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## The Aesthetics and Politics of 'Reading Together' Moroccan Novels in Arabic and French

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### Abstract

*This paper attempts to break down the common practices of reading multilingual Moroccan novels, particularly Moroccan postcolonial novels in Arabic and French. I argue that dominant reading practices are based on binary oppositions marked by a reductionist understanding of language and cultural politics in Morocco. They place the Moroccan novel in Arabic and French in independent traditions with the presupposition that they have no impact on each other, thereby reifying each tradition. They also ignore the similar historical, social and cultural context from which they novels emerge, and tend to reinforce the marginalization of the Moroccan novel within hegemonic single language literary systems such as the Francophone or Arabic literary traditions. I advocate 'reading together' –or an entangled comparative reading of— postcolonial Moroccan novels in Arabic and French; a reading that privileges the specificity of the literary traditions in Morocco rather than language categorisation, and that considers their mutual historical, cultural, geographical, political, and aesthetic interweaving and implications.*

**Keywords:** Multilingualism in Morocco, Arabophone/Francophone novels, monolingual literary systems, 'reading together', entangled comparative reading

In her pioneering work on a multilingual and non-exclusive literary history of fifteenth and sixteenth century North India, Francesca Orsini (2012, 227) adopts 'a comparative perspective that takes in both cosmopolitan and vernacular languages, both written archives and oral performances, and texts and genres that "circulated" in the same place and at the same time although they were "transmitted" in different traditions.' Orsini's approach does not only question the selective single language literary histories (Hindu or Urdu) and the way they foreground communal, religious, and regional divisions that are more reflective of modern and contemporary divisions in India, but equally questions the notion of 'composite culture' based on the idea that 'selective syncretic traditions are taken as definitive evidence that culture (selectively: music, Sufism, Sant Bhakti) acted as a great cohesive force in the Indo-Muslim polity' (2012, 242). Therefore, studies based on single-language or the 'composite culture' approach 'exclude large swathes of literary production, arbitrarily set

language boundaries, construct chronologies that do not match, and answer questions of language and literary choice spuriously along an unproblematic continuum of script-language-religious identity and community' (Orsini 2012, 242). Orsini's innovative approach to excavate the multilingual literary history of fifteenth and sixteenth century North India explores the various parts of the same social and cultural context and examines 'areas of convergence, silences and exclusions within its constituent parts' (2012, 227) while relying on 'the materiality of the archive, the spaces/locations of production and circulation, and oral-performative practices and agents' (2012, 228). The outcome is a rich, sophisticated, and nuanced understanding of the circulation and co-constitution of different cosmopolitan and vernacular languages, groups and communities beyond the common denominator of court and people, religion, and script.

Orsini's astute tracing of pre-modern North India multilingual literary cultures and their co-constitution offers a model to study other multilingual literary cultures around the world, particularly in postcolonial contexts where the languages of the ex-colonisers have been cohabiting with local 'native' languages, creating less homogenous definition of 'national' cultures and literatures. The study of the connection and co-constitution of multilingual literary traditions in postcolonial societies in Asia, Africa and Middle East is more needed than ever at this historical junction, given that postcolonial literary studies have become increasingly monolingual focusing almost exclusively on literatures written in English and French, which are perceived as being more 'transnational' or 'cosmopolitan'. This trend has largely marginalised literatures written in non-European languages such as Arabic, Yoruba, Hindi, Tamil, Urdu, Swahili, and many others and disregarded their mutual and intertwined historical, cultural, geographical, political and aesthetic connections with Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone literatures produced in the same regions.

A recent paper by one of the most influential postcolonial critics, Robert Young (2013), on 'World Literature and Language Anxiety' claims that what makes postcolonial literature distinct within the larger category of world literature is 'language anxiety' as he argues that: 'The postcolonial form of language anxiety rests simply on the question of the writer living in more than one language where the different languages have a colonial power relation to each other' (2013, 31). Young goes on to make a distinction between world literature and postcolonial literature on the basis that a) postcolonial literature is more focused on situations of colonial rule and its aftermath and b) in the way the two are read: 'world literature is prized for its aesthetic value while postcolonial literature is valued in the first instance for the degree to which it explores the effects upon subjective and social experience of the historical residues of colonialism, including language itself' (2013, 31). Young surprisingly reduces postcolonial literature to its 'political' function, although he argues that the aesthetics of the postcolonial lies in language use: 'for postcolonial literatures, the question of language, language choice and translation, are always central, and always political' (2013, 31). Young bases his analysis on the presumption that postcolonial literature is only written in European languages, thereby negating a rich postcolonial literature written in non-European languages. He claims that: 'whereas world literature is often conceived in terms of a range of particular authors expressing themselves in their own language and literary forms, which we may

however read in translation and which may require the mediating role of the critic, the assumption that literature is a form of expression in one's own language is never simply a given for the postcolonial writer, who very often exists in a state of anxiety with respect to the choice of language in which he or she is going to write [...] it is for this reason that language anxiety is fundamental to postcolonial writing' (2013, 33). Young's statement is problematic as it seems to exclude postcolonial writers who write in their 'own language' be that Arabic, Tamil, Swahili, or Urdu. Are writers in these languages less postcolonial than the ones who write for example in French or English because the latter confront the question of 'language anxiety'? The presumption that postcolonial literature written in English or French is the only one that engages with colonial legacies through the prism of language is problematic because it disconnects literatures written in European languages from those written in 'local' or 'native' languages, with which they have been in dialogue aesthetically and politically as they emerge from the same context.

