CONNECTING NORTH AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA THROUGH LITERATURE, FILM, AND MUSIC

A Dissertation in
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by
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ABSTRACT

An unresolved issue in African literary studies is whether North and sub-Saharan Africa are disconnected from one another, or whether they share elements that can further our understanding of the cultures from which they emerge. Since the mid-twentieth century, due to growing interest in Islam and the Arab world on the global scene, the Arab side of North African identity has been given paramount recognition. More often than not, North Africa is considered part of the Middle East rather than an integral member of an African community, although in spite of shifting political winds in recent years, the literatures that have emerged from North Africa have been firmly embedded in African literary traditions since antiquity, and share strong links with their sub-Saharan counterparts.

Few literary scholars have connected North Africa to the rest of the continent, and those few have done so primarily, if not exclusively, from a francophone standpoint. This fledging scholarship needs to be extended and complemented by validating the inclusion of North Africa in African literary studies, taking into consideration both francophone and non-francophone perspectives, as well as other genres, such as film and music. This analysis of works from north and south of the Sahara demonstrates that, in spite of an academic tendency to divide Africa by the vast Sahara, the literatures and cultures of North Africa are in fact deeply connected to broader African literary traditions.

Among the principal works under study are Driss Chraïbi’s novel La Mère du printemps (1982), Assia Djebar’s film La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua (1978),
and a selection of Moroccan music. Chraïbi’s fictional view of the Arab conquest of North Africa in the seventh century and Djebar’s use of Arabic in cinema illustrate North Africa’s relationship to Africa and the Arab World. The music of Gnawa communities in Morocco, whose origins are rooted in sub-Saharan Africa, points to strong historical ties between North Africa and the rest of the continent that date back at least to the sixteenth century, although evidence suggests that these ties were already developed as early as the twelfth century.

That these diverse North African works show connections to sub-Saharan cultures invites us to view both regions as a whole. Although North Africa has also had intimate ties with the Middle East since the Arab conquests of the seventh century, the Sahara desert does not constitute a boundary to the transfer of cultural references from one side to the other. The study of North Africa should, therefore, take into account the larger context of Africa; and, correspondingly, scholarship on African literatures should include the Northern part of the continent.
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INTRODUCTION

Both the products of research and popular imaginative views of Africa in the last few decades have tended to leave out the northern region, even when they ostensibly speak of the continent as a whole. “Africa” now stands for sub-Saharan Africa, while North Africa is considered in many academic disciplines to be part of the Middle East instead. The division between North and sub-Saharan Africa is particularly problematic in literature. Although North Africa does share some important connections with the Middle East, the literatures that have emerged from North Africa are in many ways part of a broader tradition that includes sub-Saharan African literatures. Today, the literatures of both sides of the Sahara are not entirely isolated from each other, but share elements that can improve our understanding of both the peoples and the societies from which they emerge. For this reason, one can no longer separate the study of North African literatures from the larger context of research on African literatures. The same is also valid for other forms of cultural production such as film and music.

Evidence for the conventional split described above comes from essays and analytical works that attempt to provide an overview of African literature: nearly all of them fail to include North African writers. The tendency in African literary studies to focus largely on texts and authors from areas in sub-Saharan Africa, especially since the mid-twentieth century, appears in the abundance of anthologies, edited volumes, and surveys that contributed to the establishment of a canon of African literature, especially in the nineteen seventies and eighties. Examples of these surveys include Edgar Wright’s *The Critical Evaluation of African Literature* (1973), Eustace Palmer’s *The Growth of the African Novel* (1979), Samuel Omo Asein’s *Studies in the African Novel* (1986), and
Simon Gikandi’s *Reading the African Novel* (1987), all of which contain numerous examples of works from the eastern, western, and southern parts of the continent, but rarely mention North African literature. This tendency does not apply to scholarship on the African novel only; surveys of African drama and poetry also follow this trend, and so do reviews of African literature at large, such as O. R. Dathorne’s *African Literature in the Twentieth Century* (1975) or Oyekan Owomoyela’s *African Literatures: An Introduction* (1979) and *A History of Twentieth-Century African Literatures* (1993). On the rare occasions when North Africa is mentioned, it is typically to be dismissed in order to justify a focus on sub-Saharan Africa. Keith Booker, for instance, writes in the preface to his 1998 introductory study on the African novel that “the cultural traditions of North Africa differ substantially from those of sub-Saharan Africa,” and includes only novels from south of the Sahara (ix). Although African literature scholars necessarily draw boundaries and focus their work according to specific criteria, such as authors, periods, genres or areas, as do scholars of other literatures, the recurrent separation between North and sub-Saharan Africa has become accepted to such an extent that it has shaped our perception of the field.

2007, not counting a special issue on Algeria in 1999 (30.3, edited by Danielle Marx-Scouras). Although this overview indicates an increase in the North African presence in African literary criticism, interest in that region remains slight in comparison with other areas of the continent. Moreover, the modest increase in visibility in *Research in African Literatures* is certainly not representative, as *African Literature Today*, for example, has published only three articles related to North Africa since 1968.

Yet, scholars in other fields have shown evidence of the long-standing connections between the peoples on both sides and through the Sahara desert (Levtzion 63), connections embodied by trans-Saharan trade routes that facilitated cultural exchanges. The formation of trans-Saharan commerce and trade routes is related to the emergence of markets on the Mediterranean coast which date back to the Carthaginian Empire in the ninth century BCE, and scholars can observe trans-Saharan cultural connections today. Ahmed Rahal and David Goodman, for instance, have written about communities of sub-Saharan origin in Tunisia and Morocco respectively. Conversely, Mukhtar Umar Bunza has written about the influence of North Africa on the practice of Islam in Northern Nigeria, and Akin Euba has studied the Islamic roots of musical cultures among the Yoruba. Ali Mazrui has also emphasized the tremendous role of North Africa in shaping African identity with its contacts with sub-Saharan Africa through history in his 2005 article “The Re-invention of Africa: Edward Said, V. Y. Mudimbe, and Beyond.”

A few scholars have advocated a more continental approach to African literature, especially from a francophone perspective. Hélène Tissières, for instance, argued in her 2002 article “Maghreb—Sub-Saharan Connections” that North and sub-Saharan Africa
share too many connections to be dealt with separately. Similarly, Thomas Hale has
called for the need to trace the history of writing in Africa back five thousand years, and
has argued that we need to study the writings of ancient Egypt and the old trade routes
along the Sahara desert (“bursting at the Seams” 12-3). Such positions, however, remain
scarce in African literary studies. While scholars in African literatures have broadened
the range of their interests to include works emerging from a diaspora with thematic
elements, sometimes only indistinct, linking them back to continental literatures, the vast
region that constitutes the southern Mediterranean shore is still considered to be part of a
larger Arabic literary scene only, and to have little to do with the rest of Africa.

What, then, is the evidence to support a more continental approach to the
literatures and other cultural productions of North and sub-Saharan Africa? In this study,
my goal is to offer answers to this question by analyzing exemplars of North African
cultural production in the ways in which they relate to sub-Saharan Africa. In particular, I
will draw on evidence from literature, cinema, and music, using the notion of adab, rather
than a Western perspective, as a guide to the multimedia approach here. Although the
Arabic word adab is usually understood to mean literature in the conventional sense, it
actually refers to a broader range of literary cultures that includes not only such arts as
poetry, prose, and drama, but also music and the visual arts, all considered to be
interrelated and to form together the same literary cultural heritage. Although the present
study will focus on literature, film, and music, other media, such as the plastic arts, also
show connections between North and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Before going any further, however, it is essential to examine briefly the origins of
the conventional separation between North and sub-Saharan Africa as it appears in
historical, cultural, and literary studies. However, although the objective here is ultimately to diminish, if not erase, the division between North and sub-Saharan Africa, one should not conclude that the entire continent is uniform and free of diversity. Rather, the multitude of linguistic, literary, and artistic categories in various parts of Africa makes any attempt at mapping them impractical because they do not always overlap neatly. Nevertheless, the enduring division along the Sahara line has acted as an insurmountable barrier for scholars on both sides of the desert. This separation runs counter to African cultural expression which, rather than relying on categories constructed by academic and governmental institutions, emerges in continuums that do not necessarily fit perfectly into convenient geographical boundaries. Proximity plays a role in creating cultural cohesion between the peoples of these regions, even across the Sahara desert, a vast region that research often misconstrues as a boundary.

My purpose is to point out that the division between North and sub-Saharan Africa in African literary studies is flawed, and to advocate a continental approach in order to go beyond the conventional and inoperative classification that is still too often transmitted by area studies programs. The goal is to overcome the inadequacies of a compartmented outlook on African literatures, nearly all of which has focused on sub-Saharan Africa. As provincialisms are diminishing in some such programs, scholars like Paul Zeleza (1997), Pearl Robinson (2004), and Ato Quayson (2007) are reconsidering problematic and deeply rooted geopolitical assumptions. A comparative approach to African literatures that challenges the separation between North and sub-Saharan Africa leads to a new paradigm for the study of the continent’s cultural production. But the task of reframing North and sub-Saharan Africa as a whole is best carried out by focusing on
specific contexts rather than attempting to create a new trope for the formation of a new
domain of African Studies. One example would be to consider areas of the continent
where Islam is predominant regardless of present-day political perspectives. In this sense,
even though the Iberian Peninsula is considered part of Europe today, Iberia should be
taken into account in a study of Islamic literature in Africa as it was more intimately tied
to that continent in the early modern period. Another example of joining North and sub-
Saharan Africa in limited contexts would be to broaden the scope of the study of
literatures from francophone Africa from both sides of the Sahara to include works in
other languages from those areas, such as Arabic, in order to move beyond the solely
colonial basis of this grouping.

It is noteworthy that while North Africa today is excluded from Africa on the one
hand, it is also been marginalized from the canons of Arabic literatures on the other.
Indeed, though the massive body of literature that has come out of Egypt since the last
century occupies the center of scholarship on modern Arabic literatures, it frames itself in
a Middle Eastern context, for Egypt, more than any other country in North Africa, is
usually considered Middle Eastern rather than African. This perspective endures in spite
of some studies that have considered the possibility of including the Middle East as part
of Africa, for example by associating ancient Egypt to sub-Saharan Africa, as in Martin
Bernal’s substantial if sometimes controversial three-volume study where he has linked
the country to peoples to the east and north, as well as to societies further south. As a
result of Egypt’s leading role in Arabic literature today, the literatures and languages of
the rest of North Africa are overshadowed. For this reason, scholars of modern Arabic
literature generally consider the region whose literature they study to be part not of Africa
but of a distinct Arab sphere, ignoring the overlap between African and modern Arabic literatures. This Middle Eastern focus misses the African connections. The result is a biased, incomplete portrayal of North African literatures. The present study of links between North and sub-Saharan Africa challenges accepted boundaries of Africa’s literary scope though the inclusion of Arabic as a legitimate language of African literatures.

It should also be noted, nonetheless, that generally speaking the few who do view North African literature as relevant to the study of African literature as a whole are mostly scholars of francophone literature who specialize in the Maghreb and approach the subject from a perspective based on the French language. Hédi Bouraoui, for example, compared the literatures of francophone North and West Africa in 1985. Mildred Mortimer’s book *Journeys Through the French African Novel* (1990) also systematically compares northern and sub-Saharan novels. More recently, Hélène Tissières has focused on the links between the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa in her 2007 book *Ecritures en transhumance*. Such studies usually include only francophone writings, while the Arabic and Berber literary productions of North Africa are often ignored. Sometimes this is done inadvertently. For example, although Anissa Talahite did address writing in Arabic in her survey of North African writing, she characterized it as rooted in the Middle East and the greater Arab World, distinct from North African writing in French. Similarly, Farida Abu-Haidar acknowledges the importance of Arabic and Berber in the Maghreb in “Inscribing a Maghrebian Identity in French,” a chapter that she contributed to Mortimer’s edited volume *Maghrebian Mosaic* (2001), but, as her
title suggests, she limits her analysis to the impact of these languages on authors who write in French.

One of the reasons behind this linguistic focus is the increasing impact of North African culture on French society. Since the nineteen eighties in particular, the emergence of a cultural space for descendants of immigrants of North African origin in France has become a highly visible topic (Silverstein 164). Consequently, some francophone scholars in recent years have focused on the study of literatures from North Africa within the framework of relations between France and the Maghreb only. One example is Mireille Rosello’s *France and the Maghreb: Performative Encounters* (2005), but this perspective extends beyond literature, as indicated in Patricia Lorcin’s work on history, *Algeria and France 1800-2000: Identity, Memory, Nostalgia* (2006). These approaches are certainly relevant today, especially considering the increasing importance of the memory of the Algerian war in French society lately. However, these viewpoints also need to be complemented by a wider linguistic framework.

The focus on the francophone dimension of the Maghreb is also due to factors ranging from the scarcity of scholars who are equally proficient in French and Arabic or Berber to the simple fact that many literary works are unavailable or difficult to obtain. For instance, in the introduction to *Maghrebian Mosaic*, Mortimer acknowledges the growth of Arabic language literature in the Maghreb since the independence of those countries, but notes that works written in French and published in Paris are better distributed (4). Madeleine Dobie deplored such French-centered approaches to studying the Maghreb in her article “Francophone Studies and the Linguistic Diversity of the Maghreb” (2003), suggesting that comparative literature is a field where the study of both
French and Arabic language Maghrebi texts can increase, and that Francophone studies programs should break new ground by teaching Arabic (as well as Vietnamese or Wolof) alongside French, in order to overcome the language barriers that remain in place in higher education in North America and Europe, as well as in North Africa (38-9).

Although the pairing of the Maghreb and West Africa on a francophone basis is commendable, and should be encouraged given the far more widespread tendency to separate the two, the fact that it almost inevitably fails to deal with significant non-francophone aspects of each area is problematic because a wide body of literature in other languages from these francophone areas remains unstudied. Indeed, although the linguistic link between the former French colonies on both sides of the Sahara is a legitimate foundation for a field of study, it would be more thorough not to limit ourselves linguistically and geographically. We should not only disregard the traditional separation between North and sub-Saharan Africa, but also consider, for instance, the North African cultural production in Arabic and Berber as well as in French, or also include the literatures of Mauritania, Libya, and Egypt rather than focus solely on Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.

In the case of the position of North Africa in modern Arabic literatures, the situation is analogous to that of North Africa in African literary studies. Scholarship on Arabic literatures has largely marginalized the literary production of North Africa, with the exception of Egypt. In fact, Egypt is considered the literary center of the Arab World and significantly different from the remainder of North Africa, which creates further distance from the rest of the continent. Literatures from the Maghreb in Arabic, in contrast with those of Egypt, have not received much critical attention in the Arabic-
speaking world. Consistent with the pairing of the Maghreb with West Africa by francophone scholars, the influence of French on the region is often invoked by proponents of other Arabic literatures in the Middle East as a justification for excluding it from studies of Arabic literatures. A typical example can be found in Roger Allen’s seminal survey *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction* (1982), where the question of language is advanced to explain the absence of works from the Maghreb. Allen argues that the influence of French on the region contributed “to retard the development of a narrative prose tradition in Arabic till comparatively recently” (44). He explains:

> It seems inevitable that the sophisticated belles-lettrist tradition in French within these countries which has already contributed many notable works to the novel tradition in French will continue to provide influence and support for the developing Arabic novel tradition in the region. (44)

According to the second edition of Allen’s book, published in 1995, it seems that things have improved a bit in thirteen years:

> [. . .] the vigorous enforcement of a French-based educational system on that part of the population that was to receive an education has also tended to have an effect on the study of the region’s literary output in Arabic, namely that it has been overlooked by a substantial number of scholars and critics in both the Eastern region of the Arab world and, it must be admitted, in the English-speaking world. Fortunately, a considerable increase in publication opportunities in the Maghrib and, to a certain extent, changing international alignments and political trends have
recently led to a greater availability of the works of Maghribi authors and critics. (19)

Unfortunately, the “greater availability” of works in Arabic from the Maghreb has not generated greater critical attention. Although Allen added three novels to the eight he originally included in the first edition of his survey, works from the Maghreb remain absent. In fact, while the novels he now analyzes include works from Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Jordan, and Syria, only one novel from a country west of Egypt is included, the excellent *Nazif al-hajar* (1990) [*The Bleeding of the Stone* (2002)] by the Libyan Ibrahim Kuni. This novel, however, although not coming from as far west as the francophone Maghreb, is deemed intriguingly exotic:

The geographical environment in which [Kuni] places his readers is one where villages and settlements of any kind are as remote as they can possibly be. Indeed the proliferation of place-names in the novel—the massifs of Messak Settafet and Messak Mellet, the regions of Tassili, Tamanrasset, and Fezzan, and towns such as Tombuktu, Ghat, Agadez, and Kano—serves as a realistic evocation of a region and landscape that are as unfamiliar to most Arab readers as they are to those of other languages. (245)

The fact that these place names in the Sahara and the Sahel region are mentioned in the novel indicates that for Kuni the desert does not constitute a frontier. Yet, the very connectedness to sub-Saharan Africa makes this North African work, Allen suggests, too exotic in its contribution to the Arabic novel.
North Africa has thus been neglected by African literature scholars on the one hand, and by Arabic literature scholars on the other. When francophone Africanists draw attention to the connection between the Maghreb and sub-Saharan West Africa, they overlook important non-francophone elements, and present an incomplete picture of North African literature. Similarly, critics and analysts of North African literature from an Arabic perspective have ignored important elements of North African culture that are tied to sub-Saharan Africa, preferring instead to consider the region part of a separate Arab scene. How then can one reframe North and sub-Saharan African cultural production in a unified continental context? To answer this question, one must first address a series of related questions. What are the historical, political, and literary circumstances surrounding the separation? What are the roles of Islam and Arabic in this separation? What evidence is there for a greater cultural linkage between the two regions?

