

INTRODUCTION

The Vitality of Tradition

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Post-colonial theory recognizes that European and American scholars have traditionally defined the themes that are of interest in literary criticism; in Moroccan studies, these themes have tended toward questions of migration, identity, secularism, and religious fanaticism – typically questions regarding Morocco in its relationships with colonizing nations. For these edited books, we intend to re-define the themes of interest in Moroccan studies, looking toward more local themes and movements and relationships of sub-cultures and languages within Morocco. Questions in this volume regard concepts of the self, conflicting discourses, intersections of self-identity and community, and Moroccan reclamation of identity in the post-colonial sphere.

In 1999, historians Miller and Bourquia predicted, in their book on Moroccan history, that we would soon witness a surge in Moroccan studies, writing, “Collaborative efforts between scholars from the Maghrib and beyond are destined to increase as transnational research becomes the scholarly norm and joint efforts become more common.”¹ Thus far, unfortunately, their prediction has failed to become reality, at least in the field of Moroccan literature. While poets and authors in Morocco have flourished in recent years, literary theorists have yet to stay abreast of the burgeoning body of literature being produced in this period of Moroccan literary achievements.

Recent decades have brought a period of stability and development to Morocco, and the reign of the current king has been an especially fertile time for literary accomplishments. This book examines the literature of Morocco produced during the reigns of Hassan II (1961–1999) and Mohammed VI (1999–present), and examines many of the socio-political forces at work during the two reigns. The works of literature produced during the reign of Hassan II were produced primarily in exile or, if written in Morocco, written under tight censorship controls. Since the beginning of the current king’s reign, authors have enjoyed relative freedom, although many still write in exile or from established homes in the West.

With the ascent of the current King of Morocco in 1999, a series of democratic reforms were set in motion, many of which affected the climate for literary production. The king developed a global reputation of tolerance, resulting in a growing field of Moroccan literature. Somewhat free of the fear of censorship, exile, and imprisonment, authors now write freely, and on a wider range of topics than they would have prior to 1999. This is not to say that writers enjoy complete freedom, as questioning the authority of the king or of Islam remain a punishable offense.

Tahar Ben Jelloun, in an interview, explains that the writers of his generation assumed that they would be the last to write in French. They expected, with the arabization movement begun in the 1980s, that authors would begin to publish exclusively in Arabic more and more. While this is increasingly true to some extent – many works are currently produced in Arabic – it is also true that French continues to be a viable language for Moroccan authors. Furthermore, as Daniela Merolla very fully describes, there is a flourishing body of work in Amazigh that is being produced throughout Morocco. Her comprehensive survey of this literature should be of great interest for scholars working in all areas of Moroccan literature. It is also true that translations of Moroccan works from Amazigh, Arabic, French, and English are proliferating in various world languages.

These volumes will include various essays that celebrate Moroccan literature produced in recent decades but, more than that, they aim for a critical investigation of the work produced and the themes introduced by these authors. The goal is to extend the discussion of Moroccan literature for scholars working primarily in English.

Identity in the Moroccan Context

Anti-colonial literature is not necessarily “combat literature”, as Fanon and Déjeux have both suggested in their own writings.² While it is often combative, there is also anti-colonial literature that emphasizes the human and the humane rather than the oppositional and contentious; it cannot be fair to label all anti-colonial literature as combative, even if one were to expand the definition of “combat” to include peaceful struggles against oppression or dehumanization. Oppositional forms of literature are certainly present in the Moroccan landscape of literature, but to consider Moroccan literature as always fighting from under a rubric of combat or tyranny is to label it away from many of its moderate and moderating themes and again to define it in terms of its relationship to colonizing nations.

Because of their relatively short history of colonization, their relatively peaceful transition to post-colonial sovereignty, and their friendly relations with other nations, many Moroccans consider themselves and their nation to be peaceful and tolerant. Literature of Morocco often presents itself as moderating – often critical of fanatics, intentionally dislocated persons, and political activists. Moroccan writing is often introspective, deeply spiritual, place-bound, and identity-based.

This volume provides in-depth discussions of several prominent Moroccan authors, including Abdelkebir Khatibi, whose work is described as a balance of sociology and artistry by Sam Cherribi and Matthew Pesce; and Mohammed Choukri, whose relation to the Beat Generation and its clash with traditional Moroccan values is the subject of Anouar El Younssi's chapter.

Moroccan homes have an international reputation for tolerance and peace, a reputation that is sometimes upheld in Moroccan literature and sometimes challenged. The literature produced in Morocco is sometimes a moderating force and sometimes a reflection of a population in transition or conflict. For example, as Mohamed Elkouche argues in this volume in "Cultural Encounter in Moroccan Postcolonial Literature of English Expression," some Moroccan literature emphasizes peaceful encounters of one "other" with another. The theme of colonial encounter, the direct contact or meeting between peoples of different cultures and civilizations, and especially between the West and its cultural Others, is an important and recurrent subject addressed in numerous Moroccan texts written in English. Sometimes, the encounters involve conflict or tension between the two different cultures, as in the case of Abdellatif Akbib's *Tangier's Eyes on America* and Mohamed Mrabet's stories, "A Woman from New York" and "What Happened in Granada?". Sometimes, these encounters tend to be familial, as in the case of Anouar Majid's *Si Youssef* and Driss Tamsamani's *Rewind*. Elkouche sheds light on how different Moroccan authors generally reflect such cross-cultural relations and how they conceive of the question of Otherness.

