

THE EMERGENCE OF MAGHREB LITERATURE ABOUT ITSELF (1945-1962)

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Abstract: The definition of Francophone literature as a field of study continues to evolve and is not uniform everywhere. In the United States, it includes literature from sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, the Maghreb, Quebec, Switzerland, and Belgium. In Europe, the last two are, surprisingly, part of French literature. Quebec, for its part, distinguishes three bodies of work: French literature, Quebec literature, and Francophone literature. Finally, in France, French literature and Francophone literature are studied separately. In this article, we will mainly reflect on the emergence and development of Maghreb literature in French.

Keywords: Maghreb literature, francophone literature, literary movements, generations of writers, discourse, knowledge, authentic, community.

Introduction: Far from being regional or exotic additions to French literature, these literatures of Africa, the Caribbean and the Maghreb have become sites of renewal in many ways. This introduction demonstrates this, through a flexible approach that takes into account generations of writers, literary movements, major texts and important dates. Moreover, works and authors are presented within the main genres: the novel, poetry, drama and essay. The Maghrebians are aware and convinced that they belong to a common land, to a society shaped by history and based on common traditions; this «community» was formed and strengthened around a national demand directed against the presence of France in North Africa. Although the two Algerian poets, Jean Amrouche and Jean Sénac, are the forerunners of a Maghreb literature that reconnects with the most ancient traditions of Arab-Muslim and Berber culture, novelists will raise their voices loudly and clearly after the Second World War to convey the views and grievances of the colonized peoples. Thus was born the so-called literature of protest, dominated by a realistic aesthetic and an ideological discourse that denounced injustice and dispossession. And although the rejection of French political, economic and cultural dominance is unequivocal, the emancipation of literary forms will occur gradually, to the point that it will not only be a question of creating «authentic» works, but also of changing the expectations of publishers and the public.

Francophone Maghreb literature is a literature of French expression that emerged during the colonization of the three countries. It is the work of authors, mostly dialect speakers, who were forced to express themselves in writing in French, most often due to their lack of sufficient knowledge of what is known as classical Arabic (Michel Beniamino 1999). Although its issues and challenges were inspired by the colonial context in the first half of the 20th century, with a shift from exoticism to anti-colonial writing, it really took off with the era of independence. Shaped by the social and political tensions that engulfed the three countries, French-language Maghreb literature throughout the second half of the 20th century largely explored themes of authoritarian power, fractured identity, immigration, the weight of religion, and the conflict between modernity and tradition.

Among the innovative writers who have received critical and reader acclaim, we can especially mention Kateb Yacine, Mouloud Mammeri, Mouloud Feraoun, Albert Camus, Albert Memmi, Abdellatif Laabi, Taos Amrouche, Assia Djebar...

The emergence of this French-language literature was part of the linguistic policy of the colonial power. The Arabic language, already marginalized under Ottoman rule, was banned from public institutions, education, and everything related to public life. The writer Mahmoud Aslan thus explores the theme of unhappy consciousness, for example in 1940's *Les yeux noirs de Leila*, where the protagonist Naguib finds himself unable to choose between his origins and the West. The emergence of local literature, even if it is detached from the masses and linked to the colonial agenda, nevertheless contributes to the affirmation of individual writers in a context that tended to erase individuality and creative autonomy within colonized peoples.

The first novels of writers such as Ahmed Sefrioui, Mouloud Feraoun, Albert Memmi, Driss Chraïbi, Mouloud Mammeri, Mohammed Dib and Assia Djebar combine numerous autobiographical elements. However, it turns out that if precise description, based on a deep knowledge of the nature, society and customs of the Maghreb, occupies a large place, in these same texts of «*ethnographic realism*» are inscribed the values and imagination of the Maghreb communities and the writers themselves, which distinguishes this novelistic work of Maghreb writers from colonial literature and gives it originality and specificity (Déjeux Jean, 1981).

Maghreb writers mastered the French language to express who they were, where they were heading, recalling the lessons they had learned at the École Communale about the Revolution of 1789. By affirming their difference from others, the colonists, they affirmed their humanity. Their gaze became internal. There was talk of neglect: «*Cette littérature, bien qu'imparfaite va refléter pour la première fois dans les lettres françaises, une réalité algérienne qu'aucun écrivain, même Camus, n'avait eu le courage de traduire*» Mostefa Lacheraf.

The generation of the 1950s took up the language to express their anxiety and their difference. The speech became a counterpoint to the discourse of the other. It should not be forgotten that these novelists who questioned the colonial presence in North Africa were not only attacking the colonizer; they were also criticizing the archaic traditions, outdated customs, and «*internal sclerosis*» of the societies from which they emerged (Déjeux Jean, 1980). From a literary perspective, the works written by the new generation of politically engaged writers were described as “ethnographic” narratives. The rise of nationalist movements was accompanied by a partial or complete challenge to colonialism. An anti-colonial current in novels emerged at the end of World War II and in the 1950s in the Maghreb, as in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa.