In chapter one, the focus will be on examples of this separation since the second half of the twentieth century. They are not solely confined to the realm of literature, but are also rooted in the general historical background of the African continent in the last century, and include issues of race and politics as well as the direct impact of European colonialism, language politics, and critical reception on the classification of African literature. My analysis will focus on literary works from both sides of the Sahara, for example the Sudanese author Tayeb Salih’s *Mawsim al-hijra ila al-shamal* [Season of Migration to the North] and the Moroccan writer Leila Abouzeid’s ‘*am al-fil* [Year of the Elephant]. Although the emphasis will at times be on individual works and authors to illustrate certain points through in-depth analyses of the texts, I will give priority in this
study to the broader significance of the relative exclusion of North Africa in scholarship on African literature.

Since the mid-twentieth century, North African countries have held ambiguous positions within the African continent, with politics shifting back and forth between pan-African and pan-Arab (sometimes “pan-Mediterranean”) strategies on the part of political leaders. Although North African countries developed ties with sub-Saharan Africa after the nineteen sixties, their positions became increasingly uncertain. In the post-9/11 context, with the growing interest in Islam and the Arab world on the global scene, the Arab side of North African identity has been paramount. More often than not, the region is considered by scholars and politicians to be part of the Middle East rather than an integral member of an African community.

For this reason, religion is a subject fundamental to this topic, and will be the focus of the second chapter. Because Islam is sometimes considered to hold a different place in the cultural traditions of societies on each side of the Sahara, I will address the impact of this religion on the separation between North and sub-Saharan Africa. Some scholars dismiss the crucial place of Islam in societies south of the Sahara, and view North African literature as exclusively Islamic. Yet, evidence of Islam in North as well as sub-Saharan Africa supports the case against the separation of the two regions. Moreover, from a thematic perspective, Islamic elements have in fact been an integral part of a large body of African literature south of the Sahara, from chronicles to oral epics and more recent novels from West Africa, while non-Islamic elements also endure in North African societies, and are clearly present in the region’s literary output today.
In this light, I will reconsider the spread of Islam to the continent from a historical perspective in the second chapter. In addition to pointing out the impact of Islam and Arabic on sub-Saharan African literature, in works such as *L’Aventure ambiguë* (1961) by Senegalese author Cheikh Hamidou Kane, and *The Epic of Askia Mohammed*, ruler of the Songhay Empire (1493-1528), I will illustrate the endurance of pre-Islamic elements in North African literature today with an analysis of *La Mère du printemps* (1982), a novel by the Moroccan Driss Chraïbi. Here the focus is on non-Arab people—the Amazigh or Imazighen, better known by their Arabic name as Berbers—whose roots predate the arrival of Islam and Arabic in North Africa.

In accordance with the notion of *adab*, a broader spectrum of cultural production, I will also include two other genres, film and music, in the third and fourth chapters respectively. This will also allow me to cover texts whose audiences may be different from those of the novels analyzed in previous chapters. In the third chapter, the focus will be on the issue of language in two films, Ousmane Sembene’s *Xala* (1973), from Senegal, and Assia Djebar’s *La Noubâ des femmes du Mont Chenoua* (1978), from Algeria. These films, both made by filmmakers who were initially novelists, illustrate not only links between North and sub-Saharan Africa, but also the intimate tie between film and literature in both areas. In the fourth chapter, the evidence will come from contemporary Moroccan music, as well as the Gnawa communities that are found throughout North Africa, mostly in Morocco, but whose roots are in sub-Saharan Africa, and who undeniably constitute the most visible and evident link between the two regions.

Ultimately, I will reveal both the limitations of the long-standing separation between North and sub-Saharan African cultural production, and the importance of
studying the two regions as part of a whole. One should not assume, however, that the
dissociation of North and sub-Saharan Africa stems simply from a widespread ignorance
of specific links between the two regions, and that this dissociation will simply go away
if a list of these links is revealed. Rather, the endurance of the distinction between North
and sub-Saharan Africa is indicative of both academic and popular views on the two
regions. This study, then, constitutes a precedent for comparative trans-Saharan African
Studies. The goal is to further complete our understanding of African cultures by opening
up the possibility of studying Africa beyond the traditional boundaries.
CHAPTER 1:

BETWEEN AFRICA AND THE ARAB WORLD: THE PARADOX OF NORTH AFRICAN LITERATURES

One of the issues emerging from any analysis of North and sub-Saharan African literatures is the multiplicity of labels attached to them, especially in the case of North Africa. However, if the labels applied to this region’s literatures are multiple, they fall more or less into one of two categories: either African or Arab, two groupings that are too often considered to be mutually exclusive. When it comes to the question of literary affinity between North and sub-Saharan Africa, the issue is not merely whether North Africa is essentially African and should be linked to sub-Saharan Africa instead of the Arab World, but rather a question of to which extent are “African” and “Arab” not mutually exclusive labels. The paradox of North African literatures that I refer to in this chapter’s title is that they are at once African and Arab, yet do not fit neatly in either category. This situation prompts one to ask just how “African” and “Arab” can belong to the same literary world.

As a first step beyond the division between North and sub-Saharan Africa in particular, and Arab and African literatures in general, I will examine some of the pretexts that account for separating between North Africa and the rest of the continent. The analysis of these pretexts suggests the need to broaden the scope of the study to include racial, historical, and political considerations that go back to the formation of contemporary African literary studies in the twentieth century. This is necessary in order to establish the status of North Africa today in African literature in comparison to Arabic literature, and clarify whether or not African and Arab are indeed mutually exclusive
labels for North African literature. It should be noted that although the focus of the present chapter is on the twentieth century, it is not to suggest that there was no difference made between North and sub-Saharan Africa earlier. There were indeed distinctions between both areas going back to the beginning of colonialism and earlier. This broader historical perspective will be addressed in the next chapter. Because the study of African literature emerged as an academic discipline in the twentieth century, however, the focus here will be on that period. I will also examine issues more closely related to literature, such as texts in Arabic by authors from different areas of Africa, including Leila Abouzeid from Morocco and Tayeb Salih from Sudan. The trajectories of these authors’ works illustrate the impact of various forces such as criticism and the publishing industry on the separation between North and sub-Saharan African literatures.

Initially, one of the most prominent justifications for this separation was racial. Indeed, the term Black Africa was widely used before sub-Saharan became the preferred phrase. Although essentialist racial distinctions are no longer, consciously or not, an explicit basis for academic categories, they are nevertheless at the root of partitions in African literatures, in part due to the importance of Negritude in African literary scholarship. In most African literature courses, especially introductory classes, significant time is allocated to the Negritude poets. Pius Ngandu Nkashama, for example, wrote a book in 2000 on Negritude in the teaching of African literatures. Even in classes with a scope wide enough to include texts from ancient and pre-colonial periods, Negritude poets are often connected to the beginnings of African literature as an academic subject. From the 1932 first and only issue of *Légitime Défense*, to “Orphée Noir,” Jean Paul Sartre’s introductory essay to Senghor’s 1948 anthology of poetry, the literary and
political momentum of Negritude is set as the theoretical foundation for the launching of African literary studies, especially their francophone aspects, in the second half of the twentieth century. The racial dimension at the heart of Negritude, however, has contributed to the marginalization of North Africans. The issue is not a question of whether or not North Africans are black. Instead, the overall racial classification of North African peoples is awkwardly vague and difficult to fit precisely into a white/black paradigm, whereas the situation in sub-Saharan Africa is less ambiguous.

From the outset, Negritude was shaped by an idea of a black race. It was the Harlem Renaissance and black writers of the United States who initially influenced founders of Negritude such as Senghor, Césaire, and Damas, providing them with a sense of awareness and recognition of a black racial identity that binds African and Caribbean people (Kesteloot 80-2). The origin of African literature as an academic discipline was therefore construed from the outset along racial terms of “blackness,” regardless of the various meanings allocated to the word by different people at different times, and this literary category often reflects a racial perception. There has nonetheless been much criticism of essentialist readings of Negritude, and its founders have been open to the application of its theoretical framework to issues beyond racial considerations. In fact, they have generally been more open to inclusion rather than exclusion. In the global context of the struggles for independence and the waves of decolonization of the nineteen fifties and sixties, the designated status of “colonized” was a sufficient premise to be perceived through a race-based consciousness. In “New Ethnicities,” Stuart Hall identifies this as a “moment” in the black cultural politics of the second half of the twentieth century:
The term ‘black’ was coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain and came to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance, amongst groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities. (223)

Although in this case Stuart Hall is referring to Britain, France and its colonies were in an analogous situation. The imperialist discourse of sameness and uniformity imposed on colonized people was appropriated by the latter in a political effort to unify, and was put to use as an idiom of decolonization across the empire. As a result of these political sympathies, the imperative of race briefly lost its priority in favor of an emphasis on the struggle for independence throughout Africa. Yet, racial distinctions remained, and North Africans were not truly considered “black.”

Rather than engage in an analysis of the racial characteristics of North African peoples, following the examples of our colleagues in the field of human genetics (Manni et al.; Terreros et al.), I propose to examine the case of Frantz Fanon in order to illustrate better this shifting dynamic between race and decolonization. Although famously critical of Negritude, Fanon was exceedingly interested in race and wrote extensively on the topic of “blackness” in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) [*Black Skin, White Masks* (1967)] and “Antillais et africains” (1955) [“West Indians and Africans” (1967)]. Yet, his involvement in the Algerian struggle for independence is possibly one of the most vivid examples of the priority of decolonization over racial distinctions. As a result, the racial complexities of North Africa have sometimes been oversimplified when Fanon’s work is analyzed, and the situation in Algeria mistakenly imagined simply as one where black
people are colonized by white people. Diana Fuss, for instance, in her examination of Fanon’s work at the psychiatric hospital at Blida-Joinville in Algeria, writes that “over half of Fanon’s patients were white Europeans, the rest black Algerians” (36).

Yet, Fanon’s perspective on North Africans excluded them from the black race. It is apparent in his earlier writings that “North African” and “black” are two distinct categories. For instance, in the article “Le ‘Syndrome nord-africain’” [“The ‘North African Syndrome’”], first published in 1952 and later included in the 1964 collection of essays Pour la révolution africaine [Toward the African Revolution (1967)], Fanon addresses his colleagues in the medical profession on issues relating to diagnosing North African patients in France. In this article, he clearly approaches North Africans as a separate grouping to which he, a black man from Martinique, does not belong. Fanon also considers “Arabs” and “Negroes” as two different categories of patients when he criticizes racist practices among French doctors in the first chapter of Peau noire, masques blancs. It must be noted, however, that in spite of understanding “black” and “North African” to be separate, Fanon was not as interested in race classification as he was in theorizing the oppressive nature of colonialism. While it is in the Algerian situation that he was more active, the goal was ultimately the overthrowing of colonialism at large.

Although the fact that Fanon overlooks race issues in his later writings on Algeria is a sign of a possible epistemological rapprochement between North and sub-Saharan Africa, it also indicates the limitations of his views on North African societies. As John Mowitt has argued, Fanon’s ideas for Algerian nationalism were limited in the sense that they sometimes resulted in theories that bypassed the particularities of the Algerian
individual (169). Ultimately, in spite of the role of the shared experience of colonialism in bringing together North and sub-Saharan Africa for the common cause of decolonization, as political concerns changed, unaddressed racial issues and the enduring pairing of “Africa” with “blackness” contributed to perceptions of the lasting separation between North Africa and the rest of the continent.

As early as 1969, the *Premier festival culturel panafricain* [First Panafri

Cultural Festival] foretold this separation, although it was held, ironically, in Algiers. According to Mouralis, the festival in Algiers came as a reaction against the *Premier

festival mondial des arts nègres* [First World Festival of Negro arts] held in Dakar three years earlier. For Mouralis:

La tenue à Dakar du Premier Festival des arts Nègres avait permi

Sénégal d’apparaître comme l’un des principaux leaders culturels du monde noir [. . .]. Le principe même, tout d’abord, d’une manifestation portant sur les productions artistiques du monde noir et postulant par conséquent l’unité culturelle de celui-ci aboutissait à reconnaître une coupure entre l’Afrique maghrébine et l’Afrique subsaharienne. (457)

Holding the First World Festival of Negro arts in Dakar enabled Senegal to appear as one of the main cultural leaders of the Black world [. . .]. The very principle, to begin with, of a manifestation based on the artistic production of the black world and consequently postulating its cultural unity resulted in acknowledging a break between the Maghreb and sub-

Saharan Africa.
The Festival in Algiers, according to Mouralis, rather than being a genuine effort to maintain the bond between North and sub-Saharan Africa, was mainly a platform for detractors of Negritude, mostly from sub-Saharan African countries who were opposed to Senegal’s dominance over African cultural discourse. Subsequently, the involvement of North Africa in African cultural politics decreased.

The increasingly sharp distinction made between North and sub-Saharan Africa after the period of decolonization is also a reflection of the shifting political drives of pan-Arabism and pan-Africanism. The revolution of July 1952 in Egypt, which marked Gamal Abdul Nasser’s rise to power, came with a profound interest in strengthening the ties between Africa and the Arab world. Then, these were not necessarily seen as mutually exclusive entities, if only for geographical reasons. When Nasser wrote *Egypt’s Liberation: the Philosophy of the Revolution* in the nineteen fifties, he strongly believed in the strength and importance of the bond between Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa. As he outlined the three “circles”—Arab, African, and Muslim—that would frame the rise of Egypt, he wrote:

> I may say without exaggeration that we cannot, under any circumstance, however much we might desire it, remain aloof from the terrible and sanguinary conflict going on there between five million whites and 200 million Africans. We cannot do so for an important and obvious reason: we are in Africa. (109; English version cited as the Arabic is not readily available)

The 1952 revolution set an inspiring precedent that validated the decolonizing movements elsewhere in Africa. Consequently, as Abdul Aziz Jalloh points out, Nasser
was a spokesman for Africa at the Bandung Conference in 1955, and Radio Cairo started broadcasting in support of nationalist struggles across the continent (17-18). However, Egypt’s role and influence in Africa had withered by the beginning of the next decade. This was due in part to the fact that Egypt became concerned with unification with Syria and with the creation of the short-lived United Arab Republic, as well as to the rise of the new leader Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, who would take away from Nasser’s dominant role as an anti-colonialist hero. Quarrels over leadership in pan-Africanism and the emergence of rival groupings in the early nineteen sixties—the so-called Brazzaville Group, Casablanca Powers, and Monrovia States—also stood in the way of African unity (Legum 50-5), and contributed to widening the distance between North and sub-Saharan countries (Akinsanya 517). Subsequently, as most African states became independent, North African countries grew increasingly involved in Arab unity and concerned with issues that the rest of the continent considered extraneous, namely the conflict with Israel.

When it came to the Israel question, few sub-Saharan African countries took a position initially. As Ali Mazrui remarks:

But in general from 1957 to 1970 the deep ambivalence of black Africa towards the Arabs and the Israelis remained. Ideological differences among the Black Africans themselves helped to divide loyalties and sympathies. Even those Africans keenly sympathetic to the Arabs continued to have diplomatic and economic relations with Israel in spite of all. (“Africa” 77)

Since the 1970’s, however, sub-Saharan countries have become increasingly supportive of the Arab side in the conflict with Israel. Critics such as Mazrui have argued that this
support was unrelated to the oil crisis of 1973. Although the increase in Afro-Arab solidarity was already suggested by the fact that the 1972 Organization of African Unity Summit was held in Rabat, Morocco, economic pressures certainly played a role in influencing the position of African states on the Israel issue (Peters 44).

Besides the question of Israel, other issues further contributed to the separation between North and sub-Saharan Africa. They include the conflicts in Somalia and Sudan, countries that are members of both the Organization of African Unity (now the African Union) and the League of Arab States, as well as the dispute over Western Sahara, which caused Morocco to leave the Organization of African Unity in protest after it recognized the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic in 1984 (Jensen 33), and the delicate positions of both Arab and African leaders in the tense context of the 2003 U.S. attack on Iraq (Muchie 324). Therefore, in spite of a series of attempts by Libyan president Muammar Qaddafi to lead movements of African unity, and an enduring strand of pan-Africanism that rejects the separation between North and sub-Saharan Africa, to which Kwame Nkrumah for example adhered (Esedebe 229), trans-Saharan political ties never became as strong as the solidarity between countries on either side of the Sahara during the period of decolonization. These political tendencies find an echo in the general separation between North and sub-Saharan Africa in academic research. The result is that the category in which North African literature fits today is not obvious.

However, while these political frictions in the twentieth century are reflected in scholarship, the separation between North and sub-Saharan African literatures at that time is also related to literary factors. One of these is the rise of English as the major language of African literary criticism. When Keith Booker wrote that “the cultural traditions of
North Africa differ substantially from those of sub-Saharan Africa,” he also admitted, to his credit, that if he chose not to include North African authors in his book on the African novel it was “not because they are not African” (ix). Rather, it was because he felt that his targeted readers were mostly English-speaking students who would be more comfortable reading books by authors from the former British colonies of Africa. Additionally, the adoption of postcolonialism as a theoretical framework for African literary criticism contributed to the separation between North and sub-Saharan Africa due to the English language being, as Madeleine Dobie has called it, the *lingua franca* of postcolonial theory (32). According to her, postcolonial theory, initially shaped in English departments in British and American universities, is founded on key texts in English, and has generally centered on the former British colonies (32). Consequently, North Africa became a neglected area in English-oriented African literary scholarship.

