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It is our policy that contributions are not only original but also advanced in the respective disciplines. Contributions that receive positive assessment from our team of assessors are published in the Journal.

**Prof. Benjamin Omolayo**  
Editor

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## MAGHREBIAN LITERATURE AND THE POLITICS OF EX(IN)CLUSION

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### **Abstract**

*The identity of Maghrebian Literature has become an integral aspect of the politics of modern African Literature. Within this overall politics the literature from the Moghreb is often excluded from African literary canon due to its similar socio-cultural orientation with the Arab world. This paper explores the content and context of the Maghrebian Literature with a view to foregrounding its area of convergence in the specific contexts of ideology, themes and style with the other bodies of modern African Literature. It argues, in addition, that these factors that shape literary evolutions in the other parts of Africa also shape the Maghrebian Literature. These factors include colonialism, postcolonial situation and cultural experience. After an extensive survey on the shades of the argument on the status of Maghrebian Literature the paper concludes that critics from both sides of the division ought to begin to see this Literature as an integral part of modern African Literature instead of playing the political ostrich.*

**Keywords:** Maghrebian Literature, African Literature, Pan Africanism, Ideology, Theme, Style

### **Introduction**

A lot of issues have been raised on the status of the Maghrebian Literature in the African literary scene. Divergent views on whether it is or not an aspect of the (global) African Literature in its outlook never cease to come up in the debate on the politics of African Literature. One school of thought argues that Maghrebian Literature could not and should not be seen as part of African Literature because of the cultural orientation of the people in the Maghreb, which is similar to that of the Arab. This claim, however, fails to consider the fact that geo-political set up of the region situates it within the African boundary. One may say, however, that the lack of understanding about the cultural structure and the socio- political dynamics of the Maghreb is responsible for this politics of exclusion. For example, in my five years of teaching Fransophone African Literature in the University, the mention of Maghrebian Literature in class often elicits strange looks from the faces of my students.

Many of them confess their ignorance of that aspect of African Literature while others claim to have heard of the Maghreb but never thought it to be part of African. Among colleagues, the opinion is that since the Maghrebian world tends more towards the Arab in its features, its literature, which is a mirror of every society, consequently, could and should not be classified as African literature but rather as Arab literature. It is in this view that this paper seeks to explore the Maghrebian Literary world with a view to bringing to the fore its areas of convergence with the commonly known features of African Literature by

shedding light on its content and context, thereby deconstructing the politics that has hitherto excluded this corps of literature from the mainstream of African Literature. This would go a long way in developing students' interests and encouraging researchers to probe more into this unique and robust literature, which is rich in its content as much as in its form.

### **Socio-historical survey of the Maghreb**

The Maghreb (which in Arab 'al-maghrib' means "sunset") comprises popularly the three northern African countries of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Although there are other countries mentioned like Libya and Mauritania also considered as parts of the Maghreb, the three afore-mentioned are popularly referred to as the Maghrebian countries in Africa due to their common historical and socio-cultural background (Sadiqi 2008:447). The major similarities among the countries of the Maghreb reside in their history and geopolitical characteristics (Ennaji 2005). Before the advent of Islam in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Berber kingdom thrived in this region. Berbers are the first inhabitants of North Africa (Abun-Nasr 1975 qtd. in Sadiqi 2008:448). Their civilization is considered among the oldest in the world. According to Brett and Fentress (1996), the Berber civilization in the Maghreb is 5,000 years old. This civilization is still alive and vibrant in today's Maghreb in spite that the fact that the Berber language is not backed by a holy book (Qur'an) and has never been the language of a centralized government. The survival of the Berber language and civilization is mainly attributable to women (Sadiqi, 2003). This is based on the facts that the Maghrebian women are always involved in the oral transmission of culture of the land. They spend more time at home with the children and the older ones who are repository of the tradition.