In *Flesh and Fish Blood: Postcolonialism, Translation and the Vernacular* (2012), Subramanian Shankar addresses this gap in postcolonial literary studies by examining comparatively Indian literary writings in English and Tamil. Shankar argues that postcolonial studies have focused far too much on the notion of the hybrid, diasporic, and exilic in literature –or what he calls 'transnational postcolonialism'—at the expense of vernacular local cultures. His point of departure is Salman Rushdie's claim that Indian literatures written in Indian languages are parochial and do not have the same high cosmopolitan and transnational qualities of Indian literature in English (2012, 1-2). Shankar debunks Rushdie's theory by showing how Tamil writers who write in English and those who write in Tamil are in dialogue with each other and with their vernacular context both aesthetically and politically. He reveals the complexity and interconnection of their writing and relationship to the 'local' context from which they have emerged. If Indian literature in English carries the burden of 'proving' its place within the Indian literary canon, the language in which it is written has attracted the attention of both critics and writers, but it tends to focus on 'the axes of the transnational and the national, making it difficult to see the various ways in which the vernacular has conditioned Indian writing in English' (2012, 48). Shankar's approach is pertinent to the Moroccan context (the one under scrutiny in this paper), where literary productions written in French and Arabic are disconnected and studied separately.

Orsini and Shankar's comparative multilingual approach to literary traditions in pre-modern and postcolonial India respectively inspires similar approaches to multilingual contexts like Morocco, where linguistic and cultural diversity have not been explored adequately in the field of literary and cultural studies. The focus of this paper is on Moroccan novels written in Arabic and French, as the genre of the novel is the most prolific one in contemporary Morocco. Like Indian novels in English, Moroccan novels in French are viewed from the postcolonial transnational perspective (Orlando 2013) without relating them to their local context or to Arabic novels; they are not even considered by some Moroccan critics as part of a 'national' literary canon (al-Yaburi 2006). This paper raises the problematic separation of Moroccan novels written in Arabic and French in literary and critical studies and the disconnected and polarized literary histories that have emerged as a result. It provides a

critique of the way Moroccan novels in French have been excluded from the literary field of Arabic literature despite their strong affiliation its cultural history. In the field of Francophone studies, focus on Moroccan novels in French has completely excluded those written in Arabic. This has resulted in a shallow conception of the transmitted cultural heritage, obscuring the cultural histories from which these texts emerge. It also obscures the ‘cohabitation’ of French with other languages in Morocco and the Maghreb region (Dobie 2003: 33). I argue that these dominant reading practices, based on linguistic determinism, have contributed to the marginalisation of Moroccan literary traditions within dominant literary systems such as the Francophone/French and Arabic traditions, and therefore, have obscured the cultural, linguistic and historical entanglement of these multilingual literary traditions with each other. Therefore I propose ‘reading together’, an entangled comparative reading of Moroccan novels in Arabic and French; a reading that foregrounds the co-constitution of the post-colonial Moroccan novel and its strong link with Morocco’s pre-modern literary traditions.

### Language politics in Morocco

Morocco’s complex multilingual scene predates French and Spanish colonialism (1912-1956). Vernacular languages such as *Darija* (spoken Moroccan Arabic) and Amazigh (the language of the indigenous population of Morocco)<sup>1</sup> cohabited with *Fusha* (standard Arabic used in print culture, media, and religious affairs, and modernised form of classical or Quranic Arabic), as well as Judeo-Arabic, and Judeo-Spanish. These languages have all shaped the oral and written cultures of Morocco (Ennaji 1991, 2005). The arrival of the French and Spanish as colonial languages in the early twentieth century further complicated the picture, particularly as the French colonial power imposed their language as the sole language of education and administration (Segalla 2009). The Moroccan State’s ambiguous politics of Arabisation in the aftermath of independence in 1956 did not succeed in removing French from the public sphere. Today it remains the language of higher education and administration, and is spoken widely in Morocco’s central administrative and economic cities such as Rabat and Casablanca (Elbiad 1985, Ennaji 2005). English, at the same time, is increasingly recognised as the new lingua franca of business and private education (Siddiqi 1991). Therefore, French still retains to a large degree its power status since colonial times as an urban language largely used by the educated middle and upper classes. In fact, the state’s Arabisation policies were influenced by French colonial policies in the way the state has promoted a linguistic divide in education: Arabic has been assigned to teaching in the Humanities; and French to sciences and technology, presumed to be the tools of progress and development in the country.<sup>2</sup> This has not only devalued some academic disciplines that

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<sup>1</sup> The indigenous population of Morocco consists of various Amazigh or Berber tribes traditionally located in three geographical locations: the Rif Mountains, the Middle Atlas Mountains, and the Souss Valley. The tribes speak various dialects of Amazigh language which has a shared alphabet called Tifinagh. These dialects are, respectively: Tarafiyte, Tamazight, and Tashelhit.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the failure of the educational system in Morocco and the Francophone/Arabophone divide and its ideological implications, see Zniber “Le système éducatif marocain : histoire d’un échec” in *Jaddaliya*,

