

Francophone Studies and the Linguistic Diversity of the Maghreb

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Among the criticisms often leveled at postcolonial theory has been the complaint that, despite its manifest concern with the conditions of cultural production, as a body of thought it has often supported generalizations about the history of European colonialism and the geopolitical and cultural forms that have emerged since its dissolution.¹ There are several dimensions to this critique, perhaps the least well-developed of which is the observation that while postcolonial theory purports to comment on contemporary global reality, it has generally emphasized the experience of the former British colonies. Postcolonial theory crystallized in the English departments of British and American universities around the critical interpretation of a core group of English-language texts. This process was stimulated by the work of a few key theorists, many of whom—Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Abdul JanMohamed, Sara Suleri, for example—write in English and share a personal experience of the cultural and linguistic legacy of the British Empire. It would be unfair to suggest that postcolonial theory privileges the English language; rather—perhaps more insidiously—it has progressively adopted English as a *lingua franca*. Though well attuned to the modalities of language, its exponents have been surprisingly indifferent to the political and cultural order of languages. One of the consequences (and also one of the causes) of this critical monolingualism has been that a relatively small number of English-language writers from Third World nations have attained the status of representative figures. As Aijaz Ahmad observed over a decade ago in his response to Fredric Jameson's much debated essay "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital," literature in Asian or African languages is only erratically translated into European languages, and "the upshot is that major literary traditions...remain...virtually unknown to the American literary theorist. Consequently, the few writers who happen to write in English are valorized beyond measure."² Alongside Gayatri Spivak's now famous question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" it has therefore become necessary to raise a complementary question about how the global distribution of power affects the power of representation: "In what language(s)?"³

An answer to the linguistic universalism of postcolo-

onialism is offered by the loosely parallel concept of *francophonie*, a term that designates the use of French in the former colonies of Africa, Asia, and the Americas, and which is perhaps most commonly used to refer to the literary use of French in these regions, and the critical study of this literature. Where postcolonial theory has been largely indifferent to linguistic diversity, *francophonie* is grounded in the historical and cultural specificity of the French language. This difference of approach can be situated within the wider political and economic context of French efforts since World War I to establish a bastion of resistance to American-centered globalization. As in the political arena, a progressive merging of horizons would no doubt be salutary: Francophone studies could benefit from further exposure to the global outlook and intense theoretical questioning that has characterized postcolonialism, while postcolonial studies would certainly be enhanced by the attentiveness to linguistic specificity that has characterized *francophonie*.

Historically, the term *francophonie* has denoted several distinct albeit related practices and ideas. In the wake of decolonization, France sought to maintain a sphere of influence through the preservation of political and economic relations with its former colonies. Emphasizing a commonality of language and implicitly of culture, *francophonie* served as an ideological framework for the preservation of these ties. It was given institutional reality through the creation of several government bodies; notably, the *Agence de coopération culturelle et technique* (1970), which dispatches French educators and technical personnel to the former colonies, and encourages cultural exchanges between France and these countries and the *Organisation internationale de la francophonie*, which since 1986 has organized biennial summits that bring together representatives from fifty-six member-nations. One of the principal objectives of these multinational meetings is of course to promote the status of French as a world language.⁴

Built around the premise that nations in different parts of the world share beliefs and values for which the French language is the medium, *francophonie* was essentially an outgrowth of the French tradition of universalism. In recent years, however, *francophonie* has come also to denote a different kind of relationship between

France and its former colonies. The official institutions of *francophonie*, responding to political forces within metropolitan France and also to pressures exerted by the member nations of the *OIF*, have increasingly embraced a rhetoric of multiculturalism, emphasizing less the universality of culture than the diversity of the Francophone world. This ideological shift corresponds to the ways in which, over the last two decades, the idea of *francophonie* has evolved in academic discourse. Responding to the work of writers from the Caribbean and Africa, literary scholars, particularly in North America, have emphasized, not the decisive imprint of French on world culture, but rather how France and French have been decentralized and decentered by colonial expansion. The Algerian writer Kateb Yacine once wrote that “l'écrivain algérien de langue française a encore un rôle à jouer, ne serait-ce pour lutter contre la francophonie” [The Francophone Algerian writer still has a role to play, even if it is only to fight against *francophonie*]. The polemical relationship to French to which Yacine gives voice has been central to the development of Francophone studies over the last two decades. In the contemporary academy, as in the literary marketplace, the concept of *francophonie* serves as a framework for the exploration of cultural diversity. Notably it makes possible a comparative reading of French, African, Asian, Canadian and Caribbean texts that would have been unimaginable just a few decades ago. The problem hidden in plain sight at the heart of this project is, of course, that the organization of a literary corpus around a single language does not provide a natural framework for the study of diversity.