The Berbers had been invaded by various occupiers who were attracted to the strategic position of the region: the Greeks, the Romans, the Vandals and the Arabs. Today, the most important markers of the Berber ethnicity are the Berber language and its culture, which constitute the major sub-stratum characteristic of the Maghreb (Sadiqi 448). Evidence of this abounds in the Contemporary Maghrebian Literature. Islam was adopted relatively easily by the Berbers and has survived because it offered a holistic view about life and death found familiar by the *Berberiens* to their custom and offered a vision of social order that Berber tribes find convenient. A common history and a shared geography resulted in a common socio-cultural, colonial and linguistic heritage in the Maghreb. Today, the three countries are Muslim, developing and multi-lingual (Ennaji, 1991). Being the westernmost part of the Middle East and North African region, the Maghreb, especially Morocco, is the link (geographically) between Europe and Africa. Morocco is only seven (7) miles to/from Europe (precisely Spain) and its southern region is a natural continuation of Sub-Saharan Africa. It is therefore, the 'border-country' between Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. This informs the reason many migrants find it more convenient to make Morocco their transit nation to and from Europe. The social organization in the in the Maghreb is based on patrilineal family and gender hierarchy. Patrilineal family is a structure where the father is the absolute head of the family whose authority over his wife/wives and children is culturally sanctioned (Sadiqi 2008:449). As a result, a gender

hierarchy whereby males have authority over females is established right from the family which is the bedrock of every human society.

Having been colonized by France, the three countries have had more or less the same experiences with the so-called civilization or ‘modernity’ using the word of Sadiqi (449) where two competing sets of paradigms co-exist (ibid); “traditionality” and “modernity”. These are not only reflected in scholarship and intellectual debates, but also in most aspects of Maghrebian life, such as language use, indoor decoration, clothing and cuisine. While the overall similarities of the Maghrebian countries make them distinct within the larger North African region, the Maghreb is far from being a homogenous region. Politically, whilst colonization destroyed the institutional infrastructure of Tunisia and Algeria, it was not able to destroy the monarchy in Morocco (Hammoudi, 1997). Up to this present time, Morocco still operates monarchical system of government in spite of the clamour by the world for pure and total democracy. Also, while colonization managed to almost destroy the tribal system in Tunisia and considerably weakened in Algeria, it was preserved in Morocco. In addition, while colonization lasted from 1830 to 1962 in Algeria and from 1881 to 1956 in Tunisia, it lasted only from 1912 to 1956 in Morocco. Consequently, the post-independence political systems have been significantly different in these countries. While Tunisia built its authority on the marginalization of the traditional system by promoting modern in their political views, Algeria and Morocco have a fusion of both the old and modern in their political systems, although in different ways, while monarchy was supported by all the social groups in Morocco, the central government in Algeria had to negotiate with only certain tribes.

These differences were reflected in the messages of the laws and the societies these embodied, as well as the policy-making strategies set up to implement them as far as health, education and other social needs were concerned. In the word of Charrad (2001 qtd. in Sadiqi 2008:450), “the strength of Berber tribes and Pan-Arabism political strategies made reforms unlikely in Morocco, rather uncertain and hesitant in Algeria, and possible in Tunisia”. According to Sadiqi (op.cit.), Pan-Arabism is both similar to and different from Pan-Africanism. For her, both movements offer a global socio-political worldview that seeks to unify Arabs and Africans respectively, but whereas Pan-Africanism seeks to unify Africans on the continent and Africans in Diaspora, Pan-Arabism seeks to unify the Arab people and nations of the Middle East (excluding non-Arab countries). Moreover, although both movements were originally meant to counter colonialism and neo-colonialism, Pan-Africanism is more of a product of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade while Pan-Arabism is more of a product of a combination of socialism and nationalism. Differences in policy-making and implementation in post-colonial Maghreb also depend on the overall demographic and economic context in each country. In terms of population size, Morocco and Algeria have relatively similar population sizes. According to recent censuses in the three countries, Morocco has an estimated total population of 33.2 million, Algeria 29.1 million, but Tunisia is much smaller having a population figure of 9.1 million (see Wikipedia, 2008). The distribution of these populations is not even as the larger percentage of the population is in the urban centres, with most able-bodied that is the strong working class; leaving the old and (majorly) women in the rural areas. Urbanization

continues till date in the three countries despite governments' efforts to discourage migration to the cities. Reason for this mass exodus is not far-fetched – government insensitivity and inability to develop the rural areas.