were seen as ‘futile’, but also the Arabic language, which has remained subordinated to French.<sup>3</sup> One can clearly deduce that Arabisation did not fully decolonise the education system, which is still largely geared to the ‘the class interests of the dominant elites’ as Paul Zeleza (2006, 23) argues in the case of other African postcolonial nations. This unfinished Arabisation policy has contributed to the already existing colonial divide between the Moroccan intelligentsia educated either in French or in Arabic Fusha (and rarely adequately in both languages). This divide often has repercussions, for example, it has instigated the recent campaign by some intellectuals to abolish Arabic Fusha, the language of education in primary and secondary schools, and which is alleged to be part of the current crisis in the Moroccan educational system and replace it with the spoken *Darija* as the new language of instruction.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, Arabic *Fusha* is perceived in most postcolonial Arabic speaking nations as the emblem of their ‘decolonised’ Arab national identity, a cosmopolitan, trans-regional, and symbolic language representing a rich and prestigious cultural heritage; its co-existence with vernacular spoken forms of Arabic (which is seen as inferior) has always been the subject of fierce debates across the region that translate anxieties on education, socio-economic changes and perceptions of national identities.<sup>5</sup>

The problematic Arabophone/Francophone polarization in Morocco, therefore, is linked to the larger question of the perception of language in relation to the formation of nation-state in postcolonial societies. With independence, and during the process of nation building in postcolonial Morocco, Arabic was singled out as the official language of the nation. This was one of the legacies of French colonialism, as it was the French colonial powers that created the enduring myth of ‘common identity between language and nation’ (Kaye and Zoubir 1992, 22). Therefore, ‘Moroccan identity is, according to this belief, tied up with being Arabic and therefore inevitably with speaking and writing in Arabic’ (Ibid). The ambiguous State’s nationalist project has pushed for Arabic as the language of national identity while keeping French as the language of science and administration. This has on the one hand largely demoted Arabic, and on the other hand reinforced the idea that ‘languages encode national value. To speak or write in French is therefore to perpetuate French values’ (Ibid).

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14 May 2014, <http://arabsthink.com/2014/05/14/le-systeme-educatif-marocain-histoire-dun-echec/> (accessed 20/06/2015).

<sup>3</sup> According to Mahmoud Mamdani (1994: 394) the education of African intellectuals in languages that are not the mother tongues of the masses creates a ‘linguistic curtain’ which not only perpetuates the separation of academics from the masses but also diminishes the importance of academic work.

<sup>4</sup> A leading campaigner to replace Arabic *Fusha* with *Darija* in primary schools is the civil society campaigner and businessman Nouredine Ayouché whereas Abdellah Laroui, the influential intellectual and novelist is the one seen as presenting the counter camp. A televised debate between the two on the talk show *Mubasharatan Ma’akum* (Directly With You) broadcasted on state media channel 2M on 27 November 2013 highlighted the complex problem of language politics, and decolonization, and the how language is still perceived as a key component of ‘national identity’; see ‘Mobachara Ma3Akom Nordine Ayouch et Abdel Aaroui’, 28 November 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v= ad6bq5BbDs/>

<sup>5</sup> For a nuanced discussion of this issue, see Haeri (2000). Edward Said’s view on the raging debate on language reforms in the Arab world is very critical of those who promote the idea that it is time to get rid of classical Arabic and use only demotic Arabic in education and communication; he accuses them of a genuine lack of knowledge and experience of how people in the Arab speaking region ‘live in Arabic’ in their daily smooth movement between the spoken and written forms of Arabic. See Said “Living in Arabic” in *Al Ahram Weekly*. 12 - 18 February 2004. Issue No. 677.

This Arabisation has also resulted in the marginalisation of Morocco's Amazigh population, their culture and language as they were subsumed under the presumed Arabo-Islamic identity of the newly independent nation. However, in the 1980s a significant Amazigh cultural movement erupted in Morocco calling for the linguistic and cultural rights of Amazigh people. The movement has benefited from the recent pro-democracy movements around the Arab world, and made some gains that were unthinkable years ago, including state recognition of Amazigh cultural identity and of the Amazigh language as the second official language of the country in the amended Moroccan constitution of 2011 (Maddy-Weitzman 2013; Errihani 2013). This official recognition of Moroccan linguistic and cultural diversity will transform the Moroccan cultural scene in the coming decades. Amazigh is now taught in primary schools in Amazighen areas, a change likely to engender a written Amazigh culture over the coming years. While Amazigh has so far been predominantly oral, it has deeply influenced and shaped Moroccan culture and literature.

Decades after national independence in 1956 and Arabisation, language politics in Morocco are more complex than ever. This is not only because of persistent colonial legacies, class divisions, the crisis of the education system, and regional diversity, but also because of the integration of Morocco in the neo-liberal market economy and globalisation, which has made the mastery of not only French but most importantly English mandatory for entry into the neo-liberal market economy and has largely sidelined Arabic Fusha, Darija and Amazigh. However, in the 'quotidian experience', Moroccans live in languages (Said 2004) and move between speaking, reading and writing in Darija, Amazigh, French, Spanish, and Arabic Fusha depending on their geographical location, and their social class and education.

### **Language 'choice' and the creation of a polarised literary field**

Language 'choice' (if it can be called a 'choice') is certainly a complex issue in multilingual postcolonial contexts like that of Morocco. If the politics of language 'choice' in the immediate aftermath of independence in the 1950s and 60s centred around the question of decolonising national cultures through the promotion of indigenous languages at the expense of the forcibly imposed foreign colonial languages such as English or French, today the latter are no longer perceived as foreign or alien and have been largely domesticated and appropriated. This is particularly the case in the Maghreb, where French has become an integral part of the multilingual scene in the region. However, I argue that the 'choice' of the language in which critics and novelists write is still largely linked to colonial legacies, the centrality of European literary traditions, markets, and their 'technologies of recognition' (Shih 2004, 17).