Ilham Boutob focuses on Moroccan migration literature of the early twenty-first century CE, examining the issues that drive Moroccans to seek migration and the unforeseen factors that cause problems for migrants. More importantly, Boutob examines the often unexamined motivators that undergird migrant dreams and also, perhaps, nightmares. Recently, the king of Morocco spoke about Morocco as a nation that loses people to migration, that gains people from migration, and that hosts people in transit, and migration continues to be a common theme in Moroccan literature.

Morocco has a long history of multi-culturalism and multi-lingualism, reflected in its social history and in its literary history, as well. Authors in Morocco write in

various languages, and translations of Moroccan literature into European languages and into Arabic are common. The work of translators is particularly important in Morocco, both in typical social interactions and in literature. The translator is essential in Moroccan daily life and in Moroccan arts. Yet the faithfulness of, and personal motives behind, various translations of Moroccan works has been called into question. Reactions from Moroccan writers to visiting writers such as Paul Bowles can provide illustration. Maghnougi explains how Moroccans responded to the interpretation of Morocco by Paul Bowles, suggesting that many believed Bowles brought his own depravity to light rather than uncovering depravity in Moroccan contexts, as he claimed to have done.

Several of our authors suggest that the relationship between the West and the rest of the world has been imagined as a relationship of Self (the West) to Other (the rest of the world), ordered and bordered geographically by the whims of Europeans and creating a Center-Periphery paradigm. These invented boundaries of humanity serve to separate geographical sites, but more, they serve to enclose the Empire and exoticize other cultures. Boundaries are often spatial, but more often they are related to relationships and colonialization. Changes within the Periphery, especially those that are due in part to European influence, create adjustments in borders, whether real or imagined, and those in the periphery often find themselves in a defensive posture, fighting misconceptions and accusations from the center. Of course, one of the most overwhelming aspects of colonialism has been the imposition of European languages.

Moroccan and Foreign Contexts

Throughout the volume, we will see an emphasis on place that demonstrates deeply passionate emotions connected to specific locations within the Moroccan landscape – some of these deep passions are more positive than others, but no matter – what matters is the verve with which many Moroccans feel a deep resonance and affinity with home.

Ian Campbell's article discusses the mapping of Fez in its intrinsically Moroccan and its colonized iterations. Innovations in mapping, Campbell writes, have led us to a new understanding of how geography contributes to social and linguistic turns; the Western gaze even comes to change the way that the city is mapped and understood. Campbell introduces us to two novels, Sefrioui's *Box of Wonders* and A. Ben Jalloun's *In my Childhood*: in each novel we learn how the main character interacts

with and is influenced by the labyrinthine city of Fez. Author Ben Jalloun is seen through various stages in his personal geography, first that his childhood in Britain caused him to have a certain expectation of geography that caused difficulties for him in Fez, and then how cultural understanding is attained apart from one's formal education and often in relationship to personal geography. In other words, personal geography can be a powerful teacher, in some ways more than one's formal education. As our maps become more and more legible given advancing technologies, urban spatial organization becomes more abstract given the domination of capitalism and the need for abstractions to obscure reality. Campbell's work with the idea of the labyrinth works as both powerful image and relevant metaphor for understanding aspects of Moroccan reality and its reflection in literature.

Earlier mappings of territory are delineated in Ziad Bentahar's chapter on early relationships between Amazigh populations and the Islamic community as seen through Chraïbi's *La Mère du printemps*. Chraïbi's novel explains how early Muslims changed the landscape of Morocco and how they were changed in turn by the Amazigh residents of the land.

Naima Hachad discusses not the colonization of land but the colonization of the female body. Often shrouded in taboos and assigned to maternity or monstrosity, the female body is a site of challenge to many female authors who question and deconstruct its marginalization. They question the sanctity of the maternal body that silences women and subordinates them to their male relatives, including their own male children. They also deconstruct the association of the female body with monstrosity or deviation, resulting in an ambiguous figure that is both weak and hostile. Feminine Francophone literature has transformed the marginalized female body into discursive tools that transpose the dynamics of Moroccan politics and gender relationships.

Notes

- 1 Susan Gilson Miller and Rahma Bourquia, *In the Shadow of the Sultan: Culture, Power, and Politics in Morocco* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999), 44.
- 2 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990); Jarrod Hayes, *Queer nations: Marginal sexualities in the Maghreb* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2000), 136.