The issue of migration is more pronounced in Morocco than in the two other nations put together. This can be traced to both the socio-political situation and the geographical location of this country which serves as crossroad between Africa and Europe. The post-colonial Morocco is notorious for her unemployment rate and popular for her closeness to Spain, one of the European countries that is much better economically. Ivan Briscoe (2004) in his write-up on Morocco and migration paints a vivid but gloomy picture of how young men of working age would gather in cafes in Tangiers' poorest suburbs, spend the weekday mornings in their typical pursuits – drinking tea, puffing on hashish pipes, having one and only aim – “To migrate”. The same scenario is painted by Ben Jelloun in one of his migrant novels, *Partir* where he describes the youths gathering in the café while waiting for the appearance of the first lights from Spain as a result of their obsession to migrate (11-12).

The combination of geographical and emotional proximity makes the Morocco-Spain relationship a special one and attracts the attention of the governments on both ends of the divide. Little wonder that Morocco is the first foreign destination of any new Spanish Prime Minister. For them, the trip of Rabat is more of work than formality as the challenge of people flowing from the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa is more serious and is becoming a threat to both the security and socio-economic life of the host country. Although, it may appear unjustifiable, the insatiable hunger for migration is driven by a vast disparity in wealth – average income in Spain according to Briscoe (ibid), at around \$15,000, is thirteen times that of Morocco – and currently seems unstoppable. One effect has been to complete Spain's transition from ‘place of exodus to migratory magnet’ (Briscoe 2004). The country's foreign population, now 2.6 million (in a total of 40 million), has quintupled since 1996; it includes around 600,000 Moroccans (Briscoe 2004). Many of these Moroccans are illegal immigrants surviving in what Briscoe terms ‘the black economy’ amidst a society wary of their presence and religion. Hein de Haas (2005) puts the actual documented figure of these immigrants at 396,668 in 2005. This puts Spain in the second position (after France) in the scale of European countries with largest population of legal residents of Moroccan descent. Justifying the reason for this urge for exile, Abubakar Khamlachi (interviewed by Ivan Briscoe) argues that for poor Moroccans, “you're considered more illegal in your own country than in any other. You have no work, no healthcare, and no welfare. At least over there you have some protection – all you have to do is get work and you're saved”. This indeed amounts to political and economic frustrations that would only propel a longing for a place that is both attractive and ‘accommodating’.

In theory, Moroccan migration is both internal and external, i.e. from rural to urban areas and from Morocco to Europe respectively. The dynamics of this migration has always responded to “national and international socio-economic and political imperatives” (Sadiqi & Ennaji 2004:61). Research works have shown that migration in Morocco is a relatively new phenomenon and it is characterized by a steady historical evolution and a diversity of destinations (Chattou 1998). Currently, Moroccan migration is widely spread throughout

Europe. It is also one of the most sociologically varied as “it includes poor and illiterate migrants; middle and upper class, unemployed migrants and professional migrants” (Sadiqi & Ennaji 2004:63).

Of all the host countries of the migrants across Europe, France and Italy remain more ‘accommodating’. For example, France is more familiar to the immigrants more significantly because of the colonial affiliation (the countries of origins of these immigrants were colonized by France). Consequently, communication becomes easier for them since they have already been exposed to French language, which happens to be the official language of the country of origin; they are also familiar with the culture and civilization of France which had already been instituted in the colonies during colonization through the policy of assimilation. Nonetheless, they live in the suburbs, which are not an ideal place to live in. Italy is often considered as land of opportunity and tolerance for the migrants, whereas Spain comes last in the scale of preference for migrants because of the negative stereotypes against Moroccans; they are sarcastically referred to as ‘*los moros*’, they are often seen as threats by their hosts, and are relegated to the poorest housing and the lowest paying jobs. Having said all these, it is important to conclude this section by putting it on record that Moroccan migration according to Sadiqi & Ennaji (2004:60), like in any other country, has been predominantly male at least in its initial phases. This is also attested to by prominent Maghrebian writers in their texts.

### **The content and context of the Maghrebian literary discourse**

As noted earlier on, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia are popularly known as Maghrebian countries in Africa. In essence, Maghrebian Literature in three major literary languages (French, Arabic and Berber) comprises writings coming from the aforementioned North African countries. Each of these three languages associated with Maghrebian literary activities evolves from a particular political and historical dynamics, a literary and cultural history that have placed their own brand on each of the literary products (Sellin and Abdel-Jaouad 1998). However, Francophone Maghrebian Literature remains one of the colonial heritages in Africa. Maghrebian Literature of French expression dates back to the French invasion of Algeria in 1830. This period of French colonial occupation gave birth to this literature, which is also a consistent part of African literature, for according to Sellin and Abdel-Jaouad (ibid), Maghrebian writers are products of intense colonization.

