

Maghrebian Literature and the Politics of Exclusion and Inclusion

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Abstract

Divergent views on the status of the Maghrebian literature never cease to come up in the debate on the politics of African literature. The politics of its exclusion is often premised on the belief that the Maghreb shares more similar socio-cultural orientation with the Arab than with the African world. Thus, this paper explores the content and context of Maghrebian literature to foreground its areas of convergence in the context of ideology, themes and style with other bodies of African literature. It also observes that those factors that shape literary evolutions in Africa South of the Sahara also shape Maghrebian literature, namely colonialism, post-colonialism and cultural experience. The paper, therefore, concludes that critics from both sides of the divide ought to begin to see Maghrebian literature as an integral part of African literature instead of playing the political ostrich.

Keywords/phrases: Maghrebian literature, politics of exclusion, Pan Africanism, ideology,

Introduction

A lot of issues have been raised on the status of Maghrebian literature (i.e., literature in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania, etc.) in the African literary scene. Divergent views on whether it is or not an aspect of African literature in its outlook 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, the region of western North Africa or Northwest Africa, west of Egypt home to the pan-ethnic Arabic-speaking in North Africa, parts Eritrea, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somalia. However, this claim fails to consider the fact that the geo-political set up of the region situates it in Africa.

One may say, however, that the lack of understanding about the cultural structure and the socio-political dynamics of the Maghreb itself are responsible for this politics of exclusion. For example, in my years of teaching Francophone African literature, 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 of it as a part of Africa. 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, should not be classified as African literature, but rather as Arab literature. It is in this context that this paper seeks to explore the Maghrebian literary world to bring forth 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 corpus of literature from the mainstream of African literature. This, the author believes would help in developing students' interests and encouraging researchers to probe more into this unique and robust literature, which is indeed rich in its content and form.

Socio-Historical Survey of the Maghreb

The Maghreb (which in Arab 'al-maghrib' means "sunset") comprises the three northern African countries of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. And although there are other countries like Libya, Egypt and Mauritania that are considered part of the Maghreb, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia are popularly referred to as the Maghrebian countries in Africa due to their common historical and socio-cultural background (Sadiqi 2008: 447). Hence, the major similarities among the countries of the Maghreb reside in their history and geo-political characteristics (Ennaji 2005). Before the advent of Islam in the 8th century, the Berber kingdom thrived in this region. In fact, the Berbers were the first inhabitants of North Africa (Abun-Nasr 1975 qtd. in Sadiqi 2008:448), and 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 of 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. Hence, the survival of Berber language and civilization is mainly attributable to women (Sadiqi 2003); this is based on the fact that Maghrebian women are usually always involved in the oral transmission of the culture wherein they spend more time at home with children and the elders, who are repository of tradition. This can also be said of the situation in Africa south of the Sahara.

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 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 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*, which offered a vision of social order that the Berber find convenient. A common history and a shared geography also resulted in a common socio-cultural, colonial and linguistic heritage in the Maghreb. Today, the region is Muslim with a developing and multi-lingual landscape (Ennaji 1991). Being the westernmost part of the Middle East and North Africa, the Maghreb (especially Morocco) is a link between Europe and Africa with Morocco only seven miles to/from Europe (Spain precisely) and its southern region is a natural continuation of Africa south of the Sahara. It is, therefore, the ‘border-country’ between Africa south of the Sahara and Europe. This informs the reason many migrants find it more convenient to make Morocco their transit nation to and from Europe. Hence, the social organization in the Maghreb is based on patrilineal family and gender hierarchy where the father is the absolute head of the family whose authority over his wife/wives and children is culturally sanctioned (Sadiqi 2008:449). And as a result, there is a gender hierarchy wherein males’ 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 (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia) 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; “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 part of North African region, the Maghreb is far from being a homogeneous region.

Politically, colonization destroyed the institutional infrastructure of Tunisia and Algeria, but, 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 destroy the ethnic system in Tunisia and considerably weakened it 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 ethnic system by promoting modern system and views, Algeria and Morocco have a fusion of both the ethnic and modern in their political systems, although in different ways; while monarchy was supported by all in Morocco, the central government in Algeria had to negotiate with only certain ethnic formations.

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 (2008), 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 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 Morocco has an estimated total population of 33.2 million, Algeria 29.1 million, but Tunisia is much smaller with a population figure of 9.1 million (see Wikipedia, 2008). The distribution of these populations is not even as the larger percentage of the strong, able-bodied, working class population is in the urban centers, 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 just like in every other part of Africa.