In this essay I want to revisit the relationship between *francophonie* and linguistic diversity in the specific context of the Maghreb. I will focus, not on the use of French by individual writers, or on national linguistic policies (both widely debated in the past, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s when the survival of French in this region seemed less certain), but on the place accorded to plurilingualism within Francophone studies as an expanding critical field. It seems to have become somewhat unfashionable to raise, in critical studies of Maghrebian literature, the issue of the language of expression. This reticence is understandable to the extent that this question has been amply debated in the past, at least insofar as state-controlled policies or the choices of individual writers are concerned. However, I believe that it is productive at this juncture to reconsider, in a more self-reflexive way, the past and future role of literary criticism as a mediating discourse in this context.

The scholarly classification of an international corpus of texts on the basis of their common use of French is not necessarily tinged with Eurocentrism. French is widely used in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, and it is certainly legitimate to study the literature associated with

this practice, as well as to consider texts of different regions together on the basis of their common language and shared colonial history. However, this critical approach becomes Eurocentric if in the process these works' affinities with other regions, cultural traditions, and, perhaps most fundamentally, other languages, are obscured. Francophone literature and the critical works devoted to it have recognized and responded to this problem by imagining and describing decentralized exchanges, hybrid subjects, and bicultural literary forms. However, as *francophonie* has expanded as a critical field it has devoted increasingly less attention to the “cohabitation” of French with other languages and the cultural heritages that they transmit. It is perhaps significant in this regard that many of the major theoretical paradigms developed within Francophone studies—the concepts of *creolité* and relationality, for example—have emanated from the French Caribbean, where French is used alongside variants of Creole but not alongside a pre-colonial language. In a plurilingual environment such as the Maghreb, however, the relationship between *francophonie* and the practice of other oral and written languages raises questions of a different scale.

Attempts to describe the linguistic diversity of the Maghreb generally fall short of the mark. In the pre-colonial period, classical Arabic, employed in religious discourse, literary writing, and political administration, coexisted with Maghrebian Arabic dialects—largely though not exclusively oral—and Berber, which falls into several groups, the principal branch being *Tamazight*. With the colonial occupation of Algeria (from 1830), Tunisia (1881), and Morocco (1912), Arabic was systematically displaced by French, which became the sole language of government, administration and (secular) education, and thus the language of the literate elites. The process of linguistic deculturation was most pronounced in Algeria, where from 1938 to 1961 Arabic was classified by law as a foreign language. With independence (for Morocco and Tunisia in 1956, for Algeria in 1962) standard Arabic, a modernized version of classical Arabic, was quickly and often heavy-handedly imposed as the national language, particularly in the spheres of public administration and primary education.

As the sociologist Gilbert Grandguillaume observes, the policy of arabicization was devised to remedy the almost total absence of public discourse in Arabic in the wake of colonial rule.⁵ As such, it required radical measures such as the recruitment of school teachers from Egypt and other Middle Eastern nations to counteract the shortage of indigenous speakers of classical Arabic, a policy that at least in the short term had a negative impact on educational standards because the differences between Egyptian and Maghrebian dialects rendered communication between students and teachers difficult. At its most pernicious, arabicization led to the mar-

ginalization and even to the suppression of regional languages: the chair in Amazigh studies at the University of Algiers was abolished in 1962, shortly after independence; at the same university, the courses of Mouloud Mammeri, Algeria's most celebrated Berber scholar and writer, were cancelled in 1973; and in 1976 the *Fichier périodique*, a journal that published research on Berber languages in Kabyle with French translation, was branded "regionalist" and "subversive" and banned.⁶ Almost from the outset, Berber speakers in Algeria and Morocco reacted against the linguistic and cultural homogeneity demanded by the post-independence authorities.⁷ Between 1957 and 1960 in Morocco, Berbers (who constitute about 45% of the population) rioted against the conservative, pan-arabist Istiqlal ruling party. Algeria has witnessed a similar series of protests demanding cultural recognition, notably the *Printemps Berbère* [Berber spring] of 1980, and the *Grève du cartable* [schoolbag strike] of 1994. In recent years the Algerian government has taken small steps toward the acknowledgement of Berber, for example by creating the *Haut Commissariat de l'Amazighité* (HCA).⁸

Arabicization did not bring an end to the use of French in either government or education. In both sectors French was too deeply implanted, and the logistical difficulties of reintroducing Arabic too great, for a wide-scale transition to be quickly achieved. In fact, as educational opportunities and access to the media increased, more Maghrebians than ever before were exposed to French. Today, multilingual Maghrebians frequently use different languages in different social contexts. A multilingual Moroccan might speak *Tamazight* at home with his or her family, read books and newspapers in French, and use Arabic at the mosque and in interactions with strangers. These practices are intertwined with deep-rooted cultural and personal attitudes. For example, French remains widely associated with modernization, science, and technology (though in this last domain it is gradually being displaced by English), with the discussion of topics considered taboo in Moslem societies (notably sexuality), and to some extent with individual freedom and human rights. Arabic expresses Muslim and Arab identity, and *Tamazight* is linked to ideas of regional autonomy, autochthonous culture, and, because it has been suppressed by the state, resistance to the authoritarian post-independence regimes. These cultural and affective charges have been described by a number of prominent Maghrebian writers. The Algerian author, Assia Djebar, for example, writes in her 1985 novel *L'Amour, La Fantasia* that young Algerian girls of her generation required four languages to express their desire: French for their secret letter-writing; Arabic for their stifled prayers to Allah; Lybico-Berber to communicate with the mother-goddesses of pre-Islam; and the silenced language of their bodies.⁹