It was the French colonial policy of assimilation that gave birth to the class of Maghrebian elites. With colonization, there was in the Maghrebian society (like in every other African society) an emergence of youths trained in the language of the colonial masters, and these youths started to write to react against the colonizers and their political system, using their colonizers’ language. It is obvious that Maghrebian Literature shares the same history as other Francophone African Literature, at least as far as the colonial situation is concerned. According to Sellin and Abdel-Jaouad (ibid), Francophone Maghrebian Literature has been in existence in an uneven manner from 1912 till after the Second World War, when there was a great rise of literary production in Algeria (162). This literary upsurge ended up defying the prediction of Albert Memmi who had earlier

said that Francophone Maghrebian Literature would die a natural death with Maghrebian independence and the promotion of Arabic language (Bonn 2006:555).

Maghrebian Literature of French expression has been evolving since the French colonial occupation of the Maghreb in the 1830s. Jean Amrouche (1906-1962) was seen as the pioneer of Francophone writings of the Maghreb with his collection of poetry titled *Cendres* (1934) and *Etoile secrète* (1937) (Sellin and Abdel-Jaouad 162). For *Dictionnaire Universel* (1995) however, the first literary works in French were produced in Morocco in the 1920s and 1930s. These were notably theatrical pieces of Kaddou Ben Ghabrit and other short stories. Despite the early commencement of writing in French in Morocco, Algeria remains the cradle of Maghrebian fiction. The reason is political because Algeria is in a vantage position over Tunisia and Morocco as a colony. Jean Dejeux, (qtd. in Ajah 2012:10) characterizes the early Maghrebian novels as ‘mediocres et decevants’ (mediocre and disappointing), saying that between 1920 and 1945, Algerian writers published a dozen of them; e.g. Caid Ben Chetif’s *Ahmed Ben Mustafa, le Goumier* (1920), Abdelkadir Hadji-Hamou’s *Zohra, la femme d’un mineur* (1925) and others. Siline does not hesitate to add that all the novels of the twenties and thirties are exotic and moralizing, because writers describe daily life, often resort to folklore and always address French readers. The reason for this is, however, not far-fetched; this was the period of colonial assimilation, of acculturation and of mimicry in the history of Algerian Literature in popular and Maghrebian Literature in general.

Morocco became a literary hub during the 1950s and 1960s. Well-known authors such as Williams S. Burroughs, Paul Bowles and Tennessee Williams flocked to Morocco for inspiration and to enjoy the literary freedom of the country. Many native Moroccans also blossomed during this time; these include Driss El Khori, Mohamed Choukri and Driss Chraïbi. With the Second World War however, an upsurge in literary production of French expression became a reality during this period when Arabic and Berber Maghrebians started writing in French. For these writers, using the French language was the only way of making their voices heard (Talahite 1997 in Olaniyan and Quayson 2007:43). The French presence in the Maghreb resulted in an ‘acculturation’ whereby the French language and culture were imposed at all levels of society excluding all other languages and cultures. According to Talahite, the writers from the North African French colonies namely Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia started to use fictional modes to describe their condition and their aspiration as colonized people (45). Such novels are works of Moroccans, Ahmed Sefroui and Driss Chaïbi (e.g. *Le passé simple*, 1954), of Algerian Kateb Yacine, Mouloud Feraoun (*Le fils du pauvre*, 1950) and Mohammed Dib (*La grande maison*, 1952), and of Tunisian Albert Memmi (*La statue de sel*, 1953). Vladimir Siline affirms that the post-Second World War fictions in Algeria marked the beginning of a new literature, which other critics consider as original while acknowledging their ethnographical features. They are popularly referred to as ethnographical novels. Siline states that Algerian writers made a narrative of their childhood and adolescence, talked of their problems and sentiments, and described the life of the people of which they were an integral part.