This neglect is also largely due to the British publishers’ role in classifying the literature of their empire. Following the success of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, the development of the Heinemann African Writers series, with Achebe as its first director, was crucial in establishing the canon of postcolonial African literature. Although there were other venues for the publication of African literature in English, such as Longman’s own African Writers series and Oxford University Press’s Three Crowns series, Heinemann’s African Writers series, as Becky Clarke notes, seems “to possess a greater canonizing power in African academia” (165-6). Clark also reminds us that “when Heinemann, alongside other publishing companies, came to Africa, it was largely, if inadvertently, to fulfill a colonial mission” (163), as the imposition of the British system of education throughout the colonies opened a new market for British publishers.
The African works that Heinemann published were thus predominantly written in English originally (although several works in translation were included), and came from the same former British colonies where Heinemann hoped to sell its books. Because of the limited colonial presence of Britain in North Africa, the literature of the latter was not considered high priority. In the early years of the series, the very few works originally written in Arabic that were published by Heinemann were predominantly by authors from Egypt, which is the only country in North Africa with significant colonial ties to Great Britain. Even though more Egyptian authors were later added, the British publisher showed an inclination towards mapping its African literature publications according to a narrowing view inherited from the colonial experience.

Heinemann’s role in excluding North Africa from the canon of African literature is illustrated by the case of the Sudanese author Tayeb Salih’s *Mawsim al-hijra ila al-shamal* (1969) [*Season of Migration to the North* (1969)]. The novel has demonstrated strong staying power, and quickly started generating a large body of scholarship, most notably the 1976 volume edited by Ahmad Sa‘eed Muhammadiyya that hailed Salih as ‘*Abqari al-riwaya al-‘arabiyya* [The genius of the Arabic novel], or Mona Takieddine Amyuni’s 1985 casebook on *Season of Migration to the North*, and Waïl Hassan’s more recent book *Tayeb Salih: Ideology and the Craft of Fiction* (2003). It is when Salih’s novel was translated into English by Denys Johnson-Davis and published in the Heinemann African Writers series in 1969 that it established its author’s reputation internationally, and in this translation it has since become a staple of many classes outside of literature departments—religious studies, women’s studies, and history. Farouk Topan, for instance, has written about his use of the novel in a multidisciplinary class
entitled “Islamic Religious culture in Sub-Saharan Africa” at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London.

The novel itself and the circumstances surrounding the publication of its translation show how the geopolitical position of the Sudan is ambiguous from a British perspective, and how Africa and the Arab World are considered to be two mutually exclusive spaces. In Denys Johnson-Davies’s autobiography *Memories in Translation*, there are conflicting stories about the publication of the English translation, *Season of Migration to the North*, which, we learn, was not easy to publish. According to Johnson-Davies:

I had neither the necessary contacts nor the time and patience to send the manuscript to various publishers. It was much easier to have it published in the Arab Authors series that I myself had created. (84)

The short-lived Arab Authors series, mentioned earlier in the autobiography, was launched by Johnson-Davies and Heinemann editor James Currey and dedicated to translations of modern Arabic literature. This is the series where, as Johnson-Davies had mentioned before, *Season of Migration to the North* was published:

In the case of Tayeb himself, I was grateful to have the Arab Authors series at my disposal, otherwise, his novel *Season of Migration to the North* might well have remained unpublished. (58)

Yet, prior to this, when initially talking about the creation of the Arab Authors series, Johnson-Davies had written:

James [Currey] was the editor of the still popular African Writers series. I had been able to include in this series books by a number of Arab writers
who happened to be African, writers such as Naguib Mahfouz, Tewfik al-Hakim, and Tayeb Salih. (47)

While this confusion is simply due to Salih’s novel having appeared in both series, a fact that could be taken on a superficial level as an example of not separating North and sub-Saharan African literature, it remains nonetheless symptomatic of an outlook that considers African and Arab literatures to be two discreet entities, and for which *Season of Migration to the North*, as a novel from the Sudan, a sub-Saharan yet Arabic-speaking country with a split identity, poses classification problems. Interestingly enough, this situation is also reflected in the novel itself, and, more particularly, in the protagonist Mustafa Sa’eed’s sexual conquests, which illustrate the paradox of African and Arab being conflicting circles, a situation of which Sudan is a particularly telling example.

The narrator of *Season of Migration to the North* is a nameless Sudanese man who returns home after completing a doctorate in Literature in Britain and obtains a post in the ministry of education in Khartoum. The novel opens upon his return from Britain to his small native village in the south of Sudan. He is exhilarated at familiar scenes that he has missed during his long stay abroad. The only thing that he finds has really changed about his village is the presence of a stranger, Mustafa Sa’eed, who has settled there and married a local woman, Hosna Bint Mahmoud. The narrator grows very curious about this stranger, who is apparently perfectly integrated into the little village’s rural population, and his curiosity reaches a peak on a certain evening when he hears him drunkenly recite poetry in perfectly fluent English. Intrigued, the narrator asks Mustafa Sa’eed for his story. For the remainder of the novel, the reader reconstitutes Sa’eed’s
story from fragments that the narrator recollects or hears from other people who have known him. Mustafa Sa’eed was an excellent pupil in colonial school, which enables him to go to Cairo for three years, then to Gordon College in London, where he becomes a brilliant student. In Cairo, Mustafa Sa’eed stays with the Robinsons, a European couple, and his quasi-Oedipal relationship with Mrs. Robinson would be the blue-print for his sexual activity in London.

In England, Mustafa Sa’eed cultivates an aura of Afro-oriental charm, and easily seduces various English women, three of whom end up committing suicide. His very active sexual life is a psychological counter-colonial response, whereby he colonizes the colonizer by having sex with European women. What is particularly interesting for our purposes, however, is his modus operandi when it comes to seducing them. Realizing that he can easily get British women to sleep with him when he validates their fantasies, he cultivates an aura of exotic charm that he employs in his mass seduction project. About Isabella Seymour, one of the women he seduces, he says:

وجاءت لحظة أحست فيها أنني انقلب في نظرها مخلوقًا بدنيًا عاريًا، يمسك بيده رمحًا، وبالآخرى نشابًا، يصيد الغيلة والأسود في الأدغال. هذا حسن. [. . .] وسألتني: "ما جنسك؟ هل أنت أفريقي أم آسيوي؟". قلت لها: "أنا مثل عطيل. عربى أفريقي". (05)

I felt I had been transformed in her eyes into a naked, primitive creature, a spear in one hand and arrows in the other, hunting elephants and lions in the jungles. This was fine. [. . .] “What race are you?” she asked me. “Are
you African or Asian?‖ I’m like Othello – Arab-African,” I said to her.

(38)

Mustafa Sa’eed meets another one of the women he will seduce, Ann Hammond, at a lecture he gives at Oxford on the Persian poet Abu Nuwas. That lecture is a perfect illustration of his persona, for the content of the lecture, he says, was “all arrant nonsense with no basis of fact” (143). As he confesses:

لكني كنت ملهما في تلك الليلة، أحس بالأكاذيب تتدفق على لسانى كأنها معان سامية. و كنت أحس بالنشوة تسري مني إلى الجمهور، فأمضى في الكذب. (117)

I was inspired that evening and found the lies tripping off my tongue like sublime truths. Feeling that my elation was communicating itself to my audience, I lied more extravagantly. (143)

Since Mustafa Sa’eed’s subject matter is destined for an audience that cannot judge its accuracy, and because he is perceived as authentic and presumed to be knowledgeable, he has great freedom in manipulating his listeners. It is the same method that he applies when seducing women. Yet, the geographical foundation of his persona remains hazy. The way he decorates his apartment is highly symbolic in that regard, as his home in London is crowded with pictures and bric-a-brac that evoke a wide variety of locations:

وكر الأكاذيب الفادحة، التي بنيتها عن عمد، أكذوبة أكذوبة. الصندل والندور، وريش النعام وتماثيل العاج والأبنوس والصور والرسوم لغابات النخل
the den of lethal lies: the sandalwood and incense; the ostrich feathers and ivory and ebony figurines; the paintings and drawings of forests of palm trees along the shores of the Nile, boats with sails like doves' wings, suns setting over the mountains of the Red sea, camel caravans wending their way along sand dunes on the borders of the Yemen, baobab trees in Kordofan, naked girls from the tribes of the Zandi, the Nuer and the Shuluk, fields of banana and coffee on the Equator, old temples in the district of Nubia; Arabic books with decorated covers written in ornate kufic script; Persian carpets, pink curtains, large mirrors on the walls, and coloured lights in the corners. (146)

If Mustafa Sa’eed is able to seduce many women, it is because, being from a liminal country such as Sudan, he is equally capable of appealing to the women who are fascinated by the exoticism of Africa, those who are intrigued by the worlds of Arab and
Persian fairy tales, and those who, while curious about a magical oriental realm, are unclear as to where exactly it is located. Thus, through Mustafa Sa’eed’s sexuality, *Season of Migration to the North* constitutes a fictional reflection of British confusion regarding African and Arab identities that become mingled in the case of Sudan. This confusion is also found in the imperial outlook echoed in Heinemann’s general tendency to classify African and Arab literatures differently, which resulted in Salih’s novel being published twice in two separate series.

While it is tempting to blame ideology and politics as the sole drives behind Heinemann’s negligence about publishing North African literature in the African Writers Series, economic factors should also be taken into account, and are especially relevant when we consider that schools have been one of Heinemann’s main outlets for the series. As pointed out by Camille Lizarribar Buxo:

> During its first 25 years, the [African Writers] Series had relied on the educational African markets, which would choose certain novels and use them as set books within the schools’ curriculums. In this manner, African governments became the primary clients and books were assured a profit.

(178)

According to Buxo, when the African Writers Series was re-launched in 1987 under the editorship of Vicky Unwin after the departure of James Currey in 1984, it became geared towards increasing profits by reaching beyond the academic clientele. Nevertheless, books published in the African Writers Series are most effectively marketable in English-speaking countries, and, therefore, publishing books written originally in English, by African authors from previous British colonies where English is known commonly
enough (meaning none from North Africa), is more cost-effective as it saves on translation expenses.

In the case of former French colonies in Africa, although the Parisian publishing houses Présence Africaine and L’Harmattan are to an extent the equivalent of the Heinemann African Writers Series, many francophone African authors were in a different situation from their English-speaking counterparts in that they were published by houses in France that did not specialize in African literature exclusively. According to Bernard Mouralis, many West African authors were published by French publishers such as Julliard, Plon, Seuil, and Gallimard who did not focus on any single literature (149). In L’Edition africaine en France, Elsa Schifano also notes that sub-Saharan African authors have had their works published by specialized houses, as well as non specialized ones such as Hatier, Le Serpent à Plumes, and Albin Michel (81-107). Similarly, francophone writers from the former French colonies in North Africa, that is, the Maghreb, have had their works published by various houses that did not necessarily specialize in the literature of that area. According to Mouralis:

Ce phénomène d’intégration à la vie littéraire française apparaît avec beaucoup plus de netteté lors des rééditions en séries « de poche ». En effet, dans ce cas là, si elle assure à l’œuvre africaine une audience que l’auteur n’imaginait guère lors de la publication initiale et dont on ne peut d’ailleurs que se féliciter, la diffusion massive, de quelques œuvres africaines disperses et noyées dans des collections comportant plusieurs milliers de titres, contribue en même temps à masquer aux yeux des lecteurs le lien qui peut unir entre elles ces œuvres. (149)
This phenomenon of integration into French literary life appears all the more clearly with re-edicitions in mass-market paperbacks. Indeed, in such a case, the African work is given an audience that the author could never have imagined at the time of the first edition. However, although this is praiseworthy, the mass distribution of a few African works dispersed and buried within series that include thousands of titles contributes at the same time to hide from the eyes of readers the link that these works could share.

If, as Mouralis argues, the links between various sub-Saharan African works are overlooked, the possible links between North and sub-Saharan African books are all the more unnoticed. Consequently, although the role of the metropolitan publishing industry in establishing a canon for regional literatures is less obvious in the case of France than it is in that of Britain, the distinction between North and sub-Saharan Africa is nonetheless extremely marked among French publishers. Moreover, in the case of those who do specialize in African literature, the focus is typically on sub-Saharan Africa, or, in the rare instances when North African authors are included, they appear in a separate series. L’Harmattan, for example, the publishing house and bookstore founded in 1975 that specializes largely in African subjects, does publish North African works but usually includes them in a separate series on the Middle East and the Arab World, regardless of whether they have been translated from Arabic or written originally in French.

In comparison with African literature in English, however, francophone African literature lends itself more readily to scholarly approaches that do not distinguish between North and sub-Saharan Africa due to the linguistic connection between the Maghreb and
West Africa. As indicated earlier, francophone scholars such as Hédi Bouraoui, Mildred Mortimer, and Hélène Tissières have conducted comparative studies of North and sub-Saharan African literatures, but this francophone framework does not account for other significant languages that are intimately connected to the use of French in those areas. In the case of the Maghreb, Arabic rarely benefits from critical attention in spite of its importance to francophone authors from the region.

When the Tunisian writer Albert Memmi was compiling the *Anthologie des écrivains maghrébins d’expression française* in 1964, his opinion was that Maghrebi literary production in French was not apt to endure. In fact, Memmi felt that the emergence of a generation of autochthonous North African writers in French—by opposition to French writers like André Gide or even Albert Camus whose North African background was incidental—deserved to be anthologized precisely because it was likely to vanish as history took its course. Memmi’s position at the time is consistent with contemporary post-independence sentiments in the Maghreb, as well as with the ensuing rise of Arabization, the policy of promoting Arabic language and culture in reaction against the colonial cultural aftermath, which has been studied in great detail by Gilbert Grandguillaume in *Arabisation et politique linguistique au Maghreb*. Yet, although Arabic-language literature in the Maghreb has been growing since the nineteen sixties, Maghrebi literature in French has endured, despite Memmi’s prediction. As it happens, francophone Maghrebi texts are better known outside of North Africa than Arabic-language ones, which accounts for why francophone North Africa has received significant critical attention on the part of literary scholars, especially in Europe and North America, whereas Arabic-language Maghrebi literature has not. This is due in part,
as Mildred Mortimer has argued, to the well-organized distribution systems of French publishers (Maghrebian Mosaic 4), against which Arabic publishers can hardly compete on international markets. However, Maghrebi literature in Arabic has not received adequate attention on the part of critics of modern Arabic literature either. This calls for questioning whether or not Arabic literature is an appropriate classification for the Maghreb, even in the case of literary works in Arabic.

In order to understand better the situation of North Africa in contemporary Arabic literature, it is necessary to start by addressing the singular position of Egypt, and its centrality to Arabic literary activity in the last century. In fact, many consider the country to be separate from the rest of North Africa due to Egypt’s importance in modern Arabic literature. The beginning of the modern era for Arabic literature is usually associated with to the end of the eighteenth century, and, more particularly, the French campaign in Egypt starting in 1798. Modern Arabic literature is generally believed to have stemmed from the contact between European and classical Arabic literary traditions (Badawi; Haywood; Allen). The beginning of the Nahda—a term usually translated as renaissance—of Arabic literature is then traced to the dynasty of Muhammad Ali which followed the departure of the French, although there is hardly any agreement among scholars regarding the precise starting point of Modern Arabic literature at large, or the Nahda in Egypt in particular. One noteworthy work associated with this period is Takhlis al-ibriz li talkhis bariz by Hasan al-Tahtawi, in which he records his experiences in Paris in the eighteen twenties. By the twentieth century, modern literature in Egypt matured and the output in poetry became significant. The publication of Muhammad Husayn Haykal’s Zaynab in 1913 marks the rise of the novel in Egypt and the beginning of an
increase in the country’s literary importance in contemporary literature in Arabic, although Eliott Colla has argued that *Zaynab* was not canonized as the first Arabic novel immediately after its publication, but much later, notably after its film adaptations.

As Egypt assumed a leading literary role in Arabic literature in the twentieth century, the rest of North Africa took a position of secondary importance. This vision of North Africa outside of Egypt as being of lesser consequence from a literary perspective has endured, perhaps particularly so in the case of Morocco, as the words for Maghreb and Morocco in Arabic are the same, *al-maghrib*, meaning the occident. Although distinctions are sometimes made through the use of the pluralized form *al-maghārib* when referring to the Maghreb in general, or by adopting the broader *al-maghrib al-ʿarabī* [*The Arab Maghreb*], it frequently remains ambiguous in Arabic texts and conversations whether the subject is the country or the broader region. This homonymy accentuates the fact that Morocco sometimes serves as a metonymy for the entire Maghreb, and Moroccan literature in Arabic is seen as emblematic of literature from all the western area of the Arab World.

This belief that Arabic literature west of Egypt is of lesser consequence is usually explained by the prevalence in the Maghreb of languages other than Arabic. Berber, which deeply permeates colloquial Arabic in the region, is very important in that regard. However, as indicated earlier, it is the French language, inherited from the colonial period, that scholars such as Roger Allen have invoked as a factor in setting aside Maghrebi literature today (44), in spite of the fact that many Egyptian writers since al-Tahtawi have also had connections to France (such as Ahmad Shawqi and Taha Hussein,
to name only two), and Jean-Jacques Luthi wrote an introduction to Egyptian literature in French from 1798 to 1945.