In the period after independence the continued use of French in certain sectors of economic, political, and cultural life was represented as an interim strategy, a necessary bridge between the linguistic order of the colonial era and the postcolonial establishment of a national language. Writing in 1986, Jacqueline Arnaud, one of the founders of Maghrebian literary studies in France, looked back to the period immediately after independence and asserted that "en attendant la modernisation de la culture arabe...le français pouvait servir de langue des sciences, de la logique, de la culture moderne" [Until Arab culture modernized...French could serve as a language of science, logic, and modern culture].¹⁰ Later in the same work she observed in a similar manner—though this time in the present tense—that "En attendant que mûrisse la langue nationale, que s'y intègrent les parlers maternels...ces écrivains continuent d'écrire en français" [while they wait for the national language to ripen, for mother tongues to fuse with it...these writers continue to write in French].¹¹ The shift in tenses between these two passages is revealing because it points to the fact that over the course of the decades following independence the linguistic terrain did not change radically. Given that this state of affairs still pertains today it is necessary to ask whether writing in French can still reasonably be viewed as a transitional strategy.

The question of why write in French, and how, has been a dilemma of Francophone writers from many regions, as well as a central theme of the critical literature devoted to their work. This reflection has taken many different guises. The theorists of relationality and *créolité*, Édouard Glissant, Jean Bernabé, Rafael Confiant and Patrick Chamoiseau, have propounded a poetics of linguistic and cultural hybridization. The notion of the *interlangue*, language inhabited by translation or by the speaker's anchorage in a mother tongue, has been illustrated by Ivoirian Ahamadou Kourouma's novel, *Les Soleils des Indépendances* [*The Suns of Independence*] (1968), in which Malinké images are rendered in French.¹² The Moroccan novelist, poet, and essayist Abdelkébir Khatibi has underscored the intrinsic value of a position that is neither inside nor outside the French language and the ideological traditions which it has served, but rather occupies an interstitial space between identity and difference. In his essay *Maghreb pluriel* [*The Multifarious Maghreb*] (1983), Khatibi uses the expression *bi-langue* (bi-language), to express the fact that languages are always inhabited by other languages, that translation occurs within as well as between them, not least because words refer not only to things but also, and more immediately, to other words.¹³ This deconstructive purchase is narrativized in Khatibi's allegorical novel, *L'Amour bilingue* [*Love in Two Languages/Bilingual Love*] (1983), in which a bilingual Maghrebian narrates the story of his passion

for a mysterious French woman, symbol of the French language.¹⁴ In a different vein, Assia Djebar represents writing in French, which she has called the “langue adverse,” the adverse language or language of the colonial adversary, as the booty of colonial rule.¹⁵ For her as for many Maghrebian writers, writing in French constitutes a double strategy of subversion directed against both the former colonial power and the patriarchal and authoritarian regimes that have governed since independence.

Integral to each of these reflections on the poetics and politics of Francophone writing is a belief that the French language does not constitute a unified whole bounded by a set of rules and conventions established in Metropolitan France, and, by extension, that French has expanded beyond its affiliation with a single nation. In a statement that has become something of a mantra for postcolonial thought, Salman Rushdie observes in *Imaginary Homelands* that the English language is no longer the property of the English. A parallel conviction inhabits the work of many contemporary Francophone writers. The prominent Québécois critic Lise Gauvin summarizes this view in *L'écrivain francophone à la croisée des langues* [*The Francophone Writer at the Crossroads of Language*], a collection of interviews with Francophone writers.¹⁶ Asking what Québécois, Belgian, African, and Antillean writers have in common—what lends unity to the virtual space of *francophonie*—Gauvin proposes that they share a “surconscience linguistique,” a linguistic hyper-consciousness that forces them to “penser la langue” (think language).¹⁷ She characterizes this hyper-conscious relation as:

une conscience de la langue comme d'un vaste laboratoire de possibles, comme d'une chaîne infinie de variantes dont les seules limites sont un certain seuil de lisibilité, soit la compétence du lectorat, mais d'un lectorat à provoquer autant qu'à séduire.

[a consciousness of language as a vast laboratory of possibilities, an infinite chain of variables whose only limits are a certain threshold of lisibility, for instance the competence of the readership—a readership that is to be provoked as much as seduced.]¹⁸

However, this characterization gives pause for thought, because this limit to the postcolonial reinvention of French constitutes a genuine impasse. In the nations of the “Francophone world” there are many readers who cannot read French. There are also many citizens who cannot read: estimated adult literacy rates hover at around 50% in Morocco, 60% in Algeria, and 65% in Tunisia. Given these realities I would like to cite a different reflection on the use of French, a paper delivered by Mohammed Ennaji, a prominent Moroccan sociologist and economist, at the recent conference *La Francophonie et la diversité culturelle vues du Maroc* [*Francophonie and Cultural Diversity as Seen from Morocco*], held in Rabat in February, 2001. Ennaji writes,

Je pars de la crainte qui me ronge d'être au rang d'acteur marginal enseignant en français à des étudiants qui sont plus sensibles à une autre langue, à leur langue, et surtout, pensent autrement. En un mot je m'interroge sur la pertinence de mon discours académique en ma qualité de francophone....