In the aftermath of independence in the Maghreb those who wrote in Arabic were never asked about their 'choice', unlike those who wrote in French, because of the presumption that writing in Arabic was part of the project of Arab national identity building. French, on the other hand, was seen as problematic and had to be defended as a choice (Kilito 2013, 16). Most Francophone writers did not really have a 'choice', as they could only write in French

and Arabic was not accessible to them because of their French education. French was also perceived then as the language that allowed the ‘liberation’ of individuals from social and religious taboos (Kilito 2013, 16), which to my mind is an orientalist legacy that considers Arabic as a fixed and ‘conservative’ language, and which has been deconstructed by many writers in Morocco and in the Middle East in the way they have used Arabic to break social and political taboos. Kilito (2013, 16) also claims that writing in French has allowed writers to access a much larger readership than that available in Morocco and the Arab world, therefore, facilitated translation into other European languages. In her recent work on contemporary Francophone literature in Morocco, Orlando (2009) argues that Francophone novelists today are writing for themselves and their own circles of readership in Morocco rather than targeting French and wider Francophone readership; but they still get translated into other languages more frequently.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1986, 2005) has been one of the most prominent postcolonial figures calling for African intellectuals to ‘choose’ to write, promote, and reinvent African vernacular languages as a way of decolonising the mind. His decision to write fiction in Gikuyu, his native tongue, instead of English is a testament to his commitment to the cause. However, he recently recognised how ‘In European languages—English, French and Portuguese principally—are also immense deposits of some of the best in African thought. They are granaries of African intellectual productions, and these productions are the closest thing we have to a common Pan-African social property’ (2005: 163). In this sense, European languages were also transformed during and after the colonial encounter in the way they have been appropriated, ‘domesticated’ and subsequently enriched with new local paradigms and sensitivities (Seleza 2006, 22). Therefore, if Francophone writers in the Maghreb and elsewhere agonised about the dilemma of writing in French, ‘the language of the enemy’ (Djebar 1985) as it was portrayed during colonial times and in the immediate aftermath of independence in the 1950s and 60s, this perception has changed radically from the 1970s onwards (Abdallaoui 1992). This is because there has been a more ‘assertive’ understanding that French language extends beyond the frontier of France and therefore, ‘writing in French constitutes a double strategy of subversion directed against both the former colonial power and the patriarchal and authoritarian regimes that have governed since independence’ (Dobie 2003, 35). However, there is still a reductionist understanding of the complexity of the multilingual literary field in Morocco and the Maghreb. Literary spheres in Arabic and French are not only divided and studied in separate literary systems (Arabic or French/Francophone), but they are also polarised as if they have had no impact on each other.

Moroccan Francophone critic and novelist Abdelkebir Khatibi (1983) argues that languages are always inhabited by other languages and there is always a process of intercultural and linguistic translation occurring in the act of using them. He uses the notion of a *bi-langue* or bi-language to express the linguistic diversity of the Maghreb in his *Maghreb Pluriel* (1983). Abdelfattah Kilito, who writes his critical essays in French (and sometimes in Arabic) and his novels in Arabic, argues that Moroccans live in ‘double languages’ (*Izdiwājiyat allugha*) in the way they move in their daily lives between various languages. This is the case in the use of Arabic Fusha and French in media, education, and administration (2013: 15). French,

therefore, is no longer a foreign language as it has largely cohabited with Arabic (Kilito 2013, 15). For Kilito, those who write in Arabic are heavily influenced in their writing by the ‘expressions’ and ‘style’ of the French language as well as French literary genres to which they have been exposed; as for those who write in French, they have always maintained that Arabic language is strongly present in their writing and that ‘behind French letters, there are Arabic ones’ (2013, 16). Kilito thus advocates a strong cultural and linguistic intertextuality in literary writing in Arabic and French, which goes beyond the polarization with which this multilingual literature is perceived and studied.

Young (2013, 35) argues that postcolonial ‘language anxiety’ is particularly high in the Maghreb today even though ‘The availability of Arabic as a literary language, and its proliferating power as the language of the world’s great literatures, might have been expected to produce a situation in which language anxiety would not be an issue for recent North African writers, but in fact, the very opposite is the case.’ Young’s analysis of the Maghreb’s multilingual literary scene refers more to the historical moment of decolonisation in the 1950/60s, when Maghrebi writers who could only write in French and who were the product of a French colonial educational system agonised about writing in French, which was seen then as an alien language. But as I have argued above, Francophone writers of later generations have been more confident about writing in French and have emphasised its strong relationship with Arabic. Young also claims that some Maghrebi writers prefer to write in French or English because Arabic is not considered their mother tongue and different from their spoken dialect (Arabic *Fusha* is not the mother tongue of anyone in the Arabic speaking world, and neither is French) and that it is distant ‘from certain areas of human experience, such as intimacy, which, writers argue, it finds impossible to express’ particularly for women writers and hence, Young claims, there are many Arab Anglophone woman writers in the diaspora (2013, 38). This analysis glosses over the fact that modern and contemporary Arabic literature written in Arabic has been extensively engaged with various social and political issues, particularly women’s rights; it is also problematic in linking Arab women diasporic writing (most of whom can only write in English, since Arabic is inaccessible to them for various reason to do with education and geographical location) with the perception that Arabic language is not adequate to address feminist issues.<sup>6</sup> Young misses the most important point here: about the language question in the Maghreb which is to do with the centrality of colonial legacies in the Maghreb/Mashreq relations which are still mediated through the west’s ‘technologies of recognition’.

