural field remains fractured, reproducing political divisions at states-level and internally, obeying the law of supply and demand. With very little resources, the amount of writing is considerable, exceeding whatever demand there is, engendering fierce competition for readership and circulation along the way.

## Conclusion

As I indicated earlier, in 1957 and 1958 the dean of Arabic letters at the time, Taha Husayn, visited the recently independent Tunisia and Morocco respectively. Role model and influential critic of the tradition, and policymaker in education and culture, he was preceded by his fame and influence. He spoke *fusha* – that is, formal literary Arabic – throughout his radio interviews and lectures, and advised simple language to meet the concrete needs of emerging states and the “uneducated” public. And despite his clear alignment with the Mediterranean identity of his native Egypt, he was rather symptomatic or representative of the main Egyptian role in the region. For him, French was to be avoided and local dialects and languages were to keep away from Arabic literature. For in reality, the movement between Egypt and the Maghreb was actually a linguistic undertaking and has been in important ways about language or language conflict. Egyptian literature is largely monolingual and in fact presented itself as prototypical, even as guardian of Arabic, a matter which was to be reinforced and empowered by turning Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser into *the* center of pan-Arab nationalism. Arabization, whether in its soft version or in the hard one, would be confronted in practice by an entrenched multilingualism in social and cultural life across the Maghreb. This made the movement inherently political and tied to identity politics. Such rapport was not always free of hegemonic tendencies and center–margin anxieties, which combined the desire to emulate Egypt and the impulse to resist its domination at the same time. Yet, the movement was in a sense monolingual, one stream in societies which lived in languages, a major stream which should be viewed within a wider confluence of languages. Arabic *fusha* was the common denominator and Arabic the language of unity of the wider nation in this perspective.

Alongside the trends mentioned above, one tendency remained somewhat constant. The subordination of historiography to political power endowed literature with the role of recording, and making sense of, the turbulent times and lives of North African societies as they transitioned into independence. This has resulted in privileging dominant trends outlined above during what we might call the Mahfuzian phase of Arabic literature. A multi-vectorial approach to these literatures sensitive to the diversity in sources and influences can account for the diverse developments they have undergone since, and the marked differences between them, most notably in relation to languages, styles, and modes of writing. Since 2011, we have been witnessing two tendencies; one is a relaxation on language restrictions while the other has to do with the rise of confessional and testimonial literature. In this literature, alternative histories are emerging but not necessarily in the old forms of the realist or social realist literature. The language battles are no longer primarily determined by ideological and state-sponsored policies but by the climates of relative freedoms and the individualization of the cultural practice of writing. In a sense, living in languages and linguistic confluence have become more, rather than less, influential in the literary domain, most notably in the Maghreb. Examples of work in dialects and even in French have expanded to include nonfiction, such as dictionaries and political theory. Vernacular poetry has been experiencing a new revival, in intersection with new verbal arts such as rap music, poetry slams, and other cultural forms across North Africa. This should challenge current approaches to these literatures to be more sensitive to multiplicity and to the rapid changes in the literary field in the region, accelerated by the most significant popular movements since the era of independence from direct colonial rule.

## NOTES

- 1 One theory attributes the name Africa to the Romans and restricts it to modern-day Tunisia. For a brief etymology and other perceptions, see W. Fourie, "Four Concepts of Africa," *Theological Studies* 71, no. 3, art. 2847, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i3.2847>.
- 2 *Muqaddimat Ibn Khadoun* (Tunis: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1991), 63.
- 3 Marginalized in academia, except perhaps for anthropology, Mauritania gained independence in 1960. Its capital city, Nouakchott, had only 300 inhabitants in 1957, but grew into a massive metropole in an unplanned manner due to exodus from the rural areas.
- 4 See Blalack (2017).
- 5 All translations are mine.
- 6 He states this position in a 1955 article, "The Modern Renaissance of Arabic Literature" (Husayn 1989, 249–256). These ideas were exchanged between the two writers in 1957. See Omri (2006).
- 7 "L'occident est une partie de moi, que je ne peux nier que dans la mesure où je lutte contre tous les occidents et orientis qui m'oppriment ou me désenchantent" (The Occident is part of me, a part that I can only deny insofar as I resist all the Occidents and all the Orientis that oppress and disillusion me) (Khatibi 1971, 108; my translation).
- 8 By *tarafud* I mean a blending of confluence and *rafid*: confluence in the sense of flowing with, and *rafid*, which designates flowing as well as support and generosity. *Tarafud* (or perhaps confluency as an English equivalent) is then a concept which describes the relationships among world literatures, away from hierarchy, domination, and one-dimensional traffic. Within a multilingual text, it designates the ways in which languages flow into one another and mutual support among these languages. See Omri (2015, 13–51 [in Arabic]).
- 9 See Ben Jom'a (1999, 745) on the effects of the Francophone Maghreb novel on its Arabic counterpart.
- 10 On the impact of the internet on Arabic language and literature, see Daoudi (2011, 146–163).
- 11 UNDP (2003, 79); *Nadwat al-Kitab al-Arabi* (1976).

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