[I start from the gnawing fear that, by teaching in French to students who are more responsive to another language, their language, and who, above all, think otherwise, I am only a marginal actor....]¹⁹

(He goes on to argue that Arabic should in the long-term become the vehicle of research in the Maghreb.)

I quote this passage because it communicates in a direct way the difficulty confronted by intellectuals working in a multilingual environment where language choice carries social and political implications and consequences. Ennaji expresses the concern that by teaching in French he might fail to reach his young students, or worse, might alienate them. The political ramifications of teaching and writing in French in the Maghreb have, of course, sometimes been very grave. In 1998 the members of the Algerian National Assembly, renewing a commitment made in 1992, voted unanimously to continue the process of Arabicization, and to impose penalties on the use of any other language in a public context. Their radical decision resonates strongly with the events of the decade of violence that followed the suspension of national elections in 1991, during which several French-language writers, including most prominently the poet Youssef Sebti and the novelist and journalist Tahar Djaout, were assassinated for their defense in French of views perceived as anti-Islamic and associated with Western society and politics. In an interview with the BBC that has since become notorious, the Arabic-language writer Tahar Ouettar commented that “la mort de Tahar Djaout n'est pas une perte pour l'Algérie, mais une perte pour sa famille, ses enfants, et la France.” [The death of Tahar Djaout is not a loss for Algeria, but a loss for his family, his children, and France], a statement that has been widely interpreted as a condemnation of Djaout's use of French. In the face of national policies of arabicization whose objective has been the imposition of a limitative template of national unity, and more recently, in Algeria, in the face of ideologically-driven violence, the continued practice of French has constituted, in and of itself, a defense of multiculturalism. But as in every political context, there is a short and a long-term perspective to consider, and it is legitimate to wonder whether over the long term the role played by French in this regard will ultimately favor the development of multiculturalism, or contribute to the reinforcement of polarized cultural identities.

At this juncture I want to emphasize that in calling attention to the social and political polarization of French and Arabic I do not mean to trivialize the theo-

retical meditation on writing in French undertaken by Khatibi, Djébar, and other Maghrebian writers. Cultural decolonization clearly requires the dismantling of myths of cultural integrity, notably the identification of languages with nation states that is itself a legacy of European colonialism, and particularly of the Jacobinist ideal of centralization. It is also true that for many Maghrebian writers French is less a chosen language than a medium imposed by education, by exile, by the dangers involved in writing on certain topics in Arabic, or simply by the logistics of publishing and the legitimate desire to reach a wide audience. But I do want to observe that in the critical literature devoted to the Maghreb these textual meditations are prioritized, while other linguistic issues and options, notably the prevalence of illiteracy or the choice to write in Arabic, are afforded less attention. This disproportion is reflected in the somewhat naïve optimism of Lise Gauvin's suggestion that the Francophone reinvention of French is limited *only* by the competence of readers.

To some extent this perspective reflects a wider tendency of Francophone and postcolonial theory to explore social and political questions primarily through the interpretation of literary texts. Postcolonial critics have often been inattentive, or at best selectively attentive, to the specific geopolitical and linguistic circumstances in which texts are produced, and instead have emphasized what Terry Eagleton terms the "unstable textual politics of production."²⁰ The rejection of deterministic thinking that identifies a one-to-one relationship between "text" and "context" has clearly been one of the most significant contributions of literary theory. However, it has sometimes generated a countervailing culturalism that reduces economic and social relations to poetics. In the context of Francophone studies, this shift emerges in the subtle yet insistent suggestion that the problem of language choice is somehow resolved within the Francophone literary text.

One of the first comprehensive studies of Francophone Maghrebian literature was Jean Déjeux's *Situation de la littérature maghrébienne de langue française* (1982), which covers the period from 1920 to 1978.²¹ Déjeux devotes a chapter of this overview to the dilemma of writing in French, and presents a number of short texts in which Maghrebian writers reflect on what it means for them to write in the colonial language. Somewhat curiously, however, Déjeux opens this chapter by setting aside the practice of bilingualism and the decision to write in Arabic as matters of sociological rather than literary interest. This foreclosure is in fact a fairly standard feature of surveys of Francophone Maghrebian literature—Jacques Noiray similarly begins the section of the multivolume *Littératures francophones* devoted to the Maghreb by defining his corpus through the exclusion of Arabic-language works.²²

One interesting deviation from this critical tendency is Charles Bonn's *Littérature algérienne de langue française et ses lectures* (1974), which includes alongside the interpretation of texts the results of a survey of reading practices that examines the use of languages by different demographic groups.²³ The key insight of this combination of literary with sociological analysis is the recognition that language-choice is an issue of readership as well as a dilemma of writing, and that it has a different force for readers who possess relatively limited literacy skills than for writers who are often well-educated and familiar with a wide range of cultural references. It would perhaps be productive to repeat this survey now in order to gauge, thirty years on, the comparative rates of growth of French and Arabic and the corresponding trajectory of reading practices.