In Morocco, this period gave birth to a militarized literature. Popular writers are Abdellatif Laabi (poet) and Mohammed Khair-Eddine (poet and novelist), the latter

published *Agadir* in 1967, while in Algeria, Rachid Boudjedra published *La repudiation* in 1969. In the 1970s and 80s, another group of writers stormed the Maghrebian literary scene; these included Moroccans like Abdelkadir Khatibi (*La Memoire tatouee*, 1971), Tahar Ben Jelloun (*Harrouda, Les yeux baisse* 1973); Algerian like Rachid Mimouni and Tahar Djaout; the Tunisian Abdelwahab Meddeb (*Talismano*), 1979) whose major preoccupation was to condemn the socio-political ills of the post-independence Maghrebian society. In Black Africa, this period produced what Jacques Chevrier (1984:156) calls “roman du desenchantement” (novel of disenchantment) whose objective was to criticize cultural, political, economic and social situations of independent Africa.

Three generations of writers especially shaped 20<sup>th</sup> century Moroccan Literature. The first was the generation that lived and wrote during the Protectorate (1912-1956). Its most important representative was Mohammed Ben Brahim (1897-1955). The second generation was the one that played an important role in the transition to independence with writers like Abdelkarim Ghallab (1919-2006), Allal al-Fassi (1910-1974) and Mohammed al-Mokhtar Soussi (1900-1963). The third generation is that of writers of the sixties. Moroccan Literature then flourished with writers such as Mohamed Choukri, Driss Chaïbi, Mohamed Zafzaf, Driss El Khouri and Tahar Ben Jelloun.

Since its emergence after the World War II, Francophone Literature of the Maghreb has been largely a masculine activity, yet its themes revolve around women and maternity (Abdel-Jaouad 15). However, female writers eventually penetrated the literary space and remain relevant and committed till date. Among them are Assia Djebar, Aïcha Lemsine Leïla Sebbar and others who remain a strong voice in the male-dominated literary scene of the Maghreb. Assia Djebar is one of the few women who have received western education, and this was made possible by colonization. French education afforded her the opportunity to escape the same fate as some of her Maghrebian sisters who are helpless and voiceless. With colonial education therefore, she has the means of penetrating men’s and colonisers’ spaces; and with her writings, she is able to carve out a niche for herself in the public space (Sartiaux 103). She remains one of the strongest feminist voices in Maghrebian Literature today. Maghrebian world is highly political and gendered. Consequently, women writers through their writings, fight against patriarchal tradition in the Maghreb. They do not hesitate to penetrate the hitherto forbidden space. Space is a fundamental element in the Maghrebian model of feminine concept, because, according to Silvia Nagy-Zekmi (2002), “sexual segregation is imposed (more or less), and contacts between men and women tend to be sporadic and superficial” (6). That is, public space is assigned to men and domestic or private space to women and the iconic symbol of this segregation is the *hijab*, the Islamic veil that envelopes women and creates a small private place around them when they appear in the public.

After the independence of Morocco, there is expansion of crisscrossing thematic preoccupations, now centred on identity, migration, religion and womanhood as well as political and socio-economic disillusionment. Most of these themes are obsessive for the Maghrebian authors, despite where they live, in exile or at home. Generally, Literature in Arabic and Literature in French, the products of different traditions, have developed side by side in the Maghreb as writers have been concerned with finding a voice of their own.

In the case of Literature in French, this search has taken the form of localization of the French language to make it suit the reality of the Maghreb in particular and North Africa in general. Observably, Maghrebian Francophone fictions comprise a diverse corpus of writing both thematically and stylistically. Thematically, the content of the Maghrebian Literature is one that is diversified in its subject-matter. It focuses on such issues as the situation of women under patriarchy, gender relations, identity construction and discovery, as well as the life of the North African immigrant community in France and other parts of Europe. The language of Maghrebian literature is one that promotes and authenticates the Afro- Maghrebian cultural heritage.

### **Maghrebian and (Sub-Saharan) African Literatures: The Unbreakable Umbilical Cord.**

The contention of this paper is whatever uniqueness Maghrebian Literature may exhibit, the facts remains that it is still a part of African Literature. It is in this view that the paper chooses to discuss (at least partially) certain thematic and aesthetic convergences that exist between the duo. This is intended to be achieved by doing a thematic analytical panorama of workd from each region of the continent; references will be made to works of well-known writers from both the Francophone and Anglophone divides. In the main, it is an axiom that the Maghreb is situated within the geographical boundary of Africa. There is, therefore, a sense in the argument that Maghrebian Literuature has more thematic and aesthetic convergences with literatures emanating from other parts of the continent than the divergences, which those playing political ostrich have always foregrounded. It shares the same global themes as its ‘compatriots’ in the other parts of Africa. Particularly like many other (contemporary) Francophone/Anglophone writers across Africa, Maghrebian writers also base their subject-matter on issues such as colonialism, patriarchy, culture, identity, political disillusionment, religion, migration and racism.