The case of the Moroccan author Leila Abouzeid challenges the notion that this distinction between Egypt and the rest of North Africa is based on a strictly linguistic factor, because she not only writes in Arabic exclusively, but she is also firmly against the use of French in Moroccan literature. In the nineteen eighties, at a time when many novelists from the Maghreb were writing in French, Abouzeid made a conscious political statement by choosing not to write in the former colonizer’s language. She has been very outspoken about her stance. Her first novel, ʿĀm al-ṣīl (1983), enjoyed a respectable success, especially after it was translated as Year of the Elephant by Barbara Parmenter and published in 1989 simultaneously by The American University in Cairo and the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. In addition to a considerable popularity as a textbook in various literature and women’s studies classes in North America, the novel has also received some critical attention, most notably from Michael Hall and Salah Moukhlis.

Abouzeid’s decision to write in Arabic was consistent with a conscious personal rejection of the French language that she traces back to her school days. In the introduction to her novel al-Fasl al-akhir [The Last Chapter], she recalls being in the fourth grade at the Mohammed Guessous private school in Rabat where instruction was conducted in both French and Arabic:

كنت أكره القراءة بهذه الأخيرة [اللغة الفرنسية] والتكلم به خارج الصف.

كنت، منذ تلك السن المبكرة قد اتخذت موقفاً من لغة المستعمر، بوعي أو
I loathed reading in French and developed an aversion to using it outside the classroom. This early position against the language of the colonialist proved fortunate, as it kept me from becoming one of the post-colonial Maghrebi writers producing a national literature in a foreign language.

(153)

Leila Abouzeid writes in Arabic primarily because she considers the French language responsible for the ills of postcolonial literature in the Maghreb, which is consistent with the prevailing view in Modern Arabic literature on that region. In fact, Abouzeid is almost apologetic about knowing French, and often tries to justify it, such as in this passage from the English edition of her autobiography *al-Rujū’ ila al-tufūla* [Return to Childhood], which, although different and slightly more detailed than in the Arabic edition, shows Abouzeid’s insistence that it was her father’s decision and not hers to learn the language of the colonizers:

Colonialism had ended and French was no longer imposed upon us, but my father had decided that we should learn it anyway, because facility in that language had acquired another significance: it meant knowledge of a European language—and that, my father believed, was important. (80)

When it comes to using a European language, Abouzeid prefers English, and she is herself a graduate of the English department at Mohammed V University in Rabat,
Morocco. When confronted about the fact that English too is a language associated with imperialism, she retorts that it is the language of a form of colonialism with which she personally had no direct contact (*The Last Chapter* 154). She accordingly has many links to the United States and Great Britain. She has worked as a correspondent for the Arabic service of the B. B. C., and has translated *The Sultan of Morocco*, Rom Landau’s biography of Mohammed V, and also Malcolm X’s autobiography from English to Arabic. Abouzeid also published accounts of travel, the first to Great Britain, entitled *Bad‘ sunablât khadra* (1979), and the second to the United States, entitled *Amrîca, al-wâjîh al-âkhar* (1986). As for French in her bilingual education, Abouzeid insists in her autobiography that it was the Arabic part of her schooling that she preferred:

من أول العام ظهر ميلي إلى العربية وتفوقي فيها. ولا أعرف أيهما نتج عن الآخر. (132)

From the very beginning my inclination towards Arabic was obvious. I excelled in it. I don’t know whether I excelled in it because I loved it, or loved it because I excelled in it. (80)

The rejection of all things French is even addressed thematically in her first novel. *‘Ām al-fîl* centers around Zahra, a woman who, after being repudiated by her husband, returns to her hometown to reflect on her life and gather herself in order to move on. The narrative unfolds following Zahra’s memories, particularly of her active involvement in her country’s struggle for independence, for which she received no recognition, unlike male resistance fighters such as her husband Mohammed. The subject of French
colonialism is in itself a factor that links the novel less to the Middle East than to West Africa, where the colonial experience permeated most of the literary repertory of the last half century. Through Zahra’s anamnesis, the reader also learns of her husband’s character and the events that led to her repudiation for no apparent reason. After Morocco’s independence, because he had been active in the resistance, Mohammed is rewarded with an important position in the government. He then behaves like a nouveau riche and adopts manners and a lifestyle associated with the French. Zahra, on the contrary, clings to her cultural identity. Her insistence on maintaining her eating manners is highly symbolic in that regard:

He ate with a fork and I with my fingers. The sound of his fork hitting the plate stopped and I looked up. Again he was glaring as if he wanted to kill me. I stood up, tipping over my chair which crashed to the floor.
―You don’t like me eating with my fingers? It doesn’t please you that I sit with the servants? We fought colonialism in their name and now you think like the colonizers!‖ (54)

This episode on eating manners, as well as the symbolic move of Mohammed into a house previously owned by colonizers, illustrates the change in behavior that conflicts with his wife’s attitude. Although he says that he doesn’t have a reason to repudiate Zahra, she realizes that he repudiated her because she had become an anomaly in his new French-style life, or, as she says, “These days my husband needs a wife who will offer cigarettes to his guest” (54). On this issue, Abouzeid wrote in the introduction to her other novel _al-Fasl al-akhīr:_

"حياة المغرب الموالية للاستقلال مباشرة كان فيها العشرات من أمثال زهرة، نساء شاركن في المقاومة بجانب أزواجهن ثم طلقن بعد الاستقلال لأن الأزواج رقوا السلام الاجتماعي بدون مراحل وأصبحت زوجاتهم في نظرهم بلديات وعاجزات عن التأخر مع أسلوب حياتهم البرجوازية الجديدة. (8)"

Immediately following independence, there were many like Zahra in Morocco. Women who participated in the resistance alongside their husbands and were then repudiated after independence because their husbands climbed the social ladder abruptly, and their wives became
unsophisticated to their eyes, and incapable of acclimating to their new bourgeois lifestyle.

Abouzeid’s criticism here is directed at the Moroccan neocolonial bourgeoisie, brilliantly described and analyzed by John Waterbury in *The Commander of the Faithful*. The social behavioral pattern of the Moroccan neocolonial elite is marked by an adoption of French culture, and the preferred use of French instead of Arabic, which, as noted, is a key factor in the marginalization of the Maghreb in modern Arabic literature studies. The choice of Arabic over French on Abouzeid’s part, as Michael Hall and Elizabeth Fernea have noted, also indicates a desire to reach Arabic-speaking audiences. Yet, in spite of a zealous rejection of French, the lesser value attached to literatures of the Maghreb in Arabic prevents authors such as Abouzeid from getting sufficient critical attention within Arabic contexts. There is still a stigma attached to literatures of the Maghreb at large and of Morocco in particular, and North Africa is accordingly divided into two opposing poles: Egypt, at the center, and the Maghreb as the periphery.

In the introduction to *al-Fasl al-Akhīr*, Abouzeid tells an anecdote about an Egyptian professor who, upon reading ‘Ām al-fīl, said that “she could have been one of the best Arab women writers if she were not Moroccan” (157). This exclamation, which may seem peculiar to those unfamiliar with contemporary cultural dynamics in the Arab world, is in fact symptomatic of the stigma attached to Morocco and the Maghreb in counterpoint to Egypt’s centrality in modern Arabic literature. Abouzeid goes on to comment that if this Egyptian professor’s remark is bizarre, it accurately reveals the perspective of the Eastern Mediterranean on the Maghreb and Morocco:
Bizarre words, but they are true, and reflect the view of the Levant on the Maghreb. A view marked by ignorance and a sense of superiority. What this professor intended was that if I were Lebanese, or Egyptian, or Syrian, I would not have been known in the West before I became known in the East.

The persistence of this marginalization of the Maghreb in modern Arabic literature, which resulted in Abouzeid’s receiving critical attention in the United States before she was noticed in the broader Arab world, is particularly anomalous considering her relationship to French.

While it is reasonably conceivable—although problematic nonetheless—that Arab writers of French expression generate less interest on the part of Arab literary critics, the fact that works written in Arabic but from francophone zones, like Leila Abouzeid’s novel, are also looked down upon is evidence of the paradoxical position of North African literature between Africa and the Arab world. Accordingly, to call attention to this paradox, I prefer to describe North African literature in Arabic as arabophone rather than Arab. As the expression francophone literature often effectively means “not quite French,” and differentiates between France and its colonies, the term “arabophone” is meant to underscore the subordinate position of North Africa in the Arab literary
hierarchy, and the status of the area’s literatures as “not quite Arab.” Rather than confirm this hierarchy, however, I suggest the use of arabophone to denote the importance and validity of North African literature’s identity. Just as francophone literature has challenged the teleological centrality of France, and has accordingly shed the “francophone” appellation in favor of the more assertive “World Literature in French,” the term arabophone, in my usage, reflects and denounces the implication in Arabic literature today that North Africa is still peripheral.

Additionally, while francophone authors from the Maghreb found avenues to publish their works in France, the arabophone literary production of the region, despite being marginalized by Arabic literary criticism as mentioned above, often had to turn to publishing houses in precisely such countries as Egypt and Lebanon. Consequently, they had to cater to an audience with less familiarity with culture and society in the Maghreb. This aspect of literary production impacted and contributed to shape arabophone literature in North Africa, and widen the gap between francophone and arabophone literary production in the Maghreb. Although the publishing industry in Arabic is not as obviously tied to a colonial project as it is in Britain or France, the fact that the most prominent publishers are located in the eastern Mediterranean also contributes to the marginalization of North African literature. Further research still needs to be done concerning the Arabic publishing industry, but one example illustrates the rapport between Maghrebi authors and Arabic publishers outside the Maghreb. When Leila Abouzeid finished her autobiography *al-Rujūʿ ila al-tufūla*, she contacted a Lebanese publisher who said disappointedly that he wished her work had been the French actress Brigitte Bardot’s memoirs instead. This anecdote suggests that, if this publisher is
representative, there is little interest in the Arab world for the arabophone literatures of the Maghreb.

The trajectory of Mohamed Choukri’s *al-Khubz al-hāfi* is another example that is somewhat characteristic of the reputation of arabophone literature. A well known literary figure in Morocco, Choukri was a close friend of Jean Genet, Tennessee Williams, and Paul Bowles. Illiterate until he reached his twenties, Choukri became a teacher, and, eventually, he became known in literary and public circles for his active social life and love of good food and drink. This is not to suggest that there was no literary value to his work, for *Al-Khubz al-hāfi* is, without a doubt, a masterpiece of modern Arabic literature, and has been translated into thirty nine languages (Jay 133). Although Choukri’s novel has reached an important position in Arabic literary circles today, its importance is mostly due to the notoriety of its author and the controversy surrounding the prevalence of lewd sexuality in the narrative, including explicit descriptions of sodomy and homosexual fellatio. In addition, the sudden removal of Choukri’s novel from the syllabus of a course on modern Arabic Literature at the American University in Cairo in 2005 under unclear circumstances contributed to the novel’s sensational reputation.

It is very significant that it was only after the manuscript had been translated into English by Paul Bowles as *For Bread Alone* (1973), and into French by Tahar Ben Jelloun as *Le Pain nu* (1980), that the novel was published in Arabic for the first time (1982). As Ben Jelloun notes in his preface to the French edition:

> Ce n’est pas un hasard si le manuscrit de ce récit a été refusé par les maisons d’édition dans le monde arabe. Il faut dire que ce que raconte Choukri fait partie de ce genre de choses qui ne se disent pas, qu’on tait,
ou du moins qui ne s’écrivent pas dans les livres et encore moins dans la littérature arabe actuelle. (iii)

It is no coincidence if the manuscript of this narrative has been rejected by publishing houses in the Arab world. We have to bear in mind that what Choukri relates is among the things that one does not say, that one keeps unspoken, or at least that one does not write in books, and especially not in today’s Arabic literature.

In fact, the original Arabic version of the book was banned in Morocco until 2001, while the French translation was widely available because it was considered acceptable to address these themes in languages other than Arabic. Besides Choukri’s overall penchant for pornographic writing, the fact that he was illiterate until he reached his twenties, and his extensive use of colloquial Moroccan Arabic rather than a language more readily accessible to readers (and critics) in the Middle East, all contribute to his writings’ reputation, and that of arabophone literature by extension, as a lesser form of expression in the broader realm of modern Arabic literature. The differences in status held by regional colloquial forms of Arabic and a standard literary form of the language are also particularly important in that regard, and will be analyzed in more depth in the third chapter.

In spite of the fact that North Africa has been generally neglected by African literary scholars, North African literature is suited to be studied within an African literature framework because the distance that the recent political climate created between Africa and the Arab World does not permeate literary and artistic dimensions.
Yet, this political environment has served to relocate North Africa in the Middle East, which has not yielded a satisfactory framework for the study of arabophone North African literatures. While on the one hand North Africa has been perceived from a political perspective to grow increasingly distant from sub-Saharan Africa since the period of decolonization, the Maghreb, on the other hand, is also considered to be distant from the rest of the Arab World.

The evidence presented in this chapter suggests a growing need to bridge the divide between North and sub-Saharan Africa, devote more attention to the southern Mediterranean shore from an African perspective, and look at the continent as a whole from a more comparative perspective. The addition of the arabophone zone as a recognized language area of African expression is necessary to advance the study of North African texts as related to Arabic literature, even if they are not yet recognized as such because of their connection to sub-Saharan Africa. Such an arabophone framework will complement the francophone connection between North and West Africa. Considering arabophone literature to be African is essential, because no serious study of this area can be complete without taking into consideration its connection to the rest of the continent on the basis of more than one language. A comparative approach will lead to a more complete coverage of North Africa’s literary output. Furthermore, the addition of an arabophone dimension to the scope of African literary scholarship will advance our understanding of African literature at large, because Arabic has played an important role in shaping the cultural and literary landscape of a significant part of sub-Saharan Africa as well. As a first step in that direction, the next chapter will explore the place of Islam in African literature north and south of the Sahara.
Islam has been a fundamental factor in the separation between North and sub-Saharan Africa. More specifically, the prevailing conjecture that Islam has essentially the status of an indigenous religion in North Africa, but not south of the Sahara, has resulted in two basic assumptions that must be rectified. The first is that Islam’s importance to North African societies is of such enormity that no pre-Islamic elements remain in the literature from the area today. Second is that the impact of the religion on sub-Saharan societies and their literatures is superficial in comparison, because Islam there is a case of syncretism. This erroneous set of viewpoints means that sub-Saharan Islamic practices are actually a cluster of imported and local religious practices, which implies that each of these two components exists unadulterated elsewhere, and appears only as a corrupted faith south of the Sahara.

However, Islam has acted as a unifying force between North and sub-Saharan Africa, rather than a dividing one. The religion has served as a common cultural foundation shared by peoples on either side of the Sahara. Among the most visible indications of this is the fact that Malikism, the most prevailing school of Islamic law, is not geographically limited to one side only of the Sahara. This is also valid for various African Sufi orders. Islam has been an agent of rapprochement between North and sub-Saharan Africa on various levels, including from a literary perspective. Two questions to raise, then, are whether there are pre-Islamic elements in North African literatures today, and, if so, do they reveal cultural traditions in a region that is thought of as exclusively
Islamic? Conversely, to what extent does Islam south of the Sahara play a role in the
distinction between North and sub-Saharan Africa in scholarly outlooks on the continent?

Although Islam has sometimes been used as a justification for the differential
treatment of literatures on either side of the Sahara, literary practices show that Islam in
Africa, both north and south of the Sahara, is in an ongoing process of formation rather
than being an imported religion corrupted by sub-Saharan practices but not by North
African ones. In order to investigate the links between the literatures of North and sub-
Saharan Africa, it is therefore useful to explore the breadth and depth of Islam in both
areas, starting with the arrival of the religion on the continent. I will then focus more
closely on texts recorded from oral sources as well as written, and in particular on *La
Mère du printemps*, a novel by the Moroccan author Driss Chraïbi published in 1982 (and
translated as *Mother Spring* by Hugh Harter in 1989). Chraïbi, more than any other writer
in the Maghreb, has portrayed Islam as a colonizing force and focused on revealing the
impact of the Arab conquest of North Africa on the original Berber societies in the
region. Although other North African authors, most notably the Algerian writer Kateb
Yacine, have included Berber characters in their works, Chraïbi is distinctive because he
explicitly addresses the arrival of Islam into North Africa through a fictionalized account
of the Arab conquest of the region in the seventh century. *La Mère du printemps* is
particularly noteworthy because it complements historical scholarship on this conquest,
and offers a literary perspective on the Islamic identity of North Africa.

Islam’s birthplace was, technically, the Hejaz area in the Arabian Peninsula.
Therefore, geographically, it is not an African religion in origin. The original inhabitants
of North Africa, known collectively as Berbers, are considered an ethnic group different
from the Arabs who brought Islam to the region. This geographical perspective, however, is limited. It is open to question whether or not the Arabian Peninsula—at the time as well as in the present day—is not part of the same cultural space as parts of what we think of today as Africa. Moreover, as Islam spread outside of the Hejaz, it became, among other things, what could be considered a fully fledged African religion in view of the extent to which it was shaped by non-Arab practices on that continent, regardless of the usual Saharan boundary. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the first recorded contact of Islam with the African continent came in the fifth year of Mohammed’s prophethood (circa 615 CE). This early contact shows the extent to which those living in the western and southern parts of the Arabian Peninsula at the time saw the Red Sea as a connecting artery rather than a boundary, and reveals the limitations of our considering it today as a dividing point between Asia and Africa. In the fifth year of his prophethood, then, and in the face of persecution by the Quraysh aristocracy in Mecca, Mohammed instructed some of his followers to seek asylum at the court of King Ashamah Negus, Christian king of Abyssinia (present day Ethiopia), who was known as a fair ruler (al-Mubarakpuri 100). In response, Mecca sought their extradition. This attempt proved unsuccessful, and the refugees stayed under the king’s protection in Abyssinia for many years until they rejoined the prophet in Medina. It is noteworthy that among Mecca’s envoys to Abyssinia was ‘Amr ibn al-‘Ās, a man of Abyssinian descent himself, who would later convert to Islam and play in important part in spreading the religion to Africa.