The critical separation of Arabophone from Francophone works has occasionally been accompanied by a mildly justificatory discourse. Attempting to explain why they are examining (only) Maghrebian writing in French, critics sometimes veer unconsciously towards the suggestion that French is in some respect culturally superior, more enlightened, more universal. Charles Bonn writes, for example, that "la littérature algérienne engagée de langue française, en s'ouvrant à l'universel, même si elle militait pour la patrie, brisait le corde de la cité musulmane et de ses valeurs d'un autre âge" [politically engaged Algerian literature in French, by opening itself to the universal, even if it fought for the nation, broke the bounds of the Moslem city and its archaic values].²⁴ More recently and far more subtly, in the Introduction to *Maghrebian Mosaic: a Literature in Transition*, a recent collection of essays devoted to North African literature in French, the respected American critic Mildred Mortimer writes:

When Albert Memmi's *Anthologie des écrivains maghrébains d'expression française* appeared in 1964, the Tunisian writer was convinced that literary production in the colonizer's language would shortly disappear. After all, the three countries proclaim Arabic as their language and embrace Arabo-Islamic culture.... Although Arabic-language literature has been growing in the Maghreb since independence, few Maghrebian Arabic-language texts have been translated into French or English. Beyond North African borders, Francophone Maghrebian texts are better known than their Arabic-language counterparts. Ironically, works published in Paris...offer the writer a greater distribution of possibilities.... Thus, more than three decades after Memmi's anthology was published and despite the Tunisian writer's dismal prophecy, Francophone Maghrebian literature is still alive and well and "cohabits" with Arabic-language texts.²⁵

It is somewhat surprising, in a work devoted to postcolonial culture, to find the unequal economic and cul-

tural power of Europe and North Africa represented as a matter of irony, but in this instance inattentiveness to the actual material relationship between the continents is necessary in order to cast Francophone Maghrebian writing in the role of the tenacious underdog. In a different vein, though with similar effect, Françoise Lionnet, one of the most insightful theorists of Francophone cultural hybridity, writes in her contribution to the volume *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* that “knowledge of nineteenth-century European literature and painting is just as important as familiarity with Arabic to appreciate [Assia] Djébar’s works.”²⁶ The point made here is fair, but the phrasing effects a surprising reversal, given that readers of Djébar are actually far more likely to be conversant with European painting than to know either standard or colloquial Arabic.

Critical studies of Francophone literature have accorded very little attention to examples of literary bilingualism, translation, and comparatism in Maghrebian literature, despite the fact that many Maghrebian writers have exercised their linguistic consciousness by writing in both French and Arabic, or by translating between the two. Kateb Yacine, who came to prominence with his Francophone novel, *Nedjma* (1957), later turned to dialectal Arabic and the theater, writing plays, beginning with *Mohammed, Take Your Suitcase* (1971), whose target audience was illiterate Algerians. Another prominent case is that of Rachid Boudjedra, the sometime *enfant terrible* of Algerian letters, who began his career in French, but who in the 1980s began to compose in Arabic, producing, almost simultaneously, his own French translations.²⁷ There are also several notable examples of literary translation between Arabic and French. For example, the poet and essayist Abdellatif Laâbi has translated into French several Arabic-language poets, and the Moroccan novelist Tahar Ben Jelloun has published an anthology of Arabic and French Moroccan poetry suggestively titled *La mémoire future [Future Memory]*,²⁸ and translated Mohamed Choukri’s celebrated novel *Khubz al-hafi [For Bread Alone]*, though it is perhaps symptomatic that this novel was “discovered” and translated into English by the American writer Paul Bowles several years earlier.²⁹

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

logue to the double issue 10-11 the editors of *Souffles* address the reasons for this juxtaposition:

Par cette confrontation des productions littéraires dans les deux langues, nous voulons remettre en question une dualité artificielle qu’on tendait jusqu’à maintenant à approfondir et instaurer par la même occasion un débat, un dialogue que beaucoup ont cherché à éviter par mauvaise foi ou par intérêt.

[By this confrontation of literary productions in both languages, we wish to call into question an artificial duality that until now has generally been deepened, and at the same time to stimulate a debate, a dialogue that many have tried to avoid out of bad faith or interest.]

In the subsequent issue this dichotomy is explored again in the context of a discussion of the role of the intellectual:

il existe une dichotomie dangereuse entre intellectuels arabisants et francisants. Ce fossé d’incommunicabilité tend d’ailleurs à s’élargir, vu le statu quo culturel dans lequel se confine le pouvoir en matière d’enseignement et d’arabisation. Cette ambiguïté entretenue est un premier obstacle que l’intellectuel conscient devra surmonter.