The issue of migration is more pronounced in Morocco than in Algeria or Tunisia which can be traced to both the socio-political situation and the geographical location of the country which serves as crossroad between Africa and Europe. The post-colonial Morocco is notorious for her unemployment rate and popular for its 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 cafés in Tangiers’ poorest suburbs by spending the weekday mornings in their typical pursuits – drinking tea, puffing on hashish pipes, with the aim “To migrate”. The same scenario is painted by Ben Jelloun in one of his migrant novels, *Partir* where he describes youth 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 to Rabat is more of work than formality as the challenge of people flowing from the Maghreb and Africa south of the Sahara 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 (2004), 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, Abubakr 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 one of the official languages of the country of origin; they are also familiar with the culture and civilisation 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 a 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) 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

Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia are known as Maghrebian countries in Africa. In essence, Maghrebian literature in three major literary languages being French, Arabic and Berber comprises writings coming from these nations. 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, a period of French colonial occupation that gave birth to this literature, which is also a constituent part of African literature, and according to Sellin and Abdel-Jaouad (1998), Maghrebian writers are products of intense colonization.

It was the French colonial policy of assimilation that gave birth to a class of Maghrebian elites, and with colonization, in Maghrebian society there was an emergence of youth trained in the language of the colonial masters, and these youth started to write to react against the colonizers and their political system, interestingly, using their colonizers' language. In this context, 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 (1998), 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. 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 the 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 décevants' (mediocre and disappointing), saying that between 1920 and 1945, Algerian writers published a dozen of them; e.g. Caïd Ben Chétif'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 were exotic and moralising, because writers described daily life, often resorted to folklore and always addressed 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 particular and Maghrebian literature in general.

Morocco became a literary hub during the 1950s and 1960s. Well-known authors such as William 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 included 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 (1999) 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 (1999) states that Algerian "writers tried to make 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" (1).

In Morocco, this period gave birth to a militarized literature. Popular writers were 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 Mémoire tatouée*, 1971), Tahar Ben Jelloun (*Harrouda, Les yeux baissés* 1973); Algerians 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 Africa south of the Sahara, this period produced what Jacques Chevrier (1984:156) calls “roman du désenchantement” (novel of disenchantment) whose objective was to criticise cultural, political, economic and social situations of independent Africa.

Three generations of writers shaped 20th century Moroccan literature. The first was the generation that lived and wrote during the Protectorate (1912–1956), with its most important representative being Mohammed Ben Brahim (1897–1955). The second generation 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), and the third generation was that of writers of the sixties when Moroccan literature flourished with writers such as Mohamed Choukri, Driss Chraïbi, 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 round women and maternity (Abdel-Jaouad 15). However, female writers eventually penetrated the literary space and remained relevant and committed until today. 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 received a 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 were helpless and voiceless. With colonial education, she had the means of penetrating men’s and colonisers’ spaces; and with her writings, she was able to carve out a niche for herself in the public space (Sartiaux 103), and she remains one of the strongest feminist voices in Maghrebian literature today.

The Maghrebian world is highly political and gendered. Consequently, women writers, through their writings, fought against patriarchal traditions in the Maghreb, and they did not hesitate to penetrate the hitherto forbidden space since 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 public.

After the independence of Morocco, there was expansion of crisscrossing thematic preoccupations centred on identity, migration, religion, and womanhood as well as political and socio-economic disillusionment. Most of these themes were obsessive for the Maghrebian authors, despite where they lived, 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 a 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 promoted and authenticated the Afro-Maghrebian cultural heritage.

Maghrebian Literature and Africa South of the Saharan Literature: The Unbreakable Umbilical Cord

Whatever uniqueness Maghrebian literature may exhibit, it is still a part of African literature. It is in this view that I discuss certain thematic and aesthetic convergences that exist between them. This is achieved by doing a thematic analytical panorama of some selected works from each region of the continent that involve the works of well-known writers from the Francophone and the Anglophone divides. In the main, it is an axiom that the Maghreb is situated within the geographical boundary of Africa, and thus, there is a sense in the argument that Maghrebian literature has more thematic and aesthetic convergences with literatures emanating from other parts of the continent than the divergences. Hence, it shares the same global themes as its ‘compatriots’ in the other parts of Africa; and like other (contemporary) Francophone/Anglophone writers across Africa, Maghrebian writers also base their subject-matter on issues such as patriarchy, culture, identity, political disillusionment, religion, migration and racism.