The initial interest in Africa after the prophet’s death came under the caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭâb who ruled for a period of ten years starting from 634 CE. The Islamic conquest of Africa was essentially a westward movement that started with the
conquest of Egypt following the enthusiastic efforts of ‘Amr ibn al-‘Ās. Much of what is known today of the conquest of Egypt is owed to the ninth century Egyptian scholar ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, who received most of his information from his father ‘Abd Allāh, an important figure of early Maliki law (Brockopp 2). Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam’s account, entitled Futūh Miṣr, was edited on the basis of all the manuscripts and published by Charles Torrey in 1922.

Egypt, which at the time of the conquests was part of the Byzantine Empire, came under Islamic control after a number of military campaigns by Arabs, followed by settlements in and about al-Fuṣṭāṭ and Alexandria. Two important moments stand out in the campaigns for this conquest: the first consists of the capture in 641 of the fortress of Bab al-Yun (Babylon) in the area at the southern tip of the Nile delta, where the city of Cairo is presently located. This area also comprised the city of Misr, which became the Arabic name for Egypt (as well as the word that Egyptians today prefer to Cairo when referring to their capital), and Heliopolis, site of an important battle, and presently a suburb of Cairo. The second moment was the surrender of Alexandria by a treaty, which sealed ‘Amr’s conquest of Egypt. Following the taking of Alexandria in 642, Arabs conducted raids towards the West in order to maintain a hold on the Egyptian conquests. The priority was not to gain territory or booty as much as it was to protect achievements in Egypt against the potential threat of the Byzantines who had possessions in the rest of North Africa (Butler 246; Taha 55). Various campaigns followed, and within seven decades the Arabs had taken control over the entire North African coastline.

Stories about the source of ‘Amr’s interest in Egypt and his persistence against all odds, including the caliph’s doubts in his ability to conquer it, are romanticized to a
considerable extent. These romanticizations present the conquest as a divinely foretold, inevitable destiny. When ‘Amr expressed interest in conquering Egypt for Islam, the caliph ‘Umar was hesitant. He allowed him to proceed but warned him that if he changed his mind he would send him a messenger, and if that messenger reached him before he reached Egypt himself, he was to return. ‘Umar did have second thoughts and sent a message to ‘Amr, but the latter guessed its contents and did not open it until he reached Egyptian lands, which enabled him to proceed without breaking his promise to the caliph (Torrey 56-7). ‘Amr’s interest in Egypt seems to have been chiefly economic, as the following story related by Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam suggests. Before the advent of Islam, ‘Amr had gone to Jerusalem to trade, and came across a man half dead from thirst on a very hot day. ‘Amr gave him a drink and the man lay down to sleep. While he was sleeping, a large snake came out of a hole next to him. ‘Amr saw it and killed it by shooting it with an arrow. When the man woke up and saw what had happened, he was grateful and convinced ‘Amr to come with him to his hometown of Alexandria where he would be able to reward him for saving his life twice, once from thirst and once from a deadly snake. It was then that ‘Amr was able to observe firsthand the wealth of Egypt (Torrey 54).

While the details of these mythologized stories usually call for little more than skepticism from a historical perspective, they are indicative of the construction of a discourse whereby the affiliation of North Africa to the Arab world is in a sense “meant to be.” The rhetoric of the conquests in Islamic historiographies can better inform us of the way in which this affiliation took place, starting with the very word by which these conquests are termed in Arabic: futūḥāt. As Bernard Lewis has argued in The Political
Language of Islam, although the ways in which early Islam spread have been called conquests, the Islamic tradition refers to them as *futūḥāt*, literally “openings” (93). According to Lewis, the *futūḥāt* were not seen as conquests in the sense of forceful territorial acquisitions, but as the “opening” of impious people to the rightful new revelation. The usage of the trilateral root *fīḥ* (open) connotes the legitimacy of these Islamic advances. In addition to this semantic point, and the stories legitimizing ‘Amr’s conquest of Egypt mentioned above, narratives of the conquest of Africa west of Egypt further illustrate the value of this kind of positive rhetoric in converting North Africa into Arab territory.

Just as the conquest of Egypt is associated with ‘Amr ibn al-‘Ās, the conquest of the rest of North Africa is associated with ‘Uqba ibn Nāfi’. ‘Uqba was Amr’s own nephew, and joined his first campaigns in the area that is modern day Libya, playing an important role in obtaining allegiance from the Luwata and Mazata Berber groups around Tripoli in 661 (Taha 58). His most important act was the founding of the city of Kairouan in modern day Tunisia (then known as Ifriqya, a term coming from the Latin appellation of the southern Mediterranean coast and initially applied to North Africa only, but from which the entire continent later took its name). Later on, ‘Uqba led a number of campaigns in the interior and west of Kairouane, mostly avoiding the Byzantine-held coastline, and went as far as the Atlantic Ocean before making his way back east and dying in battle against an army led by Kusayla, a Berber leader whom he had previously defeated. In terms of conquest, ‘Uqba’s expeditions west of Kairouan were of little consequence. They consisted mostly of raids for booty and slaves, particularly female slaves who, according to the fourteenth century scholar ibn ‘Idhari al-Marrakushi, were
so astonishingly beautiful that they fetched a handsome price back east (27). However, no arrangements were made for the collection of tributes or taxes or the establishment of outposts, and only two mosques (in Sus and Wadi Dra in Morocco) are attributed to him (ibn ‘Idhari al-Marrakushi 27). In fact, his raids may have impeded Arab progression as they drove some of the Berber tribes to unite in order to resist the invaders, most notably under the leadership of Kusayla and that of the renowned al-Kāhina [The Priestess]. It is only later that Arab presence in all of North Africa was cemented, largely through the efforts of leaders such as Ḥassan ibn al-Numan al-Ghassani and Musa ibn Nusayr starting in 698. Islam in North Africa was ultimately consolidated through the conversion of Berbers, who supported the conquests, and, in some instances, participated in them militarily as well.

There are two views on the end of this first phase of Muslim settlement of North Africa. The settlement of Tangiers circa 708 CE can be taken as a marker if we only look at the region geographically today. However, while the strait of Gibraltar may seem a logical frontier, it did not form a lasting obstacle, and the subsequent conquest of the southern Iberian Peninsula was part of the same, continuous movement, even though it was chiefly a Berber and not an Arab conquest, and Andalusia then became tied to the same cultural and political spheres as the western parts of North Africa for several centuries.

In any case, the endurance of the mythical dimension attached to ‘Uqba’s expedition is significant, even if his role in converting North Africa to Islam was not substantial historically. As Hugh Kennedy has pointed out, ‘Uqba is “credited in historical record and popular imagination with bringing Islamic rule to the Maghreb”
While some details surrounding ‘Uqba’s activities in North Africa have been the subject of thorough historical analyses, other stories about his North African campaigns have been noticed but generally regarded as folk tales and dramatic embellishments of secondary importance. Yet, these embellishments, which often occur in classical Arabic histories, reveal aspects that can be as informative as the purely historical dimension of these accounts (Lévi-Provençal 26, 29). In a typical example of such stories, ‘Uqba miraculously discovers a subterranean spring and brings relief from a lack of water after performing two rak‘at, prostrations that are part of the Muslim prayer, and invoking God (Torrey 195). These ornamental anecdotes, like those associated with ‘Amr’s conquest of Egypt, contribute to the claim of North Africa for the Arabs through the portrayal of ‘Uqba as victoriously and triumphantly controlling the vast region and overpowering its adversaries.

Two particular events stand out in that regard in addition to the miraculous discovery of a spring. The first one concerns the building of the settlement in Kairouan, and the second the moment in which ‘Uqba reached the Atlantic Ocean on his westbound campaign. Both of these events were narrated by Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam in the fifth division of his Futūḥ Miṣr, and filtered into popular imagination as well as subsequent histories. The first event, the settlement of Kairouan and the building of its mosque, came out of a desire not to reside among the local population, but to build a new city in which Muslims could settle (Kennedy, 209-10). When ‘Uqba ordered his men to start building, however, they refused, complaining that the site he had chosen, strategically removed from the sea and safe against possible naval attacks, was infested with lions. ‘Uqba then cried out to the beasts to leave his men alone out of respect for the members of his army who had
been companions of the prophet (Torrey 196). Ibn ‘Idhari al-Marrakushi narrates the event:

[‘Uqba] yelled out: “Listen snakes and lions! We are the companions of the messenger of God—Peace be upon him. So leave us, for we are coming and whatever we find after this we’ll kill!” The people then witnessed an astonishing thing, as the lions came out of the scrub carrying their cubs in obedience, and the wolves and the snakes likewise carrying their young. [. . .] The people of Ifriqya then lived forty years without seeing a single snake, scorpion or lion.

The other event to show ‘Uqba’ as a victor in North Africa that has subsisted in the popular imagination is his arrival at the Atlantic shore. ‘Uqba rode his horse into the ocean as far as he could, calling upon God to witness that he had gone as far as humanly possible to spread his religion (Torrey 199). The fact that his westward conquest could be stopped only by an impassable ocean underscores the divine will behind his endeavor.

According to ibn ‘Idhari al-Marrakushi:
[‘Uqba] went on until he reached the ocean, and he entered it until the waters reached his horse’s belly. He then raised his arms to the sky and said: “O God! Had the sea not prevented me, I would have continued on through the country unto the pass of Dhul Qarnayn [in the Quran, a figure who reached the setting place of the sun], defending Your faith and fighting whoever did not believe in You!”

Such accounts of ‘Uqba’s glorified triumph over the North African environment serve to present the conquest as divinely sanctioned, and emphasize the legitimacy of annexing North Africa to the Arab world. The westward spread of Islam is thus conceived as a Manifest Destiny, confirmed by divine signs (springs found miraculously, obedient lions etc.) and therefore inevitable. From this perspective, North Africa becomes a site of Arab culture. The indigenous inhabitants of the area were provided with new origin myths and narratives that came from the East, and that legitimized their inclusion in the same community as the Arabs (Hannoum, 2001).

This perceived cultural map, whereby North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Eastern Mediterranean are bound in Arab identity by virtue of religion, is in contradiction with the predominance of Islam in a large part of sub-Saharan Africa. If North Africa has become thought of mainly as Arab territory, the vast area in sub-
Saharan Africa where Islam is predominant, by opposition, remained seen as a different world. Yet, Islam’s influence reached into various sub-Saharan societies in as permanent a manner as it did in North Africa, and is equally legitimized by historical narratives although it happened subsequently and followed different impulses. The spread of Islam to sub-Saharan Africa is rarely thought of as futūḥāt, even though the term has been used in relation to that region in other contexts, as in the sixteenth-century Yemeni scholar Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn ‘Abd al-Qadir’s book entitled Futūh al-Habasha [The Conquest of Abyssinia], for example. One possible explanation for the fact that futūḥāt is a word rarely associated with sub-Saharan Africa, whereas it is intimately tied to the conquest of North Africa, is that it is a euphemism for the spread of the religion by military means, which did not occur in sub-Saharan Africa until later. The armed spread of Islam south of the Sahara, which was by no means the first introduction of the religion in the region, started with invasion of the kingdom of Ghana in the eleventh century by the Almoravides, a Berber dynasty with origins along the Senegal River (Segal 89).

Islam diffused into sub-Saharan Africa following two main axes. The first of these axes was trans-Saharan into West Africa, an outcome of the conquest of the northern part of the continent. The second axis was southward along the eastern coast of the continent, where geographical proximity to the Arabian Peninsula and the avenues provided by the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the Nile facilitated commerce, cultural exchanges, and religious changes in the region. Evidence has been found of an Islamic presence in Eastern Africa as early as the eighth century (Horton and Middleton 49). By the tenth century, concurrently with the rise of the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt, trade along the Red Sea increased, thereby advancing the spread of Islam southward (Kapteijns 228).
This expansion would continue through the fifteenth century (Pouwels 251). Following the Portuguese arrival in that area, which lasted roughly from the late fifteenth to the early eighteenth centuries, the Arabic impact on Swahili language, literatures, and religious practices increased, and continued with the establishment of the Omani sultanate in Zanzibar in the nineteenth century. It is noteworthy that in eastern Africa Islam remained confined to the coastal areas without spreading inland for a relatively long time. One hypothesis advanced for this is that Islamic slave traders sought a supply of non-Muslim people from the interior (Horton and Middleton 49).

Just as established trade routes led to the diffusion of Islam in East Africa, trans-Saharan trade circuits that date back at least to the growth of Carthaginian markets on the Mediterranean shore in the eighth century BCE encouraged the southward spread of Islam in western Africa. Scholars have identified two of those routes: one through the Fezzan region in Libya, the other through southern Morocco (Levtzion 63). By the eleventh century, the city of Gao, in present day Mali, already had a significant Muslim quarter. In fact, the paramount role of trans-Saharan circulation in this era invalidates attempts to separate North and sub-Saharan Africa. In the following centuries, empires led by Muslim leaders would rise in the Sahel region of West Africa, the most notable of these being the Ghana, Mali, and Songhay Empires. The Mali Empire, which was founded by Sundiata Keita in the thirteenth century, acquired an international reputation for its wealth after the pilgrimage to Mecca of its tenth king, Mansa Musa, in 1324. This long expedition caused a great stir because Mansa Musa spent so much gold when he stopped in Cairo on his way to Mecca that the value of the precious metal dropped substantially. The Songhay Empire under Askia Mohammed was an agent of the spread
of Islam in West Africa by force (Hunwick, *Timbuktu* 106-14), in a fashion that echoes the way that ‘Uqba brought the religion to Ifriqya seven centuries before.

The fact that Islam reached North Africa first, before spreading south of the Sahara, can create the erroneous impression that the place of the religion in each of the two areas was quite different, when in fact there are many similarities. David Robinson distinguishes between “islamization” and “africanization” to suggest that at least two processes were involved in the arrival of Islam to Africa (27-59): while islamization refers simply to the spread of the religion into the continent, africanization indicates the particular way in which Islam was appropriated and impacted by African practices from both sides of the Sahara. In this view, the africanization of Islam is an ongoing process that has involved a multitude of locations in both North and sub-Saharan Africa.

Robinson insists that there is nothing pejorative about his usage of the term “africanized Islam,” because he is aware that the association of the religion with sub-Saharan Africa has in fact sometimes been perceived derogatorily, particularly by Europeans and Mediterranean Muslims (42). This negative vision was appropriated by Europeans and Arabs alike, and endured, resulting in a latitude-based racial hierarchy that placed North Africa closer to the center of Islam while sub-Saharan Africa was marginalized. According to Robinson, this view is traceable to the second century CE and to Ptolemy’s climatic conception that Mediterranean societies, such as those of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, constitute the center of civilization, while other regions were inferior (74). Robinson focuses on European attempts to rationalize the arrival of Islam in civilized climes (74-88). These attempts range from waves of demonizing discourses on Islam following the conquest of the southern Iberian Peninsula, to more recent French
colonial efforts to distinguish between Muslims on both sides of the Sahara in order to undermine the formation of alliances between colonized peoples in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Besides the European non-Muslim perspective on Islam and African civilization, the perceived inferiority of sub-Saharan Islam is widespread among Muslims themselves, both within Africa and without. As a result, although the africanization of Islam is a process in which North and sub-Saharan Africa play equal parts, the prevailing negative views on sub-Saharan Islam result in a general rejection of the African label in Islam. A good example of this rejection is the rise throughout Africa of extremist religious movements driven by patristic ideologies and an accentuated phobia of religious innovation, whose zeal could be in part interpreted as a desire to overcompensate due to a feeling of inferiority. The overall phenomenon of this perceived inferiority of African Islam among Muslims still deserves critical attention, and is yet to be analyzed satisfactorily. One can discern an initial step in that direction in the work of Bernard Lewis, who has approached the issue from a racial perspective in *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*, pointing out that Ethiopia was not viewed negatively among Arabs, either in the pre-Islamic or the early Islamic eras:

In pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabia, there would have been no reason whatever for Arabs to regard Ethiopians as inferior or to regard Ethiopian ancestry as a mark of base origin. On the contrary, there is a good deal of evidence that Ethiopians were regarded with respect as people on a level of civilization substantially higher than that of the Arabs themselves. A slave as such was of course inferior—but the black slave was no worse
than the white. In this respect pagan and early Islamic Arabs seem to have shared the general attitude of the ancient world, which attached no stigma to blackness and imposed no restrictions on black freemen. (25)

Lewis also mentions a number of prominent companions of the prophet who were of Ethiopian descent, including ‘Amr ibn al-‘Ās and the caliph ‘Umar, as well as Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, also known as Bilāl al-Ḥabashī [the Abysinian], and most famous for being the first muezzin to call Muslims to prayer. Another example given by Lewis is borrowed from ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam’s history of the conquest of Egypt, where a Christian functionary in Egypt was shocked by the fact that a black man named ‘Ubāda ibn al-Sāmit was, in fact, a leader among the Arabs (26).