[there is a dangerous dichotomy between intellectuals working in French and Arabic. This gulf of incommunicability is moreover widening because of the cultural status quo which the authorities maintain in the area of education and arabicization. This enduring ambiguity is a first obstacle that the intellectual must overcome.]

The authors proceed to argue that French should serve as an interim device, with Arabic acknowledged as the ultimate vehicle of Moroccan culture.

Several points emerge from these passages. The decision to publish in two languages is presented as a rejection of both state-imposed monoculturalism and the colonial legacy of French cultural hegemony. It is also portrayed as the staging of a confrontation that intellectuals, whether for political, cultural, or personal reasons, have generally preferred to avoid. Finally, the inclusion of Arabic texts by editors whose own intellectual formation was conducted predominantly in French reflects a conviction that there should be a slow transition from French to Arabic. The striking similarities between this position and the one articulated by Mohammed Ennaji some thirty years later reflect the prescience of the *Souffles* team but also, unfortunately, the continued reality of linguistic polarization.

Change in this context will depend to a considerable degree on the resolution of a number of basic material problems. While literacy rates remain low and there is relatively little indigenous publishing of creative literature and humanistic and sociological writing, intellectuals will continue to write in French, often for a French

public. But some hope is on the horizon. The recent growth in both Algeria and Morocco of bilingual publishing houses and journals reflects a heightened consciousness of the problem, and a renewed desire to bridge the linguistic divide. In Morocco, Éditions le Fennec, a publishing house that works in cooperation with *Synergie civique*, a movement for literacy and social reform led by Le Fennec's director Layla Chaouni and sociologist Fatema Mernissi, has published a number of works bilingually.³⁰ In Algeria, Éditions Barzakh similarly publishes in both French and Arabic. In an interview conducted in July 2000 with the newspaper *Libre Algérie*, Barzakh's co-founders, Selma Hellal and Sofiane Hadjadj, discuss their decision:

...aucune exclusion sur le plan de la langue... rendre compte aussi bien d'une écriture en langue arabe que d'une écriture en langue française, précisément pour arriver à casser les cloisons, cette espèce d'étanchéité qui existe entre ces deux mondes pour faire en sorte que des francophones puissent avoir accès à une littérature Arabophone et vice versa.

[No exclusion in relation to language...we review writing in Arabic as well as writing in French, in order to break down the divides, the kind of impenetrable barrier that exists between these two worlds, so that Francophones can have access to Arabic-language literature and vice versa.]

Hadjadj observes that the most dynamic Algerian literature unfortunately remains work published in Paris by expatriate writers, a corpus that to his mind inevitably reflects a particular cultural perspective. Arguing for the need to reappropriate Algerian literature, Hellal states:

Nous avons l'ambition de nous réapproprier une écriture qui a eu tendance à se décentrer vers l'étranger, notamment vers la France... Finalement il n'y a qu'une littérature qui représente l'Algérie, c'est celle de l'étranger, francophone, et qui a fini par être biaisée parce qu'elle s'adresse à un lectorat français.

[Our ambition is to reappropriate a literature whose center has generally been abroad, notably in France. Really there is only one literature that represents Algeria—it is produced abroad, in French, and it has ended up being biased because it is directed towards a French readership.]

Interestingly, however, Hadjadj also says that he feels more affinity with Arabophone than Francophone writers because he finds them to be more *global* in outlook, more engaged, for example, with Latin American culture, less rooted in a single national tradition.³¹ Whereas Charles Bonn in 1974 tied openness to *universal* concerns to the use of French, writing in Algeria in 2000, Hadjadj perceives a global outlook in Arabic-language texts. The transition from "universal" values to "global" awareness, underpinned by the argument that the call to

universalism has often masked Eurocentrism, has of course been one of the central concerns of recent cultural theory. In this instance, where the relative cultural positioning of French and Arabic-language writers is at issue, we are reminded that it is inherently problematic—albeit seductively easy—to advocate globalization while remaining within a Eurocentric perspective.

Another illustration of the recent impetus for linguistic and cultural translation is the Moroccan journal *Prologues*, which reviews academic books in the social sciences with the aim of bringing academic debates before a general reading public. It has enjoyed a successful run, with a number of issues from the 1990s going into reprint. In its manifesto the editors state that by publishing in French and Arabic, *Prologues*

contribue...à briser l'isolement qu'imposent l'enfermement dans une langue (souvent dans la langue arabe, où le nombre des publications reste plus limité et d'un accès plus difficile). A ce titre, elle est devenue face à l'avalanche de littératures intégriste et nationaliste, l'organe qui diffuse des discours "autres."³²

[contributes...to the breakdown of the isolation imposed by the enclosure in one language (often in Arabic, in which the number of publications remains more limited and less accessible). It has therefore become, in the face of the avalanche of fundamentalist and nationalist literature, the organ that disseminates "other" discourses.]