Today, while some Moroccan authors write solely in French or in Arabic, there are others like Abdallah Laroui and Kilito who write their philosophical and critical texts in French and their fiction in Arabic. Laroui, for his part, recognises that his critical and philosophical texts are likely to be ignored in the Arab speaking *Mashreq*, or Middle East, but will be appreciated by Europeans. It is the European interest in his critical texts, he notes, that always triggers interest from the Mashreq in his ideas—as was the case of his book *L’Idéologie*

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<sup>6</sup> On Feminist literature written in Arabic, see among many others for example, Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (eds) (1990); ~~Joseph; Joseph~~ T. Zeidan (1995) Anastasia Valassopoulos (2007), Karima Laachir and Saeed Talajooy (2013); ~~:-).~~



*arabe contemporaine* (Contemporary Arab Ideology) (1967) (Kilito 2013: 42). Here the question of the power of European academe and literary markets as well as colonial legacies in the Arab-speaking Maghreb and Mashreq is crucial. Arabic critical and literary productions have been mediated in the last hundred years of so through the West in the sense that their production becomes only known to them through the way they are received in Europe; for example, if an Arabic critical book is translated into French and English, only then does it become important in the Arab-speaking region, not before that European recognition. Laroui claims that: ‘any contact between us—Maghrebis, Arabs or Muslims—passes through the West’ (cited in Kilito 2013: 42). There is a kind of a tacit request for recognition that passes through the West. This is what Shu-mei Shih (2004: 17) refers to as ‘technologies of recognition’ which ‘have largely operated alongside and within national, political, cultural, economic, and linguistic hierarchies’, and which she defines as ‘the mechanisms in the discursive (un)conscious-with bearings on social and cultural (mis)understandings-that produce “the West” as the agent of recognition and “the rest” as the object of recognition, in representation.’ In this sense, Mashreqi/Maghrebi relations have yet to overcome colonial legacies and the way the West still mediates their ‘recognition’ of each other’s cultural and critical production. This may partly explain the marginal position assigned to Moroccan and Maghrebi literature within the larger category of Arabic literature as I will argue next.

Linguistic diversity and multilingual cultural production are not unique to Morocco and a number of African and Asian countries, as well as countries in the Arab speaking region, share this linguistic plurality. However, what one finds in Morocco (as well in other postcolonial multilingual nations such as the case of India) is that these multilingual literary and cultural productions, particularly in Arabic and French, the most prolific so far, have been studied in separation from one another. This polarized multilingual literary field and how it is studied in monolingual literary systems is what Kilito (2013, 16) calls ‘split tongue’ (*lisan maflouq*) and ‘split literature’ (*adab maflouq*). For Kilito (2013: 16), it is not the question of the ‘doubleness’ of language expression that is the problem in Morocco in the field of literature but rather the problem lies in the division between these two literary worlds, which does not allow for mutual recognition and analysis. The Moroccan literary field is therefore marked not by ‘linguistic doubleness’ as such, but by two types of monolingual literary systems, which live together but separate from each other and which pose huge obstacles for those who attempt to create a multilingual literary history of Moroccan literature.

In other words, there are two literary systems in Morocco now, one produced in French and one in Arabic, directed to two different audiences. Research on Moroccan literature is either focused on the one written in French or the one written in Arabic and this is the case not only in Arabic studies department and Francophone studies department in Europe and North America but in Morocco, where researchers do not relate these two fields of production to each other. This is a symptom of the unproductive ideological dichotomy set up between languages that are perceived as ‘national’ and those perceived as ‘foreign’, and which contributes to the creation of a disconnected and polarised multilingual literary field.

### **Regional literary systems and the marginality of Moroccan literature**

The Moroccan novel in Arabic is assigned a very marginal position in the modern Arabic literary tradition. Most anthologies and literary histories of the Arabic novel are Mashreqi (Middle East, or rather Egypto-) centric, and most of them consider Moroccan (and Maghrebi) modern and pre-modern literary traditions to be insignificant. Most of the books consulted on modern Arabic literature in the writing of this paper mention the odd Moroccan novelist like Mohamed Choukri or Mohammed Zafzaf (perhaps because both authors are perceived as rebellious) without really engaging with their works (Allen 1987; Badawi 1990; Hafez 1997, Moosa 1997).

Roger Allen (2007, 249), one of the pioneering critics of modern Arabic literature, has recently recognised the limitations of hegemonic regional literary systems that are exclusive and do not pay attention to the particularities (*khusūsiya*) and various genres like the novel, poetry, and short story in different contexts. Even though Allen (2007, 249) claims that there is a need to offer ‘in more literary-critical terms, a division into more local concerns and an analysis of *khussūiyyāt* (particular ties) at the national and regional level’, he never considers that in a multilingual Arabic speaking region like the Maghreb and Morocco, part of those *khussūiyyāt* include the need to create a more inclusive multilingual literary history that includes, for example, Maghrebi novels in French.