According to Lewis, the attitude of Arabs toward blacks changed with the advance of the Islamic empire, although his arguments regarding the source of this change of attitude are hardly compelling. As far as Lewis is concerned, the change is due to three factors linked to the Islamic conquests (28-36). The first is the normal feeling of superiority of the conqueror over the conquered; the second factor is the contact of Arabs with areas of Africa which, unlike the Ethiopia that they knew well, appeared less civilized; and the third factor is the increased importation of black slaves that influenced the attitudes of Arabs who began to encounter black people only in this way. These factors outlined by Lewis are hardly conclusive, if only because the Islamic conquests also brought Arabs into contact with conquered peoples who were not black, and because even the increased importation of African slaves is unlikely to have resulted in Arabs encountering black people only in this way, not to mention that some of those African slaves were light-skinned Berbers. Nevertheless, a change seems to have occurred in the
attitude of Arabs towards blacks. As Ronald Segal has pointed out, the concern embedded in the Prophet’s admonition that “No Arab has any priority over a non-Arab and no white over a black except in righteousness” indicates that this change was a long-term process begun at least in the Prophet’s own lifetime (46). Considering this change of attitude towards black-skinned peoples, it is not surprising that even today the pejorative connotation persists in association with the religion south of the Sahara to which Robinson refers.

One example that can demonstrate the general attitude of Muslims towards the practice of Islam in Africa south of the Sahara can be found in a story told about the stay of the mali emperor Mansa Musa in Cairo while he was on his way to Mecca in the fourteenth century. Shaikh Shihāb al-Dīm al-‘Umari, the fourteenth century scholar who compiled *Masālik al-ahšār fī-mamalik al-Amšār* (cited by Nehemia Levtzion 67), reported that Mansa Musa was generally described as a pious man who “strictly observed the prayer, the recitation of the Koran, and the mention of Allah’s name.” However, daughters of the ruler’s subjects were brought to him so that he could enjoy them without marriage, even though these were not slaves or concubines. When Mansa Musa was told that this behavior was not permitted to Muslims, he was surprised, but vowed to renounce this habit completely now that he knew better. This event, reminiscent of the sexual aspects in the frame story of the *One Thousand and One Nights*, shows that it is through women that the correct practice of religion is measured. Similarly, the fourteenth-century Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta noted during his travels in sub-Saharan Africa that the people of Mali were commendable for their piety, but that they failed to enforce modesty among their women (690-91). These accounts present sub-Saharan Africans as well
meaning but ignorant in Islamic law and practices. Their perceived naïveté contributed to the view that they were of a lower status compared to Muslims north of the Sahara.

Another question, then, is why the pejorative connotation extends to sub-Saharan Islam more than North Africa, when Muslims throughout that region have in effect africanized Islam as well? While it may not be possible to give a definitive answer to this question, it is apparent that the practice of Islam throughout the continent was canonized largely by early scholars on both sides of the Sahara, from academic centers such as Kairouan and Fez (not to mention Andalusia) in North Africa, to Timbuktu in sub-Saharan Africa. Both the Songhay and Mali empires, for example, are notable for their intellectual proximity to their neighbors to the north, and the movement of scholars and ideas across the Sahara was not a rare occurrence by any means. In fact, the Sahara was not necessarily a jurisdictional boundary in terms of Islamic law, and the ideas and opinions of scholars circulated widely throughout the entire area of Africa under Islamic influence. While there may have been through history a larger number of influential scholars North of the Sahara, such as Saḥnūn ibn Sa‘īd who had a significant long-term impact in North Africa and Spain (Brockopp 63), the breadth of their “africanizing” influence was not confined to the northern parts of Africa, perhaps in part due to the importance of Islamic jurisprudence to trans-Saharan trade. One notable example is the correspondence between Askia Mohammed, ruler of the Songhay Empire (1493-1528), and the North African scholar al-Maghili that has been studied by Hunwick in his 1985 book *Sharī‘a in Songhay*. Another example is the work in Islamic jurisprudence by the sixteenth and early seventeenth century Timbuktu scholar Ahmad Baba. The practice of Islam and its impact on daily life was therefore not guided by two separate outlooks, one
for North and the other for sub-Saharan Africa, although sub-Saharan schools of Islamic thought have not yet been investigated fully, and thousands of manuscripts in archives throughout the region remain to be studied.

Although today Islam is usually associated with North African literatures only, it has also been a crucial component in written texts from the Islamic parts of sub-Saharan Africa. There are numerous examples of such texts. P.F. de Moraes Farias has studied Arabic inscriptions on tombstones from the Sahel region that date back to the eleventh century. Chronicles from Timbuktu from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries provide detailed accounts of the history of that region in a way very similar to that in which ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam historicized the Islamic conquest of Egypt. There are also numerous texts in ‘Ajami script (Arabic script used for a language other than Arabic) that are only now beginning to receive critical attention. A recent article by Fallou Ngom draws attention to these literary traditions; focusing largely on Wolofal (Wolof in ‘Ajami), he urges scholars to pay more attention to the importance of ‘Ajami literature to the intellectual history of Africa (2009). One of the obstacles to the study of ‘Ajami literatures in North and West Africa is that few scholars today possess the necessary working knowledge of both Arabic script and the non-Arabic languages transcribed in this script.

Another example of an essential Islamic dimension in literature south of the Sahara is the poetry of Nana Asma’u, daughter of Uthman dan Fodio, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century religious leader of Northern Nigeria. In a review of her collected works, Graham Furniss describes Nana Asma’u as follows: “A woman, a scholar, an intellectual, an organizer and a linguist, Nana Asma’u was a leading figure in
the establishment of what came to be known as the Sokoto Caliphate” (308). Although mostly of interest to historians, Nana Asma’u’s crucial role in women’s education is also literarily significant. As Jean Boyd has pointed out, Nana Asma’u’s method of instruction consisted of composing poetry to teach her students about Islam, even devising ways for women in remote areas to travel to her, learn the poems, and put them to use when they returned home. Although these poems were composed in Asma’u’s mother tongue, Fulfulde (written in ‘Ajami script), she did employ Arabic for formal works, and communicated with her students in Hausa (Boyd 11). Nana Asma’u’s poems are a prime example of Islamic components in literature south of the Sahara, and are still sung today (Boyd 22).

Many illustrations of the prevalence of Islam in sub-Saharan African literature can be found in literatures from the oral tradition, as exemplified by the epic of Askia Mohammed. As recounted by jeseré Nouhou Malio in 1980-81 and recorded by Thomas Hale, the epic gives us a clear understanding of the importance of this fifteenth-century ruler today. The epic also illustrates the way in which sub-Saharan Islamic peoples, the Songhay in this case, view their past and their Islamic identity, in spite of some inconsistencies with the primary sources of knowledge about Askia Mohammed, which are Tarīkh al-fettāsh and Tarīkh al-sudān, chronicles from the Timbuktu region. According to Hale, one reason for the enduring respect and admiration for Askia Mohammed was his piety (Askia Mohammed 2). The Timbuktu chronicles, recorded by Muslim scribes, portrayed Askia Mohammed in a highly positive manner as a righteous ruler who contributed greatly to the growth of the Islamic faith in the region, and made a pilgrimage to Mecca. The depiction of Askia Mohammed’s piety stands in sharp contrast
with the behavior of his predecessor Sonni Ali Ber. Although Askia Mohammed’s religiosity was probably overstated, and the wickedness of his predecessor exaggerated, the fact that Islam is such a central dimension to the most heroic figure in Songhay culture indicates that the importance of that religion is not limited to North Africa.

In Nouhou Malio’s account of the epic of Askia Mohammed, the Songhay ruler’s pilgrimage to Mecca is comparable to the stories of ‘Uqba’s triumph over North Africa, inasmuch as it legitimizes the Sahel region in sub-Saharan Africa as a rightful and valid territory of Islam with strong links to the birthplace of the religion. As the epic recounts, when Mamar Kassaye (Askia Mohammed) reached Mecca after conducting a holy war to spread Islam on his way, he asked to see the tomb of the Prophet (a geographical inconsistency, as the tomb of the prophet is located not in Mecca but in Medina). He was warned that he would not be able to come back out of the tomb, and was only allowed to peek into it with an iron chain secured to his belt and some strong men holding the other end in order to be able to retrieve him from the Prophet’s grave. Inside the tomb, he found what “resembled young onion shoots,” ate some, and gave some to his two companions, his griot cousin and Modi Baja:

Hala i ga a wafa ga ka taray,
A yottu yaa cine kambe hinka me fo a fatta nd’ey.
Hasay izo, go ga kay a kambe guma gaa a na wone salle a se.
Modi Baaja, go ga kay kamba wo gaa, a na wone salle a se.
Modi Baaja na nga wone jare za makka kala a kanda fu, a n’a neera.
Modi Baaja kulu mana taabi.
Han din ga ka hunkuna Irkoy man i hundi gurzugay.
Iri wo kayo na nga wono nwa.

A dira, a iri nan gurzugara.

Han din ga ka hunkuna hay kulu kan fun Modi Baaje gaa mana gurzugay.

I mana farga ga gurzugay, i mana ceci ga gurzugay.

I ga hawru, i gacurgusu, i ga bankaara.

Before they pulled him up out of the hole,
He grabbed and pulled out two handfuls and came out with them.
His cousin was standing at his right, he gave that to him.
Modi Baja was standing at his left hand, he gave that to him.
Modi Baja brought his from Mecca all the way home, he sold it.
None of Modi Baja’s people suffered.
From that day to present, Our Lord did not make their lives hard.
Our ancestor [the narrator’s ancestor, Mamar Kassaye’s cousin the griot]
ate his.
He left and he left us in suffering.
Since that day until the present, no descendent of Modi Baja has suffered.
They didn’t tire from a hard life, they didn’t seek to work hard in life.
They sup well, they lunch well, they dress well. (Lines 333-44)

In addition to the Islamic traditions brought to the Songhay by Askia Mohammed’s pilgrimage, the highly symbolic carrying of a plant growing out of the prophet’s own tomb from Mecca back home by Modi Baja, and the blessings that came from this living “relic,” which contrasts with the suffering that resulted from the narrator’s ancestor
eating his, establish a connection between the Songhay homeland and the Arab center of Islam in a way similar to that in which ‘Uqba’s stories bind North Africa to the Arab world.

Besides the earlier examples and traditions given above, there are many instances that illustrate the prevalence of Islam in recent sub-Saharan African literature, the most important of which is undoubtedly *L'Aventure ambiguë* (1961) by the Senegalese author Cheikh Hamidou Kane (1928--). Researchers who have analyzed the text now view it as the quintessential example of sub-Saharan Islamic fiction. Donald Wehrs argued in a 1992 article that *L'Aventure ambiguë* (along with Yambo Ouologuem’s 1968 novel *Le Devoir de violence*) shows “African cultures shaped in their fundamental metaphysical and political premises by the single-voicedness of the Quran and by the Islamic doctrine of unity as it applies to God, truth, and community” (1000). More recently, Marc Caplan affirmed in an article on Islamic Negritude that “the most pronounced and enduring effects of negritude on African literature, particularly the African novel, can be found in the work of Muslim authors, of whom Kane is both the most orthodox and, perhaps paradoxically, the most representative” (944). There are, however, many examples besides Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *L'Aventure ambiguë* that illustrate the prevalence of Islam in recent West African literature, some of which have been studied by Ahmed Bangura in *Islam and the West African Novel*, including writings by Ousmane Sembène, Aminata Sow Fall, and Ibrahim Tahir.

One can also find many instances of explicit Islamic components elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. In the southern part of the continent, Nadia Davis’s play *At her Feet* (2006) constitutes an example of the literature of Islamic minorities in South Africa.
These South African Islamic communities were studied by Pallavi Rastogi as well as by Gabeba Baderoon, particularly in her article “Ambiguous Visibility: Islam and the Making of a South African Landscape.” Other examples of Islamic components in sub-Saharan literature have been analyzed in *Faces of Islam in African Literature* (1991) and *The Marabout & the Muse: New Approaches to Islam in African Literature* (1996), two volumes on Islam in African literature edited by Kenneth Harrow. *The Marabout & the Muse* in particular is especially commendable since it dedicates an entire section to the Maghreb, thereby contributing to erasing the separation between North and sub-Saharan Africa. In two chapters of this book, Maggi Philips and Alamin Mazrui also analyze the Islamic dimension in the writings of the Somali novelist Nuruddin Farah.

The many examples of Islamic components in African literatures south of the Sahara suggest that the religion serves as a common denominator between North and sub-Saharan Africa. If Islam is nevertheless also seen as a factor in the separation between the two areas, this perception stems more from the way North Africa is integrated into the Arab world than the tendency to overlook the religion’s importance south of the Sahara. But the imposition of the “Arab World” label on North Africa has been contested in North African literature, notably by the Moroccan author Driss Chraïbi (1926-2007), who has had a tremendous impact on francophone literature in the Maghreb—indeed he shaped and defined it in many respects following the publication in 1954 of his first novel *Le Passé simple*. The importance of that novel was such that its publication is considered a landmark even from a non-literary standpoint. Pierre Vermeren, for instance, notes the publication of the novel as a major event from a historical perspective in his recent book *Histoire du Maroc depuis l’indépendence* (111). More specifically, the novel’s challenge
of authority through the main character’s defiant attitude towards his father seemed scandalous by the social norms of the time and shocked Moroccan readers greatly, which added to its importance as a groundbreaking work. In terms of Islam and the Arab identity of North Africa, however, a later novel by Chraïbi is of greater interest. *La Mère du printemps* (1982) relates the story of ‘Uqba ibn Nāfi’’s arrival at the western edge of North Africa, but from a Berber point of view. This novel is part of Chraïbi’s so-called Berber trilogy that explores the Arab conquest of Africa and Spain in the seventh century. Central to the trilogy is the fictionalized Berber clan of Aït Yafelman, from whose perspective history is retold.

The question of which novels make up the trilogy, however, is open to debate. Many critics, including Carine Bourget, consider the trilogy to consist of the novels *Une enquête au pays* (1981), *La Mère du printemps*, and *Naissance à l’aube* (1985), considering these works to be connected partly because they focus on the Aït Yafelman Berbers, share some thematic elements, and have a few common characters whose descriptions are sometimes even copied verbatim from one novel to the other. However, although the Aït Yafelman are introduced in *Une enquête au pays*, that novel does not constitute a re-telling of Islamic history the way the other two do. Rather, an important difference between this novel and the others is that *Une enquête au pays* is the debut of l’inspecteur Ali, an important character for a different phase of Chraïbi’s work, whom the author will revisit many times in later novels. There is other evidence suggesting that *Une enquête au pays* is not part of the trilogy: in a publisher’s foreword to *Naissance à l’aube*, the novel is called the second rather than the third volume of a novelistic fresco (*une “fresque romanesque”*) that started with *La Mère du printemps*. 
If *La Mère du printemps* and *Naissance à l’aube* are indeed part of a trilogy, it would be more appropriate to pair them with a later work, *L’Homme du livre* (1995), which is a fictional biography of the Prophet Mohammed. This novel was announced to be in preparation when *Naissance à l’aube* was first published in 1985, and was then going to be entitled *L’Emir des croyants*, but only came out ten years later (Fouet 59). This delay, as well as the fact that *L’Homme du livre* was published by Eddif and Balland, whereas *Une Enquète au pays, La Mère du printemps, and Naissance à l’aube* were all published by Seuil, may have impacted the perception of which novels constitute the trilogy.

*La Mère du printemps*, however, is particularly important because this novel is the exemplar of a fictional account of the way in which North Africa was annexed to the Arab world following the Islamic conquest of the seventh century. While Chraïbi reminds readers in a warning note at the beginning of the novel that this is a work of fiction, not a historically accurate account, his inclusion of ‘Uqba as a character makes a bold statement. As Bourget notes, the historical components in Chraïbi’s work constitute a form of demystification of official histories that promote an Arab and Islamic culture at the expense of indigenous populations (57).

The novel starts with a brief passage in the present day, with the character Raho Aït Yafelman pondering topics such as the past and destiny of the Berber people and Islam in the world. The readers are then transported to the mouth of the Oum-Er-Bia River in Morocco in the seventh century, just before the arrival of the Arabs. This is the setting of most of the novel, which centers on the life of the Berber protagonist Azwaw Aït Yafelman and his strategies to avoid the extinction of his people as the Arabs
gradually approach. After ‘Uqba’s successful conquest of all of North Africa toward the
end of the novel, Azwaw converts to Islam and the narrative mode of the novel changes,
with Azwaw becoming the narrator as Imam Filani. This dual identity is ambiguous.
While remaining antagonistic to the Arabs, he is also sincere in his new religion.
However, he uses the Islamic call to prayer to send coded information to other Berbers,
and the novel ends on him being discovered doing so and having his tongue cut off as a
punishment.