Finally, the recent rise in interest in plurilingualism and bilingual publishing has been acknowledged in a number of recent books and events, for example the international conference *Lire, écrire et éditer en Méditerranée* [Reading, Writing and Editing in the Mediterranean] held in Aix-en-Provence in October 2000.

Despite this burgeoning of bilingualism in the domain of publishing, the language barrier remains in place in the crucial sphere of higher education. In North Africa, France, and the United States, French or Francophone and Arabic literature are still almost exclusively taught in separate degree programs, with little room for crossover.³³ This is particularly surprising and particularly problematic in North Africa, where a considerable proportion of the student population is multilingual.³⁴ In France and North America the recent burgeoning of Francophone studies, a field in which cultural diversity is valorized, should have supported the development of a more far-reaching critical multiculturalism, but the monolingual framing of the field has instead tended to reaffirm the separation of French and Arabic literatures. For example, there are no serious studies in which, for example, Mohamed Choukri is read alongside Driss Chraïbi, or in which the impact of the rhythms of classical Arabic poetry on French prose and

verse is analyzed in depth.³⁵

The ideal framework for the study of French and Arabic language Maghrebian texts is perhaps comparative literature, which emphasizes comparatism and demands knowledge of several languages. However, as Charles Bernheimer notes in his report to the American Comparative Literature Association of 1993 (republished in the volume *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*), comparative literature programs still typically emphasize mastery of the languages and literatures of “Europe and Europe’s high cultural lineage.”³⁶ Though the use of translations has broadened the horizons of these programs, continued expansion is obviously contingent on their availability. To date, relatively few Arabic-language Maghrebian works have been translated, both because Maghrebian literature has not entered the mainstream of Arabic literature, and, paradoxically, because it has been somewhat eclipsed by the strong tradition of Francophone writing. Bernheimer is perhaps right to say that the best currently available strategy for broadening the linguistic and geographical parameters of literary study is the recruitment of faculty from non-European literature departments to teach or co-teach courses in comparative literature programs. I would also propose, rather more controversially, that postcolonial awareness should open us to the possibility of teaching Arabic, Vietnamese, or Wolof alongside French within Francophone studies programs, a step that would bespeak a new level of reciprocity in the intercultural dynamic of *francophonie*. In an essay entitled “Pour une éthique de la francophonie” [For an Ethics of *Francophonie*] Abdellatif Laâbi argues that there is a need for greater linguistic reciprocity. He observes that although the old mentality of *francophonie* has been overtaken by a new emphasis on multiculturalism, this logic has not been extended to the teaching of Maghrebian languages, even to the children of immigrants, within metropolitan France:

La volonté de contribuer à la diversité culturelle du monde, maintes fois affirmée par les instances officielles de la francophonie et même par le pouvoir politique, devrait s’appliquer en toute bonne logique à la France également. C’est ce que j’appellerais le principe de la réciprocité. L’exemple qui me tient le plus à coeur...est celui du statut des langues maghrébines. Quand on connaît la place exceptionnelle que le français occupe aujourd’hui de ce côté-ci de la Méditerranée...on ne peut que s’étonner de l’effort modeste qui est consenti en France pour que les langues maghrébines prennent la place qui devrait être la leur, notamment dans l’enseignement.

[The desire to contribute to the cultural diversity of the world, often affirmed by the official representatives of *francophonie* and even by the political authorities, should logically be applied to France too.

When one is aware of the exceptional place that French occupies today on this side of the Mediterranean...one can only be astonished by the modest efforts made in France so that Maghrebian languages take their rightful place, notably in the domain of education.]

This kind of change in pedagogical practice would also require a shift in the conceptual apparatus of the field. Like postcolonial theory, Francophone studies have emphasized cultural hybridity, drawing attention to the contemporary multiculturalism of French both in metropolitan France and the former colonies. This emphasis should now be complemented by a messier, less circumscribed model of hybridity that offers some resistance to the institutional drive to deploy French as a framing device, and also acknowledges the relevance of multilingualism to the project of multiculturalism.

It is perhaps helpful, in closing, to compare the perspective from which Francophone studies approaches Maghrebian writing with an outlook that emanates from a different historical and geographical position. In the volume *Writing and Africa*, Anissa Talahite argues that “North African writing offers a perspective that cannot be strictly confined within the geographic boundaries of North Africa. From a linguistic and cultural point of view it is part of *Arabic* literature.”³⁷ This characterization may seem surprising given that it is offered in a volume devoted to *African* literature, but in fact it reminds us that literary works can always be explored in relation to several interconnecting contexts and traditions. To argue for the study of Francophone texts alongside Arabic and Berber works is not, therefore, to advocate a model of literary study in which geographical rather than linguistic boundaries are recognized as the parameters of a unified whole, but rather to assert the need for a more radical relationality that draws the full consequences of the emphasis on hybridity and intercultural contact that has been a central theoretical concern of Francophone studies.