Gonzalo Fernandez Parrilla (2006) has demonstrated in his excellent book on the literary history of Moroccan novel in Arabic, the novel’s strong ties with pre-modern Moroccan traditions and genres such as travel writing, manuscripts, and letters. Parrilla (2006, 150-53) devotes a brief section on the ‘supposed influence of the Moroccan novel in French’ on the Arabic novel; his brief analysis remains limited to the question of the ‘beginning’ of the Moroccan novel. The influential Moroccan critic Ahmed al-Yaburi explores in his *Novelistic Writing in Morocco (Al kitāba Ariwā’eya fī al Maghreb)* (2006) the history and aesthetic development of the Moroccan novel in Arabic from its beginning in the 1950s. However, he completely excludes Moroccan novels written in French and their relationship with the Arabic ones; he argues that ‘The Moroccan novel written in Arabic grew up in the arms of history, biography and autobiography. It was never separated from reality [*al wāqe*]’ despite its diversified narrative style. This is because its most important exemplars have always been inspired by the social, political and intellectual life of modern Morocco’ (2006: 22). One could easily trace the same history for Moroccan novels written in French, which are not perceived by al-Yarubi to be part of the Moroccan literary canon. This exclusion is symptomatic of nationalist and regional language based analysis and reading of the Moroccan literary traditions. The same can be said about the body of critical texts devoted to the study of Moroccan novels in French as none of them refer to their strong links and affiliation with Moroccan novels in Arabic (Tenkoul 1985, Mouzouni 1987, Dejeux 1992, Orlando 2009).

Moroccan novels in French are in fact read with other Francophone texts within the French literary system, to which they remain marginal. These novels were largely directed in their

early phases to a French readership well versed in colonial French literature like that of Pierre Loti and others, whose representations of Moroccans are marked by a set of fixed stereotypes and prejudices (Kilito 2013, 69). This may explain the trap of folklorisation and self-orientalising tendencies of early Moroccan novels written in French, particularly those of Mohamed Sefrioui (Abdallaoui 1992: 13). These tendencies were challenged by second generation novelists such as Abdellatif Laabi, Mohammed Khair Eddine and Abdelkebir Khatibi, who reinvented Moroccan Francophone novels. However, as Abdellaoui (1992: 31) argues:

[...] in France (and elsewhere in the West), Moroccan novels [written in French] are still universally read as sociological documents (the most highly prized being those that deal with the condition of Muslim women). This propensity reinforces ethnocentric views and expectations inherited from the previous century. In this regard, a careful study of critical reception is enlightening. The criteria that prevail on both sides of the Mediterranean are highly arbitrary: in France, critics argue about whether a text has a literary merit; in Morocco, they debate whether to label it “authentic”, whether to admit it into the national cultural canon.

Moroccan novels in French remain marginal to both the Francophone literary system and to the Arabic one; in fact, they have been analysed in a way to suggest their ‘alienation’ from the national culture. Thus, I agree with Mezgueldi’s point (1995:1) that ‘within the Framework of a study on French-language Maghrebian literature, it is best to escape the vicious circle of “alienation” and “acculturation” in which this literature has been hastily enclosed’. Moroccan authors of French expression maintain a strong relation with ‘Moroccan culture of an oral tradition’ or what Mezgueldi (1995, 1) calls the ‘maternal culture’ in their attempt to valorise their own culture in the context of decolonization. She argues that ‘The bilingualism functioning in French-language literature is still secretly and overtly affected by the mother tongue, present in the very structure of the text, at the heart of which an orality has been inscribed’ (Ibid, 2). This link to Moroccan oral culture is evident in Moroccan novels written in Arabic as they are shaped by the vernacular sensitivity of Moroccan Darija as well as Amazigh language and oral culture.

Laabi links both Moroccan novels written in Arabic and French and define them as ‘*roman-itinéraire*’ heavily influenced by Morocco’s pre-modern narrative traditions such as travel literature (*rihla*) and its oral equivalent *al-maqāma* (Wolf 1992, 36). Al-Yaburi (2006) also claims that the origins of Moroccan novels written in Arabic are travel literature, which were serialised in Moroccan newspapers in the 1920s; they were also influenced by Egyptian and Lebanese novels, which were made known through serialised editions in imported Egyptian newspapers. This shows the interlinked histories of the multilingual novels written in Arabic and French. As Parrilla (2006: 153) puts it ‘everything seems to indicate that the emergence of the novel in Arabic and French [in Morocco] was more or less simultaneous, and that both were trying to contribute to the development of the national culture and literature’ and hence the need to read them together and to explore the way they have been in dialogue with each other and how they have responded to their local, national and transnational contexts both aesthetically and politically.

### **‘Reading together:’ postcolonial Moroccan novels in Arabic and French**

Laabi, who was the co-founder of the *Souffles/Anfās* bilingual French/Arabic review in the 1960s, is one of the Moroccan writers in post-independent Morocco to emphasise the importance of ‘reading together’ Moroccan literature in Arabic and French. The journal resisted both state imposed monoculturalism on the one hand, and French colonial and cultural hegemony on the other. Dobie (2003, 37) claims that *Souffles/Anfās* is an early example of breaking down a normative understanding of Moroccan multilingual literature:

An early model of literary bilingualism in the arena of publishing was furnished by the Moroccan journal *Souffles*, which between 1966 and 1971 under the direction of Abdellatif Laabi and Abrajham Serfaty, published essays and poetry by Maghrebian writers, and served as an outlet for avant-garde literature that broke with the themes and forms espoused by the first post-independence generation of writers. Rejecting the monoculturalism of the post-independence regimes, *Souffles* espoused a multiculturalist ideal of the Maghreb and strove to enact this ideal by publishing, from 1968, texts in Arabic alongside texts in French.