Fundamentally a story of cultural contact, *La Mère du Printemps* is a re-telling of
the Arab conquest of North Africa (the sequel *Naissance à l’aube* being a re-telling of the
conquest of Andalusia), but from a Berber perspective. The novel climaxes with Azwaw
finally encountering the conquering ‘Uqba at the moment when he rides into the Atlantic
waters on his horse. As Violeta Baena Gallé notes, the Arab army in *La Mère du
Printemps* is always defined in terms of its horses:

> Le cheval était tout: l’ami. Le frère, le père et la mère, fils et aïeux. La
> prunelle des yeux. C’était de lui qu’on s’occupait d’abord, avant et après
> n’importe quel combat. Près de lui que l’on dormait, bivouac ou halte. Les
> plus beaux êtres de la Création : oreilles courtes, tout comme les paturons
> et la queue ; encolure, jambes, hanches et ventres longs ; le front large,
> poitrine et hanches larges. (147)

The horse was everything: the friend, the brother, the father and the
mother, the son and the ancestors. It was the pupil of the eye. The horse
was taken care of first, before and after any battle. Whether in bivouac or
at a halt, it was by his side that men slept. He was the most beautiful of all Creation: short ears, just like the pasterns and the tail; neck, legs, hips, and stomach long; the forehead, breast, and hips, wide. (80)

This attention to horses that accompanies descriptions of the Arabs in the novel offers a portrayal of the conquerors as “cowboys” riding into the sunset—literally into the “Far West,” considering that is exactly how the Maghreb is referred to in Arabic—and taming the natives. Not surprisingly, Chraïbi dedicates his novel to the Native Americans (among other people), thereby solidifying this analogy. In this audacious parallel between the Arab conquest of Africa and the annihilation of many Native Americans that accompanied European settlement in the Americas, the author assigns an evil role to the Arabs, which enables him to question the hegemony of Arab accounts and their impact on the Maghreb. Here, the portrayal of ‘Uqba stands in sharp contrast with the conventional historical accounts that memorialize him as a victor, such as Al-Bayān al-Mughrib fī Akhbār al-Andalus wa al-Maghrib by ibn ‘Idhari al-Marrakushi, where the Arab conqueror is, for all intents and purposes, celebrated for his Berber-killing skills (27).

In the eleventh chapter of Le Monde à côté (2001), the second volume of his memoirs, Chraïbi relates briefly his initial interest in writing a fictional account of history in La Mère du printemps. While he gives us in his memoirs a clearer understanding of the novel’s genesis, his laconic description is more indicative of his peculiar idiosyncratic style and quirky persona. He also mentions cryptically the Islam of Ayatollah Khomeini and the socialism of French president François Mitterrand as the backdrop of a “vital” need that he felt to look to the past to better understand the present. Chraïbi compares this
need to a distant music calling him back from his own past, that of the Oum-Er-Bia River that flows into the Atlantic Ocean by the town of Azemmour, which is quite near his own hometown of El Jadida (previously known as Mazagan):

Je ressentais le besoin vital de remonter le cours du temps, le plus loin possible dans le temps, afin de donner une signification charnelle aux mots et de comprendre les temps présents. C’était comme une musique lancinante qui m’appelait du fond de mon passé, celle jamais oubliée de l’Oum-Er-Bia, *La Mère du printemps* [. . .]. C’est là et nulle part ailleurs que je situais l’action de mon prochain roman, en l’an 680, au moment même où, parti du désert de Tripolitaine à la tête des cavaliers d’Allah, le général Oqba Ibn Nafi allait surgir, messager pur et dur de la religion nouvelle. (190)

I felt the vital need to go back in time, as far back in time as possible, in order to give a corporeal meaning to words and understand the present. It was like a throbbing music that called me from the depths of my past, that of the remembered Oum-Er-Bia, *Mother of Spring* [. . .]. It is there and nowhere else that I set the action of my next novel, in the year 680, at the very moment when, starting from the Tripolitanian desert at the head of the horsemen of Allah, the general Oqba Ibn Nafi would appear, genuine messenger of the new religion.

The name of the river, Oum-Er-Bia, meaning “mother of spring” in Arabic, gives the novel its title. Although Chraïbi had already decided that the novel would be set by that
river, and that it would be about ‘Uqba’s arrival from the east, he explains in *Le Monde à côté* that he was faced with writer’s block. As he was struggling with this project, he went to bed one night after his wife had played a recording of Omar Naqishbendi playing the lute, only to wake up in the middle of the night with a case of insomnia. It was after trying to go back to sleep by drinking several glasses of pure malt whisky that he realized, in a drunken epiphany, that music should be central to this novel. In fact, in the novel a character named Naqishbendi plays a lute as ‘Uqba and his troops reach the Atlantic.

The importance of music in this novel, and in the work of Chraïbi in general, has been analyzed comprehensively by Stéphanie Delayre in *Driss Chraïbi, une écriture de traverse*. According to Delayre, based on an interview she conducted with Chraïbi on May 7th, 2001, although in *Le Monde à côté* the inspiration for *La Mère du printemps* is attributed to Naqishbendi, as just noted, it actually came from a piece entitled *La Mer* played by the Iraqi lute player Mounir Bachir (265). One important musical aspect of *La Mère du printemps* is the inclusion in the novel of musical notes on a staff, not only as the character Naqishbendi accompanies the arrival of ‘Uqba on a lute, but also to render the “chanson de la pèche,” a fishing song whose lyrics were forgotten by the Berber character Yerma Aït Yafelman, and which became a wordless melody. The role of music, then, as a mode of expression beyond words, takes on a new meaning. Besides the way it unlocked the author’s writing block, it is a metaphor for the continuation of a Berber voice after it is silenced by the Arabs’ arrival. The literal manifestation of this change occurs when Azwaw’s tongue is cut out after his conversion to Islam, and he is reduced
to wordlessness when he is discovered using the call to prayer to send coded messages to Berbers allied against the Arabs.

Chraïbi could be criticized for his literary representation of Berbers in such a politically-laden way in *La Mère du printemps* and his other novels that center on Berber characters, and for trivializing Berber aspects of Morocco’s cultural heritage, especially considering that the emergence of French and Arabic language literatures in North Africa in the last century relegated Berber literatures, which mostly exist in the realm of oral expression, to a lesser standing. However, in his treatment of Berber characters, Chraïbi makes an important point about the significance of an insufficiently addressed dimension in the Islamic identity of North Africa.

A good example of this debate can be found in an interview with Kacem Basfao that appeared in a special Chraïbi issue of the bilingual literary magazine *Lecture/Qirā’āt* published after the author’s death in 2007. Kacem Basfao, professor at Aïn Chock University in Casablanca, a leading scholar on Chraïbi and longtime personal friend of the author, was asked about a possibly “occidental” perspective in novels such as *Une enquête au pays*, where small rural villages in Morocco are described as if they were isolated from the rest of the world (6). In answer, Basfao argued that Chraïbi’s description does not portray rural Morocco in an essentialist way, but attempts through his Berber characters to address humanist themes; moreover, Basfao claims, Chraïbi’s descriptions are not very far from sociological reality, as certain rural areas in Morocco were in fact neglected by the political administration in the nineteen eighties when *Une Enquête au pays* is set, and some villages in these areas suffered from a form of isolation similar to what is portrayed in the novel (6-7). Although Chraïbi’s use of Berber
characters could be read as a form of essentialism, it is mainly an attempt to resolve the
dependence of North African people on both Arab and Islamic elements to form their
own identity. Moreover, it is also a literary attempt to rectify official North African
histories that largely overlook the importance of Berbers, a crucial issue for revivalist
cultural movements that, as Bruce Maddy-Weitsman has pointed out, prioritize memory
work (51).

In *La Mère du printemps*, through the inversion of official history, and a narration
from a Berber perspective, the author reconstructs a cultural, national, and religious
Berber element in an attempt to undermine the hegemony of the Arab component of
North Africa’s identity. “Berber,” then, is used conceptually as an indigenous African
and pre-Islamic character, and put forth as a crucial aspect of North Africa not simply
insofar as it is contrapuntal to an exogenous (Arab) religion, but as a factor in shaping the
destiny of that religion in the region. The way that Chraïbi presents this process
challenges conventional postcolonial readings. Instead of seeing the incorporation of a
Berber component into a broader Islamic imperial project as the victory of Arab
colonialism, in which it is the colonized Berbers who inherit a crossbred cultural identity,
he sees it as precisely the opposite: the ultimate continuation of the indigenous North
African character in the inclusion of Berber elements within Islam. This dimension of the
novel is particularly important because it complements historical scholarship, in which
researchers have portrayed the assimilation of Berbers and their role in securing an
I slamic presence in North Africa, notably in the settlements in Kairouane as well as in
subsequent campaigns, including the conquest of Andalusia, in terms of conversion and
recruitment into Islamic armies (Taha 61-2; 76). But to date scholars have not analyzed this phenomenon satisfactorily in terms of its cultural ramifications.

Early on at the beginning of *La Mère du printemps*, Berbers in the present day are shown to understand their own practice of Islam to be inadequate and not quite as thorough as it should be. Raho Aït Yafelman considers that there is a hierarchical structure within Islam: “Il y avait deux Islams, celui des privilégiés et l’autre…” (17) [“There were two Islams, one of the privileged and the other…” (4)]. Raho clearly considers himself to belong to the “other” Islam. He blames his own uncivilized pagan forces when he declares that he has blasphemed. At the same time, he attempts to improve by self-discipline:

[Raho] cracha entre ses pieds, extirpant le Moyen Age qui subsistait encore en lui malgré des générations d’islam. Il n’était pas tout à fait un musulman digne de ce nom, voila la vérité ! Il lui fallait maitriser ses forces païennes [. . .]. (17)

[Raho] spit [*sic*] between his feet, to root out the Middle Ages that survived in him despite generations of Islam. He was not at all a Muslim worthy of the name, that’s the truth of it! He still had to master his pagan forces [. . .]. (4)

Raho’s acknowledgement of his situation as a Muslim not quite worthy of the name reflects the accepted pejorative connotation associated with the practice of the religion in Islamic Africa, which implies that a singular, necessarily Arab, religious culture is valid
while all others are naïve and perpetually in the process of seeking to measure up to the ideal version of this imported system of belief.

Nevertheless, later in the novel and some centuries earlier, when Raho’s homonymous ancestor warns his clan of the danger of the approaching Arab army, Azwaw accepts the inevitable with an odd serenity:

Oh oui! Ils peuvent venir, les Arabes! Debout dans sa barque, Azwaw les attend. Tout est paisible autour de lui et en lui. (175)

Yes, indeed, let the Arabs come!

Standing in his boat, Azwaw awaits them. Everything is peaceful around him and inside him. (96)

Rather than see the conquest as a defeat, Azwaw has the peaceful assurance that time is on his side. Through this character, Chraïbi reveals some of his theoretical insights into the repercussions of the Arab assimilation of North Africa to the Islamic identity of the region.

Earlier in the novel Azwaw justified his tranquility upon hearing the news of the westward advance of the Arab conquerors because he saw them as only the latest of many waves of conquerors, including Romans and Phoenicians, who had failed to overcome the Berbers in any permanent manner (89). Yet, he realizes later that these new invaders are unlike earlier conquerors because they are driven by a religion:

“Les autres conquérants s’intéressaient à la terre et aux richesses de la terre. Et moi je vous certifie que ces Arabes s’intéressent surtout à l’homme, à ce qu’il est, à ce qu’il peut leur apporter. Ils se mélangent aux
berbères, par le sang, pour fonder une seule et même tribu, la *Oumma* comme ils l’appellent.” (134)

“The other conquerors were interested in the earth and the riches of the earth, and I assure you that these Arabs are interested first and foremost in man, in what he is, and in what he can bring to them. They intermingle with the Berbers, in their blood, to found one single same tribe, the *Oumma*, as they call it.” (71)

Azwaw remains serene nonetheless. He is confident that when Arabs accept converted Berbers into their religious community, it is that community more than the new convert which is affected. He supports this argument with a botanical metaphor whereby weeds, representing Berbers, in the long run take over a field at the expense of other seeds, which represent Arabs:

“Nous allons occuper le terrain du temps. Nous allons entrer *dans ces nouveaux conquérants*, à l’intérieur de leur âme, dans leur Islam, leurs mœurs, leur langue, dans tout ce qu’ils savent faire avec leurs mains et dire avec leur cœur. Dans tout ce qu’ils représentent de jeune, de fort et de beau. Nous allons lentement prendre leur vigueur et puis leur vie.” (138)

“We are going to occupy time’s terrain. We are going to get inside these new conquerors, inside their very soul, into their Islam, their customs, their language, into everything that they know how to do with their hands and to say with their hearts. Into everything that is youthful, strong, and beautiful. We will slowly sap their vigour and then their life.” (73)
In spite of an apparent Arab victory and the conversion to Islam that would ensue, the
Berber will prevail because through miscegenation, both literal and cultural, these Arab
colonizers will be assimilated into the people that they colonize rather than the other way
around. Azwaw tells his clansmen:

“Les Arabes seront peut-être contents de nous, devenus musulmans
comme eux. Ils baisseront la garde, nous laisseront vivre et procréer. Nous
ne serons sans doute jamais leurs égaux. C’est la loi de la domination qui
le veut ainsi […] Nos fils se mélangeront à leurs filles et nos filles à leurs
fils à eux. Chaque enfant qui naîtra sera pour nous un berbère de sang et
de cœur, même s’il ne porte pas le nom de son père […] Quant à notre
terre, vous la connaissez tous. Vous êtes ses fils. Elle n’aime que ses fils.
Elle est sauvage et belle. Très forte, plus forte que les envahisseurs qui ont
voulu la dominer dans le passé. Elle leur sert de cimetière. Un jour,
bientôt, dans quelques siècles, les Arabes l’engraisseront de leurs cadavres
et du cadavre de leur islam. Leurs ultimes descendants, s’il en subsiste, ne
seront plus tournés que vers le passé de leurs aïeux. Et ce jour là, nous, les
Imazighen, nous serons l’avenir.” (139-40)

“The Arabs may be happy with us, once we become Muslims like them.
They will let their guard down and will let us live and procreate. We will
doubtlessly never be their equals. It is the law of domination that makes
things go […] Our sons will join with their daughters, and our daughters,
with their sons. Every child that is born will be a Berber in blood and heart
for us, even if he [doesn’t carry] the name of his father [. . .] As for our land, you all know it. You are its sons. It loves only its children. It is savage and beautiful, and very strong, stronger than all the invaders that wanted to dominate her in the past. She has been their cemetery. The Arabs will fatten it with their cadavers and the cadaver of Islam one day soon, in a few centuries. Their last descendants, if there are any, will only turn toward the past of their ancestors, and that day, we, the Imazighen, we will be the future.” (74)

The portrayal of the islamization of North Africa in _La Mère du printemps_ emphasizes the africanization of Islam. It reminds the reader that Islam in North Africa, which is thought of as Arab, is in fact largely Berber, and engaged in a dynamic of ongoing configuration. If we consider the arrival of Islam to North Africa as an Arab colonial enterprise, pigeon-holing North Africa as a part of the Arab world, therefore, constitutes a complete incorporation of the colonized subject’s identity into the ideological discourse that oppresses him—in this case the supremacy of Islam and Arab culture. It goes beyond the mere physical occupation of his land, because it is not erased by subsequent colonial projects such as French occupation.

From the historical and literary evidence here, it is clear that the way in which the Arab conquest of North Africa was narrated historically, and the significant presence of Islam in African literature south of the Sahara, suggest that the conventional separation between North and sub-Saharan African literatures on religious grounds leads to a partial portrayal of the past. The message of _La Mère du printemps_, then, is that although the arrival of Islam in North Africa resulted in the region being defined chiefly as a part of
the Arab World, it is in fact not exclusively Arab, and pre-Islamic and pre-Arab elements are in effect a crucial component of the character of North African peoples. They appear as vital to the endurance of the religion in the area. This view of Islam being africanized in North as well as in sub-Saharan Africa forces us to rethink the role of the religion in the relationship between the two regions, as it becomes a source of commonality rather than difference. Religion, however, is only one of two aspects related to the Arab conquest of North Africa that bind the region to the Arab World at the expense of its connection to sub-Saharan Africa. The other important component that was imported in the seventh century is the Arabic language, which is still widely considered not to be a language of African expression. Because Arabic, just like Islam, was africanized when it spread through Africa, the varieties of Arabic spoken in North Africa today are viewed to be far removed from what should be an authentic language of Arabic literature. This issue and its relation to literary genres constitute the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3:

FILMS THAT SPEAK TO US: ASSIA DJEBAR’S *LA NOUBA DES FEMMES DU MONT CHENOUA*, AND OUSMANE SEMBÈNE’S *XALA*

Reflections about languages have always been at the center of African literary studies, usually in some variation of the question, why write in the colonizer’s language? In the case of North Africa, this question usually applies to francophone literatures from the Maghreb. As for Arabic, in spite of it being also laden with colonial baggage in that region, the language alienates the Maghreb from African concerns. Although linguists have extensively studied the complexities of language politics in the previously French colonies of North Africa, their analyses have occurred largely outside the realm of African studies. For specialists of Africa, Arabic is a heritage language that is usually of interest only to historians, especially those who specialize in the Sahel region of West Africa. Even those African authors who write in Arabic and who have received some critical attention, such as Nawal El Saadawi or Tayeb Salih, owe their reputation mostly to the translation of their works into European languages. The aspects of their writings that relate to language are yet to be studied in depth.

The fact that Arabic is not typically associated with African literature contributes to the marginalization of North Africa from African literary studies. To what extent, however, can Arabic be used in North African literature today without creating a distance from sub-Saharan Africa? To answer this question, I will analyze Assia Djebar’s film *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* (1978) [The Nouba of the Women of Mount Chenoua], which she has used as an alternative to the novel to offer another form of Algerian cultural production. I will compare this film with *Xala* (1974), by the
Senegalese Ousmane Sembène, the well known novelist turned filmmaker. As Josef Gugler and Oumar Cherif Diop have argued, *Xala* constitutes a major departure from the eponymous novel, although the film was released only a year after the publication of the book (147). *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* and *Xala* are analogous not only because they are films made by novelists, but also because Sembène and Djebar, while they have made their films in different languages, do share a common experience of French colonialism.