Of a truth, Francophone writers across the continent, including North Africa where Maghrebian Literature is mainly domiciled, always prioritie their writings with what is usually termed ‘literature engagee, that is, literature of commitment that serves to disseminate socio-political realities and conscientize the citizens. For instance, African literature evolves with the African history. During the pre-colonial (and early colonial) era where African culture and cultural heritages were celebrated and eulogizes through oral tradition, writers were committed to what could be referred to as cultural nationalism. This period is what Kehinde (2010) calls ‘paradise on earth’ and the events are well articulated in the works (mainly poetries) of writers like L.S. Senghor, Birago Diop and David Diop from Senegal who along with other students from Africa and the West Indies launched, in France, a movement which was later known as ‘La Negritude’ in 1930s. The movement was characterized by the reversal of the European negative notion about Africa and Africans seen as evil, subhuman or, at least, inferior to all things European. This movement exerted a great deal of influence on the Black African Literature for a long time and can be said to have forerun what I would like to call here ‘African Postcolonialism’, a kind of ‘writing back to the empire’ borrowing the words of Bill Ashcroft et al. Although, a majority of these Negritude writers were from the Francophone Black Africa, it is clear

that the thematic elements of this movement are also prominent in the writings of Maghrebian authors of the same period. They are found in the works of Cheikh Ben Badis (1930), Malek Hammad (1961), Cachin using Henri Krea as Pseudonym, to mention just a few. These writers, like their counterparts in the Sub-Sahara, became voices for their communities and, according to Jean Dejeux (1992:76) “[they] were defining themselves in opposition to colonialism – the enemy that has provoked them to national solidarity and national identity. At the same time, their words reveal an awareness of the cultural and religious dimensions to the struggle”.

Immediately, after this period, is the colonial era known as the era of ‘paradise disturbed’ (Kehinde, 2010). This period witnessed a heavy presence of Europe on the continent of Africa. For instance, the French presence resulted in assimilation whereby the French language and culture were exclusively imposed at all levels of the African society. Writers started to use fictions to describe their condition as colonized people; and at the same time expose the weakness and wickedness of the colonizers. Works of Cameroonian Ferdinand Oyono reflect this. His novel, *Une vie de boy*, is an attack on French justification for colonialism, which according to them was ‘to civilize’ Africa, by satirizing the French political administrators and the catholic missionaries. Senegalese Sembene Ousmane’s works also articulate this socio-political situation. In his novels, *Le Docker Noir* (1956) and *O pays mon beau peuple* for example, he protested the oppressive and repressive nature of colonialism. This literature of protest is not limited to the Sub-Saharan Africa alone as the Maghreb also had its share of the colonial experience. Such novels that articulated this political and cultural revolution in the Maghreb are works of Moroccans, Ahmed Sefroui and Driss Chraïbi (e.g. *Le passé simple*, 1954), of Algerian Kateb Yacine, Mouloud Feraoun (*Le fils du pauvre*, 1950) and Mohammed Dib (*La grande maison*, 1952), and of Tunisian Albert Memmi (*La statue de sel*, 1953). Generally, the revolutionary process of the colonial era provided most of these writers an excellent opportunity to re-evaluate, in retrospect, the impact of French colonialism on their native society as well as its effects on their own psyche. According to Isaac Yetiv (1977:858)”

They discovered that the intense acculturation to which they had been subjected through the exclusive and totalitarian French educational system had transformed their ego to the point of non-recognition; they had become “cultural hybrids”, “bastards of history”. They could no longer identify with their native ethnic group and the luring glow of Western civilization proved to be treacherous and inhospitable. In their painful quest of identity, the sacred values of both societies, of the two worlds that inhabit their torn inner self, they became objects of adhorrence and odium. In their writings, whether prose brethren knocked down the statues and monuments of the French colonizers that adorned the central squares of their cities.