It should also be noted that, as elsewhere in the French colonies, publishing was largely carried out in mainland France until independence, and that many writers continue to publish in France even today, for reasons that vary widely. However, French-language Maghreb literature has been strongly institutionalized (at least relatively) since then (Déjeux Jean, 1981).

Many works of the Algerian School were published locally, and from the 1920s onwards there were numerous literary circles and salons, associations and magazines: La Voix des humbles, La Voix indigène, L'Arche (founded by Amrouche in 1944), Forge (1946), Soleil (founded by Senac in 1950), Terrasses (founded by Senac in 1953), Souffles (1966-1973), etc. Even if most of these periodicals were short-lived, they testify to the dynamism of literary circles and the desire to free themselves from French surveillance. Independence saw the creation of national publishing houses, such as the National Publishing and Diffusion Company (SNED), founded in Algiers in 1966 and which became the National Book Company (ENAL) in 1983, and the Moroccan Publishing and Broadcasting Company (SMER) and Eddif in Morocco, as well as private publishing houses, now numerous but often short-lived, in the three Maghreb countries (Michel Tétu 1992). Whether in Berber, Arabic or French, poetry is a form of expression that conveys, orally or in writing, both the values of the past and the values of the present, which are about love and exile, loyalty to the land of one's ancestors and hope for the future.

Among French-speaking Algerian authors, it is both sad and frightening to see how many of them have died, been killed or live in exile.

Many writers, both men and women, incorporate poetry into their prose works because it is difficult for Maghrebians to stick to a single literary genre, especially because of the almost mythical place that the poet occupies in the Maghreb cultural space (Farid Laroussi et Christopher Miller, 2003). Others tackle this difficult genre head-on because it requires a great deal of mastery of the French language to adapt the subtleties and empirical approach of North African Arabic, which seems more linear, more explicit, than the challenging ambiguity or metaphoricity of dialectal or classical Arabic.

The 1960s seem to be marked by a relative decline in African literary production, as if independence had mobilized intellectual energy for the most urgent tasks. On the one hand, the great writers who had become ministers and diplomats (Oyono, Kane) were no longer publishing, and on the other hand, the conditions for the distribution of texts had changed. African publishing houses were created. An African literary public was formed. Texts found a more suitable, but also more limited, audience. New tendencies emerged. The ideology of negritude, which glorified Africa's past and fed the themes of the historical novel, for example, began to be questioned. And this doubt about the positive literary imagery of the African world had already found decisive expression in essays such as those of Frantz Fanon, Marcin Tova, and Stanislas Adotewi, who sometimes violently refuted the theses of the supporters of negritude, such as Senghor. The novel soon intervenes.

The evolution of this literature shows that the principles of literary creation, which are initially individual, give rise to a corpus too heterogeneous to be captured by the magical gaze of any ideology. If some writers reproduced with varying success the principles of each movement, many Caribbean writers have produced quality works, remaining indifferent to the petitions of principles erected as official poetics, and have enriched Caribbean literature with their choices. It is thanks to these individual choices that Caribbean literature is characterized by great vitality in the French-speaking corpus, while from a territorial point of view the islands are rather modest in size.

Conclusion: It should be noted that the classification by periods overlaps with the classification by themes. The two ways of understanding the works complement each other and echo each other. Thus, the autobiographical and testimonial writing, which makes abundant use of ethnographic narration, is conveyed by a realistic description of the Balzacian type, as in Muloud Ferraoun's *Le fils du pauvre* (1950). The critique of family and society, a theme that appears in several novels published at different times from 1945 to the present, at the same time reveals a persistent aesthetic search, where verbal violence symbolizes social violence, as in Boujedra's *La répudiation* (1969) or Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'enfant de sable* (1985). Finally, the search for identity is carried out through the double call of literature and history: we question history in order to build a collective identity. Thus, the theme of the country's independence represents the hope of reconnecting with the Arab-Muslim or Berber national culture for a modern society, where the two cultures will live in symbiosis. This theme of acculturation³⁰ and crossbreeding runs through the great moments of Maghreb literature, where writers constantly question the specificity of French-language literature in a region where there is another widely spoken language: Arabic. In fact, the theme of language reveals this theme of collective identity. For some, writing in French is a betrayal of their own culture. But some writers write in both Arabic and French. Maghreb literature shares this phenomenon with other French-language literatures, as we have seen in Africa and the Caribbean.

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