NOTES

¹See, for example, Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (New York: Routledge, 1990), esp. 150-152. The problem of generalization is one that Young raises in relation to several postcolonial theorists, but it is most fully explored in his discussion of Homi Bhabha’s attempt to provide a general theory of the ambivalence of colonial discourse.

²Aijaz Ahmad, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the National Allegory,” *Social Text* 17 (Autumn 1987), 5.

³“Can the Subaltern Speak?: Speculations on Widow Sacrifice,” *Wedge* 7/8 (Winter/Spring 1985), 120-130.

⁴This policy has been accompanied by the passage of a series of domestic legislative measures, notably the Loi Toubon of 1993, whose objective was to defend the integrity of the French language by imposing penalties against the use, in

France, of English and anglicisms.

⁵Gilbert Grandguillaume, *Arabisation et politique linguistique* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1983), 9.

⁶On this interdiction see Grandguillaume, 113.

⁷In Tunisia only 1% of the population speaks a Berber language.

⁸This shift in policy is perceived by some as a strategy of containment rather than as a genuine step toward the cultivation of linguistic pluralism.

⁹Assia Djébar, *L'Amour, La Fantasia* (Paris: Jean-Claude Lattès, 1985), 203.

¹⁰Jacqueline Arnaud, 57.

¹¹Arnaud, 120.

¹²Edouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1981); Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Rafael Confiant, *Éloge de la créolité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989); Ahmadou Kourouma, *Les Soleils des indépendances* (Montreal: Presses universitaires de Montréal, 1968).

¹³Abdelkébir Khatibi, *Le Maghreb pluriel* (Paris: Denoël, 1983).

¹⁴Abdelkébir Khatibi, *Amour bilingue* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1983).

¹⁵See, for example, Assia Djébar, "Ecrire dans la langue adverse," interview with Marguerite Le Clézio, *Contemporary French Civilization* 19:2 (Summer 1985): 230-244, and "Du français comme butin," *La Quinzaine littéraire* 436 (March 1985).

¹⁶*L'écrivain Francophone à la croisée des langues: Entretiens* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1997).

¹⁷Lise Gauvin, *L'écrivain francophone à la croisée des langues*, 6-10.

¹⁸Gauvin, *L'écrivain francophone à la croisée des langues*, 10.

¹⁹The proceedings of this conference can be read in html form at www.confculture.francophonie.org.

²⁰Terry Eagleton, "In the Gaudy Supermarket," review of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Post-colonial Reason: a History of the Vanishing Present*, *London Review of Books* 21:10 (May 1999).

²¹Jean Déjeux, *Situation de la littérature maghrébine de langue française* (Algiers: Office de la Publication Universitaire, 1982), 75-138.

²²Jacques Noiray, *Littératures francophones*, volume 2 (Paris: Belin, 1996), 11.

²³Charles Bonn, *Littérature algérienne de langue française et ses lectures: imaginaire et discours d'idées* (Sherbrooke: Naaman, 1974).

²⁴Bonn, *Littérature algérienne de langue française et ses lectures*, 110.

²⁵*Maghrebian Mosaic: a Literature in Transition*, ed. Mildred Mortimer (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2001), 4.

²⁶Françoise Lionnet "Spaces of Comparison" in *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, ed. Charles Bernheimer (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 171.

²⁷Boudjedra has recently returned to writing directly in French.

²⁸*La Mémoire future: anthologie de la nouvelle poésie du Maroc* (Paris: Maspero, 1976).

²⁹Mohamed Choukri, *Le pain nu*, translated by Tahar Ben Jelloun (Paris: Maspero, 1980).

³⁰For example, *Le harcèlement sexuel est un crime / Attaharoch al jinsi jarimab* [Sexual Harassment is a Crime] (Rabat: Le Fennec, 2001).

³¹This interview can be read online at the Algerian Planet-dz website: <www.planet-dz.com/ACTU/2000/juillet/entretien_ed_barzakh.htm>.

³²*Prologues* is difficult to find in the United States but the list of contents for each issue and the editors' manifesto can be accessed at: <www.ned.org/grantees/Prologues>.

³³Courses in Arabic literature tend to emphasize the Egyptian and Eastern Arabic traditions rather than Maghrebian literature, because these are considered more purely "Arab" and more continuity is perceived between the pre- and post-colonial periods.

³⁴An exception is the Université Libre de Tunis whose Faculty of Arts, Letters, and Human Sciences privileges the multilingualism of its students and emphasizes the mastery of three languages (French, Arabic, and English) and translation among them.

³⁵The *Literary Review* (Winter 1998), has published an issue titled "North Africa: Literary Crossroads," a selection of Maghrebian French, Arabic, and Berber poetry translated into English, edited and presented by Eric Sellin, one of relatively few critical attempts to consider the region as a literary whole.

³⁶Charles Bernheimer, *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, 40.

³⁷Anissa Talahite, "North African Writing," in *Writing and Africa*, ed. Mpalive-Hangson Misiska and Paul Hyland (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1997), 13-31, my italics.