Francophone writers across the continent (including North Africa where Maghrebian literature is mainly domiciled) always prioritise their writings with what is usually termed ‘littérature engagée’, that is, literature of commitment that serves to disseminate socio-political realities and raise the consciousness of the people. For instance, African literature evolves with the history of Africa. For example, during the pre-colonial era (and early colonial era), African culture and cultural heritages were celebrated and eulogized through the oral tradition, and 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 were articulated in the works of writers like Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906-2001), Birago Diop (1906-1989) and David Diop (1927-1960) from Senegal who along with other students from Africa and the West Indies launched, in France, a movement which was later known as ‘La Négritude’ in the 1930s. The movement was characterized by the reversal of the European negative notion about Africa and African people as being evil, subhuman or inferior to all things European. This movement exerted a great deal of influence on Black African literature for a long time and can be said to have forerun what I would like to call here ‘African Postcolonialism’. Although, a majority of these Negritude writers were from the Francophone Africa to the south of the Sahara, 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 Kréa as pseudonym, to mention just a few.

These writers, like their counterparts in the south of the Sahara, became voices for their communities and, according to, Jean Déjeux (1992) “[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 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 colonizer. Works of Cameroonian Ferdinand Léopold Oyono (1929-2010) reflect this. He used his novel, *Une vie de boy*, to attack French justification for colonialism, i.e. ‘to civilize’ Africa, by satirizing the French political administrators and the catholic missionaries. Senegalese film director, producer and writer Ousmane Sembène (1923-2007) also articulated this socio-political situation. In his novels, *Le Docker Noir* (1956) for example, he protested the oppressive and repressive nature of colonialism. This literature of protest is not limited to Africa south of the Sahara 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 society as well as its effects on their own psyche. According to Issac 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 abhorrence and odium. In their writings, whether prose or poetry, they toppled them one by one the same way their political 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 African as well as Maghrebian literatures is the post-independence era wherein literature is considered as what Jacques Chevrier (1984:156) calls 'littérature désenchantement' (literature of disenchantment) because of the disappointing attributes exhibited by African political elites who succeeded the Europeans at independence. These elites are described by Bestman (1981) as "les oiseaux noirs qui occupent le nid laissé par les blancs" [the black birds that occupy the nest left by the whites]. This literature is an auto-critique in its stance as it looks inward to chronicle and satirise the African situation. According to Kehinde (2010), satire dominates the writings of this period. This is well reflected in the works of Sembène 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.

In the words of Kehinde (2010), one of the enduring ideological signifiers of African literature is socio-political commitment. It always reflects the happenings in the society that produces and consumes it. This ideological indicator is also often reflected in its twin sister, to wit, the Maghrebian literature where writers, like their counterparts in the sub-Sahara Africa, use their writings to reflect and refract social and political events and happenings. Therefore, postcolonial Maghrebian literature, like its counterparts, becomes the critique of social ills, such as corruption, women under patriarchy, migration, economic inequalities and the like.

Thematically, the major preoccupations of the postcolonial African literature were 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, Azzous 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. 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. For example, Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Partir* and Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* converge thematically in their condemnation of both racism and apartheid respectively. The novels feature traumatized individuals who strive to live within a society which often dehumanises them.

The protagonists in the two novels suffer rejection as a result of their colour. Discourses on migration also feature recurrently in contemporary Maghrebian literature and Africa south of the Saharan literature, thus writers from the both sides are preoccupied with the causes and consequences of migration in their works. Aminata Sow Fall in *Douceurs du bercail* (1998) and Ben Jelloun in *Au pays* (2009) criticize the manner in which people from Africa are treated in the host countries in order to encourage them to return home.

Postcolonial dilemma is another major thematic thrust that recurs in the Maghrebian and other African literatures. The dream of every African is to see a better and more humane society devoid of crime and violence at independence. This shattered dream becomes a motif of discourse in almost all the postcolonial texts across the continent. Issues of bad leadership and corruption that depict the experiences of all the politically independent African nations feature prominently in the writings of Tahar Ben Jelloun, Azzous Begag from the Maghreb as well as Sembene Ousmane and Aminata Sow Fall from the sub-Sahara to mention just a few. In Ben Jelloun's *Les yeux baissés* (1991), the protagonist, Fathma is disillusioned as her hope of a better society where she could call home is shattered due to government insensitivity and hypocrisy. This is also similar to the fate of Biram and his family in Sow Fall's *La festin de la détresse* (2005).

African traditional 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 south of the Sahara. This, therefore, portrays the cultural affinity and experience of African people 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, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo, Zaynab Alkali, 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 (particularly French) to authenticate their Africaness, domesticate their works, and they try to create a literary language that suit the reality of their immediate societies.

Conclusion

This paper has been able to x-ray the content and context of the Maghrebian literature and has foregrounded its area of convergences with other regional literatures within Africa. There is no gainsaying that the Maghrebian writers and writers from Africa south of the Sahara act as the conscience of their individual societies. They are mouthpieces for the experiences of their generations. It is, therefore, convenient to conclude that since this unique corpus of literature exhibits such similarities in the specific contexts of ideology, themes and style with 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 African literature instead of playing the political ostrich.

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