*Souffles/Anfas*’s project to heal the divide between intellectuals and writers in French and Arabic and create a debate between them came to an end in 1972, when the magazine was shut down by the regime. It seems that Moroccan critics in the post-independence era were, therefore, more attuned to the danger of linguistic determinism and segregation in the analysis of Moroccan novels in Arabic and French expression. Khatibi’s book *Le Roman maghrébin* (1968) is an early example of a literary history that goes beyond language determinism and includes Moroccan novels in both Arabic and French. Mohammed Berrada’s translation of the book to Arabic in 1971 is a testimony to the belief that Moroccan novels should be read and analysed beyond linguistic divisions. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore in depth why this consciousness and resistance to monoculturalism and linguistic determinism disappeared from Moroccan literary scene in the 1980s, the trend can perhaps be related to the state’s tyranny during the so called Lead-Years and the repressive regime of the 1970s, 80s and 90s and its policies of dividing and ruling Morocco’s Francophone and Arabophone intelligentsia. Francophone and Arabophone writers like Laabi, Khatibi and Kheir Eddine, Zafzaf, Choukri, Berrada and many others have brought new aesthetic creativity to the Moroccan novel with innovative narrative styles and structures that reflect complex identities. These are the generation of writers who were young at the time of independence and emerged in the late 1960s as a powerful cultural and political force whose aspirations had been thrashed by the postcolonial regime and its increasing tyranny.

Therefore, I suggest ‘reading together’ or reading side-by-side and comparatively postcolonial Moroccan novels in Arabic and French expression. This is a reading that has the potential to create a connected multilingual literary field in Morocco beyond the ideological language dichotomy or the ‘national’/‘foreign’ language paradigm, existing hierarchies, divisions and exclusions. It is a reading that challenges not only the nationalist and regional

language-based analysis of Moroccan postcolonial literature but also the divide between Arabophone and Francophone cultural and literary producers, critics and intellectuals. This approach moves away from the common reading of postcolonial Moroccan novels in French either as ‘alienated’ from the national culture and hence excluded from the Moroccan literary canon or as ‘transnational’ and ‘cosmopolitan’, which not only disconnect them from their vernacular context, but also from the novels written in Arabic. ‘Reading together’ overcomes the limitations of hegemonic regional literary systems such as Arabic or Francophone, which are both exclusive and do not pay attention to the particularities of local contexts, particularly those with a complex and rich multilingual history and quotidian life like the Maghreb and Morocco.

‘Reading together’ is in fact an entangled reading that sheds light on the interwoven aesthetics and politics of Moroccan postcolonial novels in Arabic and French expression, and how they have been in dialogue with each other, not only in responding to the same social and political contexts but also in terms of their intertwined aesthetic influences. It is an entanglement that links culture, histories, and languages in a pluralistic triangle that recognizes the Moroccan novel’s strong links with its pre-modern Arabic traditions, its indebtedness to European, Mashreqi, and African literatures. It is a reading that suspends the link between the national and the linguistic so that ‘the national and the linguistic are no longer metonymies and mutually determining, then we can move on to critically engage the novels themselves, noting, to start, their singular achievements in form and language’ as well as their engagement with the contexts from which they emerge, and how their aesthetics is linked to their politics (Shih: 2004: 27). In other words, it is not a mode of reading that prioritizes geographic borders as opposed to linguistic ones as the embodiment of a unified field of study, rather it is based on the belief in the cultural and historical relations of multilingual Moroccan literature and their importance in revealing new insights into the aesthetics and politics of the country, an aesthetics and politics that is never fixed and is always on the making. It is a reading that produces unstable histories, cultures, languages, geographies, and subjectivities. What would one gain aesthetically and politically by reading together, for example Driss Chraïbi’s *Le passé simple* (1954) with Mohamed Choukri’s *Al Khubz Al-hāfī* (1982)? Or Mohammed Berrada’s *Lu’bat anisyāne* (1986) with Abdellatif Laabi’s *L’œil et la nuit* (1969)?

Reading Chraïbi’s *Le passé simple* with Choukri’s *Al Khubz Al-hāfī*, for one, reveals a complex set of aesthetics and politics. Both semi-autobiographical novels explore Moroccan society and politics on the eve of Independence, and both caused an uproar upon their publication: Chraïbi’s novel for its presumed anti-nationalist stance at a critical moment in the anti-colonial movement, and Choukri’s for its alleged devaluation of Moroccan culture and its ‘vulgarity’. The protagonist in Chraïbi’s novel represents a generation of Moroccan intellectuals educated in French colonial schools, caught between their critique of colonialism and their fascination with European civilisation. He rejects the absolute authority of his patriarchal father and the oppression of women including his own mother. Chraïbi’s open and scathing critique of Moroccan traditional values and patriarchy were perceived then as a betrayal and a ‘sell out’ to French colonial power; all carried out in French

expression. Choukri's novel explores the lives of underclass Northern Moroccans under Spanish colonial rule in the 1940s and 50s. The protagonist of *Al Khubz Al-hafi* is—like Chraïbi's—rebellious. He works against his tyrannical father and is critical of the exploitation and deprivation of social outcasts: thieves, prostitutes, vagabonds, and the unemployed. His compelling narrative of the lowly in society offers a unique stylistic tension that is heightened with his masterful use of elegant Fusha with vernacular Darija and Amazigh as well as Spanish.