The third and present stage of the (Black) African as well as Maghrebian Literatures is the post-independence era whose literature is considered as what Jacques Chevrier (1984:156) calls ‘litterature disenchantement’ (literature of disenchantment) because of the disappointing attributes exhibited by the African political elites who succeeded the Europeans at independence. These elites are described by Bestman (1981) as “les oiseaux noirs qui occupent le nid laisse par les blancs” [the black birds that occupy the nest left by

the whites]. This body of literature, unlike the two previous eras, is auto-critique in its stance as it looks inwards to chronicle and satirise the African situations. According to Kehinde (2010) satire dominates the writings of this period. This is well reflected in the works of Sembene Ousmane, Jean Pliya, Sony Labou Tansi, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, etc., while in the Maghreb, we have writers like Abdellatif Laabi, Mohammed Khair-Eddine, Tahar Ben Jelloun from Morocco. In Algeria, we have Rachid boudjedra, Rachid Mimouni, Azzouz Begag and Tahar Djaout; and in Tunisia are Abdelwahab Meddeb, Amin Malouf, Amin Zaoui, etc. The entire continent of Africa experiences the same political disillusionment, and writings emanating from the different regions, including the Maghreb, articulate the scenario without any cultural or religious inhibition.

Thematically, the major preoccupations of the postcolonial African literature, including Maghrebian literature, are expressed in the writers' quest to regain the 'lost paradise', which the colonizers and their indigenous stooges have stolen. The catalogue of these thematic preoccupations includes gender emphasizing the status of women under patriarchy, corruption, economic disparities, migration, and so on. In all, there are thematic convergences in all the prominent literary texts produced across the continent including the Maghreb. Interestingly, racism as a theme in the Maghrebian literature and apartheid as a theme in the South African literature converge in their protest form. Protest against racism is a recurrent theme in Maghrebian literature as much as apartheid is a persistent issue in South African literature. Writers like Tahar Ben Jelloun, Azzouz Begag as well as other *Beurs* living and writing in France write extensively on the lives and experiences of the North African/ Maghrebian immigrants in Europe to corroborate the contention of their compatriots black writers who have also written extensively on this theme. Their works are a reflection of protest against every form of racism. And just like their compatriots in the Maghreb, South African authors express protest against apartheid and works of writers like Dennis Brutus, Athol Fugard, Nadine Gordimer, Arthur Nortje and so on dwell on this.

The African society, as we all know, is highly gendered. Writers across the continent, therefore, do not shy away from engaging gender issues in their literary discourse. Obviously, this thematic preoccupation converges in virtually all the postcolonial texts, from the Maghreb to the Sub-Sahara. This, therefore, portrays the cultural affinity and experience of Africans and confirms my argument in this paper that varieties of African Literature are interconnected in spite of noticed national and cultural divergences mirrored in different national and/or regional literatures. Tahar Ben Jelloun's works such as *La nuit sacrée*, *Les yeux baissés* and *L'enfant de sable* as well as Amin Zaoui's *Haras de femme* engage in discourse on the status of women in a highly patriarchal Maghrebian society, the same way their counterparts in other parts of Africa challenge monolithic patriarchal tradition that has hitherto left African women in the subaltern. References could also be made to works of Aminata Sow Fall, Calixthe Beyala, Sefi Atta Aidoo, Sembene Ousmane and so on.

Aesthetically, the way and manner language is used in the Maghrebian Literature points to the facts that they share in the linguistic politics of the African literary world. Writers from this region, like their compatriots elsewhere in the continent, manipulate the

European/colonized language to authenticate their African identity and domesticate their works.

### Conclusion

This paper has been to x-ray the content and context of the Maghrebian literature and has foregrounded its area of convergences with other regional literatures within the African territory. The paper examined the socio-political dynamics that shape the Maghrebian literature and showed that issues as colonialism, neo-colonialism, culture as well as migration, which are important factors in the evolution of other corpus of African literature, permeate the Maghrebian literary texts. It also showed that writers in the Maghreb deal with these issues that affect their existence with the same degree of intensity and passion as their compatriots in other parts of the continent. It is, therefore, convenient to conclude that since this corpus of literature exhibits such similarities in the specific contexts of ideology, themes and style to the other bodies of African Literature, critics from both sides of the divide ought to begin to see the Maghrebian Literature as an integral part of the African Literature instead of playing the political ostrich.

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