Reading the novels together provides a complex picture of the national tensions in 1950s Morocco, and sheds lights on division within the anti-colonial movements between various fractions. It gives a unique comparative context between two colonial systems of governance, the Spanish in the North where Choukri's novel is based (and which has rarely been explored in Moroccan novels until recently), and the French in the rest of Morocco. Both novelists explore the role of the intelligentsia in the historical moment of pre-independent Morocco, its relationship to political articulation and the formation of a national consciousness from diverse vantages. Both critique not only colonial oppression but also the elitism of some members of the anti-colonial nationalist movement. The complexity of the politics of both authors and their critique of the violence of colonial and nationalist hegemony, patriarchy, class, and social hierarchy are reflected in their aesthetics: personal histories and narratives are embedded within national history and wider global movements of anti-colonialism at the time (the war in Algeria, the Palestinian struggle). Their styles desacralize French and Arabic, and mark them with Moroccan cultural specificity.

What would an entangled reading of Abdellatif Laabi's *L'oeil et la nuit* (1969) and Mohamed Berrada's *Lu'bat Anisyān* (1986) tell us about the intertwined styles of these two giants of Moroccan literature? Laabi's French-language novel blends poetry and prose in a unique style marked by a breakdown in temporal linearity through the use of narrative fragments, flashbacks, and hallucinations. This style reflects the historical context of the novel in 1960s in Morocco, when the postcolonial regime was becoming increasingly tyrannical and oppressive. The novel's figure of the 'eye in the night' represents the watchful eye of power amid which the protagonist reflects not only on the memory of a traumatic colonial past but also on the disillusionment of the people with the repression of the postcolonial regime. Laabi's French is blended with Arabic expressions and sensitivity and therefore offers an example of the rootedness of Francophone novel in Arabic literary traditions. Berrada's novel also uses fragments in its innovative narrative style, which is characterized by non-linear chapters and sub-chapters, made up of monologues and sometimes appearing as incoherent. The multiplicity of narrative voices is disrupted by the presence of a 'supreme narrator' who reminds the reader that the characters behind the narrative voices are not 'real' but 'fictional'. In other words, like Laabi's novel, Berrada's does not have a linear plot or a story that can be summarized. The dominant voice in the novel is that of Hadi, a social reformer, who is disillusioned with the state of affairs in Morocco and who embarks upon a journey of memory to understand what went wrong with his country socially and politically since Independence.

Both novels represent moments of aesthetic creativity and rupture with the literary history of the Moroccan novel, for example, in the way Laabi's novel firmly establishes a break with the self-orientalising early Francophone novels, or Berrada's experimental style of writing that leaves behind the early nationalist Arabophone novels such as those of Abdelkrim Gallab and others. Both writers are firm believers in the plurilingualism of Moroccan literature and have been involved in translation from Arabic to French and French to Arabic to set up a meaningful dialogue not only between Moroccan literary producers but also with the Arab Mashreqi and European traditions. The novels question fixed traditions (literary and cultural), and provide an embedded critique of state power using their creative aesthetic narrative style.

## **Conclusion**

By way of conclusion, I will go back to Orsini's pioneering work in offering a more productive and less Eurocentric model of reading world literature beyond the dominant models of recognition and circulation. Orsini suggests an approach that links literature with space and considers 'multilingualism within society and literary culture as a structuring and generative principle [...] and holds both local and cosmopolitan perspectives in view' (2015: 2). Morocco's multilingual literature is complex in the way it is grounded in local and vernacular cultures, and influenced by cosmopolitan, transnational, Arabic, and European literary traditions and genres. French has become an integral part of the multilingual literary scene in Morocco and the Maghreb; therefore, one needs to move beyond the postcolonial 'language anxiety' paradigm and consider its productive role in reshaping the literary field in the region. Postcolonial literary studies' selection of literatures written in French and English in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East as the 'true' bearers of anti-colonial politics because of their 'transnational' reach and their language 'choice' is problematic. This selection marginalises a large body of postcolonial literature, written in native languages such as Arabic, Hindi, Tamil, Swahili, and many others, which has equally engaged with colonial legacies aesthetically and politically. It also reinforces the West's 'technologies of recognition' that operate along with the linguistic, economic and cultural hierarchies as I have argued in the case of Maghreb/Mashreq relations, still dependent on the West's recognition and 'mediation' in order to recognise one another's cultural and critical production.

Therefore, I argue that a monolingual reading and framing of Morocco's postcolonial multilingual literary field is problematic in the way it promotes a polarized understanding of language politics in Morocco and the way these various languages have been cohabiting and have co-constituted a rich literary field. It also reproduces the marginality of Moroccan literature in relation to other single language hegemonic literary systems such as Arabophone or Francophone and denies the specificity and the links of Moroccan novels in Arabic and French expression to their pre-modern narrative tradition and to their locality. Therefore, 'reading together' multilingual literary traditions moves beyond linguistic determinism and hence an exclusive understanding of 'national' literature. It is a comparative, entangled reading that highlights the particular ties of Morocco's postcolonial multilingual literature to

its pre-modern traditions, and to the Mashreqi, African and European influences; it also sheds light on their entangled 'local' aesthetics and politics, and their strong ties to a vernacular context. 'Reading together' Moroccan novels in Arabic and French expression will provide the tools to rewrite a non-fixed multilingual postcolonial Moroccan literary history that is not determined by linguistic paradigms, but rather inspired by shared narrative traditions, contexts, histories, intertwined textualities, aesthetics, and politics.

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