In the present chapter, I will pair the two films and examine the particular circumstances in which they were made in the nineteen seventies, taking into consideration the broader historical context of the emergence of African cinema North and South of the Sahara. This comparison builds on the work of Roy Armes, the leading critic of African cinema, who has also been arguing for considering filmmaking in the two regions in concert, especially in his last book *African Filmmaking North and South of the Sahara* (2006). The goal here is to show how cinema is a medium ideally suited for asserting and conveying a distinctly African identity through language whereas the novel, in the case of these two authors, fails to capture the complexities of African expression, even in a non-European language. In fact, as I will show in my analysis of the case of Assia Djebar, who prefers cinema to express herself in Arabic, novels fail to capture the dynamics of written and spoken languages of North Africa.

*La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* reveals, among other things, the extent to which contemporary literatures from the Maghreb do not, in fact, create a distance between the region and sub-Saharan Africa. Articulated around an overture and six movements, the plot of Djebar’s film is complex and difficult to access. This structure is
borrowed from the traditional format of the North African musical genre called *nouba*, from which the film gets its title. The non-linear narrative centers largely on the character of Lila. In the overture, Lila is revealed to be experiencing communication problems with her husband, who is confined to a wheelchair after a horse riding accident, an echo of Djebar’s personal life and her own marital problems at the time. Through the rest of this nearly two-hour-long film that resembles a documentary at times, Lila embarks on a twofold journey, at once personal and introspective, in which she meets with older women from her native region of Cherchel in Algeria, where Mount Chenoua is located. While the narrative is articulated around painful memories from the Algerian war, the filmmaker puts emphasis on listening to what the women of the region have to say. One indication of the quality and success of the film as an artistic production is the fact that it won the International Critics’ Prize (Premio della critica internazionale) at the Venice Film Festival in 1979.

The plot of *Xala*, in contrast, is more linear. In the opening sequence of the movie, a group of Senegalese men takes over a building and expels its white occupants. This important scene represents the end of colonialism, and describes the shift in control of the powerful institution that is the Chamber of Commerce in Dakar. The significance of this takeover is difficult to appreciate by non-Francophone audiences because the influence of the Chamber of Commerce in France and its former colonies is immense, in contrast to the merely club-like concept of local chambers of commerce in the United States, for example. The Senegalese men then exchange their typically African clothes for three-piece suits and ties, an act symbolic of the social change that accompanies the rise to power of this new bourgeoisie. A silent white character, however, lingers in the
background, and hands money-filled briefcases to each new member of the organization (he will remain largely silent throughout the movie, as an incarnation of the neocolonial control that France retained over its previous African colonies). The main action then begins with one of the men from the new bourgeois ruling elite getting ready to take a third, much younger, wife. On his wedding night, however, he is afflicted by a *xala*, a curse that causes sexual impotence. Throughout the rest of the film, his attempts to remove the curse result in social, financial, and familial ruin, and, eventually, in his expulsion from the Chamber of Commerce.

Both *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* and *Xala* are examples of African cinema first and foremost, in spite of the fact that Djebar’s film was made in Arabic and carries a French title. The African quality of both films can be determined according to three interrelated characteristics: aesthetics, politics and language. Whereas the aesthetic and political dimensions function very similarly in the cases of both Sembène and Djebar, it is on the particularly important question of language that the films are most revealing of the role of this medium in African literatures. At the same time, language issues also exemplify the specificity of African cinema in opposition to the novel as an art form. More importantly, they demonstrate a crucial connection between literary cultures of both sides of the Sahara. Aesthetics, politics, and language are very intimately connected here, and should not be addressed discretely. Both Sembène and Djebar use cinema to support a political stance which is brought to the attention of the viewer through peculiar aesthetic characteristics.

In her article on *Xala*, Marcia Landy examines many of those characteristics while giving particular attention to editing. The film’s reflexivity, however, is perhaps the
most important of those characteristics. In *Xala*, Sembène frequently reminds us that we are in presence of a movie by using such devices as briefly showing a poster of Charlie Chaplin and one of *La Noire de...*, another of his films, in the background. The manner in which *Xala* draws attention to itself avoids passivity on the viewer’s part, and makes it difficult for the film to be merely distracting entertainment. As the film aesthetically draws attention to the reality of being in the presence of a movie, its political agenda becomes inescapable.

Other aesthetic elements in *Xala*, such as the discrepancy between image and sound that occurs at moments, for example during the scene in which the beggars gather to eat together, also give this film a singular character. Another example of the film’s peculiar aesthetics can be seen in one particular scene, when the protagonist is riding in an elevator. There, Sembène shows the actor’s reflection in the mirror to create a surprising shot in which the viewers glimpse only fragments of the actor, mostly reflected in the mirror, and his face remains unseen. The marginalization of the character here and the invisibility of his visage sharply contrast with the importance of movie-star close-ups used in films intended for mass consumption and entertainment markets.

Similarly, *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* is a very unusual movie that is not easily classified among the typical genres of cinema. Viola Shafik alternatively calls it “experimental,” “art-cinema,” a “semi-documentary” and an example of “Algerian cinéma d’auteur” (39). Shafik also argues that the structure of Djebar’s film stands out as an original attempt to apply the rules of traditional music to cinema. The music in this case is the Andalusian noubâ, a traditional form of urban music in the Maghreb, with its roots in Arab Spain. The appellation noubâ, which has entered French to mean a loud,
carnivalesque revelry, is originally an Arabic word signifying “turn” that may have originated from the various movements that alternate (or “take turns”) in these music pieces, or from the large orchestras in which musicians take turns to play their instruments. The seemingly artistic decision of having a musical basis to *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* reflects a political position. As Shafik goes on to show, Djebar’s decision to use musical arrangements to articulate her film reflects her opinion that music in Algeria was not as altered by French colonialism as were other aspects of Algerian cultural production.

Moreover, the circumstances in which *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* was produced and distributed also reveal that Djebar is in no way interested in making entertaining movies, or marketing them as such. As Roy Armes points out in a chapter dedicated to Djebar’s film in his book *Postcolonial Images*, the Radiodiffusion Télévision Algérienne, the Algerian state organization for broadcasting, which funded the movie, was initially interested in seeing Djebar adapt her novels to the screen (116). After *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua*, they funded a second film, *La Zerda ou les Chants de l’Oubli* (1980), but according to Djebar, they impeded the completion of six other projects in part precisely because her movies were not marketable as entertainment for the masses, or, as she put it in *Ces voix qui m’assiègent*, because she insisted on practicing a cinema “*de recherche*” [of research] rather than a cinema “*de consommation*” [of consumption] (*Ces voix* 169).

It is important to remember that although their peculiar aesthetics give the films of Sembène and Djebar a distinct identity in comparison with more conventional cinematic productions, such as those of Hollywood, the extent to which these movies are
part of what was once called Third Cinema and are actually in dialogue with American movies should not be overestimated, as important as this conversation may be. In fact, generally speaking, the differences between African films from the seventies and American cinema are often incidental even when they are self-conscious. *Xala*, for instance, does not rub the standards of Hollywood’s movie industry against the grain simply because they pose an ideological threat to Senegalese society, or because the voracious capitalism that they incarnate, in Sembène’s view, runs counter to his communist ideals. As Armes has remarked, it is only starting in the nineteen eighties that film production in the Third World started engaging other cinemas in a dialogue by confronting Hollywood’s clichés (*Third World* 97). Moreover, francophone African films from both sides of the Sahara are more likely to be in dialogue with French movies that sometimes try to disrupt Hollywood’s domination themselves. This is not to mention, as Sabry Hafez has pointed out, dialogue with Arab cinema from Egypt and the Levant in the case of the Maghreb.

Nevertheless, films by Sembène and Djebar do attempt to subvert the discourse of dominant media practices, although priority is not given to those that prevailed in cinematic production. Instead, both *Xala* and *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* can actually be seen as asserting an identity by opposition to the novel, especially if we consider that *Xala* was initially a novel before it became a movie, and that Djebar is mainly known as a novelist. This purpose becomes particularly clear when we take into account the pragmatic appeal of cinema’s ability to reach the masses as a primordial motive behind choosing film over written texts. The debate over this question is in fact indiscernible from the development of film criticism. Early on, in “The Work of Art in
the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” Walter Benjamin made the case that works of art with an affinity for exposure, such as photography and film, can better convey their political charge because, thanks to what he calls their “exhibition value,” they appeal to the masses. This broad impact is especially apparent in Africa today, as the wide circulation of films in DVD format, often through illegal means, allows the public to consume films beyond those they see in movie theatres. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, conversely, argued that cinema, precisely because of its appeal to the masses, is conducive to monetary profit and becomes a business, limited to entertainment and distraction through the propagation of formulaic clichés. Adorno and Horkheimer’s point is all the more valid, one could argue, because film requires a fairly substantial financial investment, whereas novels, in comparison, do not. However, at the time when *Xala* and *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* were made, Sembène and Djebar had been using writing as a vehicle for their political agendas, yet they chose to turn to cinema instead.

This is particularly evident in the case of Sembène who, in spite of becoming better known for his movies than his writings, has explicitly acknowledged his preference for writing novels and short stories over making films. He maintained this position until late in his long career as a filmmaker. In a 1994 documentary by Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o and Manthia Diawara dedicated to Sembène, the latter states:

“I was driven to cinema as a way of communicating my ideology. I myself prefer literature to cinema. But in our time, literature is a luxury [. . .]. [Cinema] is of all the arts the most appealing for a large audience.”
As Roy Armes observes: “By the early 1960’s, Sembène was becoming increasingly frustrated by the failure of his work—written in French and published in Paris—to reach the mass of people in his homeland” (Third World 283-4). Josef Gugler and Oumar Cherif Diop have argued that while the explanations provided in the text and the numerous clarifying footnotes in the novel Xala indicate that it is explicitly addressed to a foreign public, the film does not try to avoid the loss of comprehension of some aspects of the story by viewers unfamiliar with Senegalese society (149-50). This is not to suggest that the movies are merely simplified versions of novels intended for those who are not urbane enough to access the books. If that were the case, Assia Djebar would have turned to cinema “de consommation” instead of persevering in her approach that yielded a film “de recherche.” Rather, the authors use cinema to reach a public that was economically, politically, and educationally marginalized, because this audience is also the subject of their works.

Moreover, another reality in these filmmakers’ historical context, which is related to the tension between cinema and writing, is the high rate of illiteracy in their respective societies. The people whose problems the filmmakers address simply do not have access to their writings. This situation is not by any means unique to Sembène and Senegal or Djebar and Algeria. Other authors in Africa and elsewhere found theatre—a medium that, like cinema, does not require that its audience be able to read—to be better suited to serve their agendas because it appealed to their targeted audience. The most famous African case is certainly that of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s play Ngaahika Ndeenda [I Will Marry When I Want (1982)]. The play, entirely in Gikuyu, had such an impact when it was performed that it landed Ngũgĩ in jail. It is conceivable that had Ngaahika Ndeenda been
a novel, and therefore inaccessible to the many illiterate Kenyans, it would not have been perceived as such a threat by the government. Therefore, a movie, although more expensive to make, is a more convenient instrument for the raising of consciousness than a written text. Moreover, cinema is easier to bring to the public since a film screening is less demanding in terms of logistics and infrastructure than a theatre production.

The claim that cinema is a more appealing way to reach the audience than novels is not necessarily due only to the way the former fits better in a long-standing tradition of oral artistic expression. While the influence of oral literature on virtually all African art is impossible to ignore, it is also injudicious to forget the complexities of certain African societies when it comes to oral traditions and to presume simply that cinema springs directly from orality. However, cinema’s ability to speak a familiar language does make it sound more natural than writing, whereas access to the language of novels remains the privilege of the minority educated in European-style schools.

Novels, in that sense, sustain the elitism that Sembène is trying to denounce in his films. The reason for this is that African novels, particularly in the nineteen sixties and seventies, were far more instrumental in the construction of the elitist discourse that films like Xala condemn than was cinema. In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, this can be partially explained by the fact that, at a time when filmmaking was not yet a common practice in the nineteen seventies, the novel had emerged as a preferred form of literary expression written in European languages. Some view this literature as a form of cultural neocolonialism. This is not to suggest that African cinema has no ties to colonialism, especially since, in many cases, it still relies largely on foreign funding, often from those same countries that were the previous colonizers. When Sembène was making Xala,
however, these ties were not as obvious and strong as they were in the case of his novel by the same name, which was published in Paris earlier.

In the case of North Africa, the tensions between two literary scenes that often remain distinct, one francophone and the other arabophone, constitute a crucial difference. As explained in previous chapters, while francophone authors from the Maghreb found avenues to publish their works in France, the arabophone literary production of the region had to turn to publishing houses in Egypt and the Levant. Consequently, they had to cater to an audience that had experienced French colonialism differently, or not at all. The result is that the gap between the francophone and the arabophone literatures widened in the Maghreb. More importantly, writing a novel in Arabic in this context was a statement of identity inasmuch as it embedded its author in a pan-Arab rather than an African literary framework. In contrast, the way in which Djebar makes use of Arabic in *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* effectively sets the film outside of a pan-Arab context, and affirms an individual identity that links it instead to African films such as *Xala*.

Before exploring this point further, it is necessary to situate Djebar’s work in film within the context of her career as a novelist. In 1981, she finished co-translating Nawal El Saadaoui’s novel *Imra’a ‘inda nuqtat al-sifr* [*Woman at Point Zero*] to French as *Ferdaous, une voix en enfer*. In the foreword to this translation, Djebar expresses interest in the significance of a feminist novel in Arabic. Her attraction to the language question at this particular moment in her career is pertinent, because she had just published *Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement* (1980) [*Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1992)] in Paris, a collection of stories that marked her return—after a decade-long
absence—to both writing in general and to the French language in particular. This break from writing on Djebar’s part occurred after she expressed disagreement with the 1969 adaptation of her play *Rouge l’aube* into Arabic by her then-husband Walid Garn (Déjeux 11). It is possible that it is after seeing this translation of her work (which she originally co-wrote in French with Garn) that Djebar then decided to attempt writing in Arabic herself, instead of the French that she had hitherto used. The result would be this long absence that lasted through most of the seventies and that was finally interrupted by the completion of *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* in 1978. As noted, Djebar eventually resumed writing in French, and, to this day, has still not written in Arabic.

Djebar’s relatively brief experience in film in the nineteen seventies had a tremendous impact on her subsequent writing, namely in works such as *Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement, L’amour, la fantasia* (1985) [Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade (1993)], *Ombre sultane* (1987) [A Sister to Schererezade (1987)], and *Vaste est la prison* (1995) [So Vast the Prison (1999)]. *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* can often be a key to better understand these writings. One indication of the importance of *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* for Djebar’s later works can be found in her interview with Ana de Medeiros which took place in 2007, after the writer had published *La femme sans sépulture* and was finishing her latest work, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, which would appear the same year. In the foreword to this interview that was published in *Wasafiri* in 2008, de Medeiros writes that she had prepared a series of specific questions that she intended to ask, but Djebar preferred to discuss the making of *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua*, and the way in which that experience was related to *La femme sans sépulture*, a novel that she wrote almost a quarter of a century later.
The importance of *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* for Djebar’s later works has been analyzed by many critics. Chief among them is Mildred Mortimer, who has commented on this issue on various occasions, including in a 1988 interview with Assia Djebbar, but more particularly in “Reappropriating the Gaze in Assia Djebbar’s fiction and Film,” a chapter in her edited volume *Maghrebian Mosaic*, and in her article “Assia Djebbar’s Algerian Quartet: A study in Fragmented Autobiography,” in which she underscores the important role that Arabic played in that moment in the Algerian author’s career. Similarly, in *Postcolonial Images*, Roy Armes calls attention to the significance of the film for the writer:

The experience of making *La Nouba* and the impact of the women’s testimonies were crucial to Djebbar in recovering her own voice as a novelist, and there are specific references in many of the novels she has published since the 1980s: some of the interviews appear in *l’Amour, la fantasia* (1985), extracts from her diary of the shooting are incorporated into *Vaste est la prison* (1995), and the novel *La femme sans sépulture* (2002) is devoted entirely to the story of the rebel heroine, Zoulikha [to whom *La Nouba des Femmes du mont Chenoua* is in part dedicated].

(117)

One of the most talked-about aspects of Djebbar’s writing that was perfected in her film is the alternation between past and present, and between the collective and the particular. Although this feature has been the object of numerous studies, including an original analysis of *Le blanc de l’Algérie* on the basis of mathematical formulas by Deborah Hess, this is not the only aspect of Djebbar’s writing that was developed in her
film. Mary Vogl has argued that Djebar’s experience as a filmmaker gave her “newly developed sensitivities” when she returned to writing (692). While many of Djebar’s subsequent works owe something to her experience making *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua*, all of these works were written in French, which makes it quite remarkable that she has used Arabic only in film. Her election to the Académie française in 2005 cements her relationship to French, and adds to the significance of her cinematic work as her only output in Arabic so far.

Many critics have shown interest in this connection between Arabic and film in Djebar’s work. Besides Mortimer and Armes, Jean Déjeux, reflecting on this subject in *Assia Djebar: Romancière Algérienne Cinéaste Arabe*, suggests that spoken Arabic cannot be captured in writing, yet is necessary in order to tackle the political issues addressed by the movie (23). The opposition between written and spoken Arabic that Déjeux hints at has to do with the diglossic nature of modern Arabic. In fact, the dichotomy between spoken and written Arabic (sometimes called respectively dialectal and literary, or various other Manichean oppositions) is at the heart of why Djebar never wrote in Arabic.

Menahem Milson’s description of the tensions within Arabic reflects the problems faced by authors who wish to express themselves in the language:

> Arabic dialects vary greatly from one region to another, and they all differ from literary Arabic, which is however the same throughout the Arab world.

To appreciate the dilemma that this poses for Arab authors, one must bear in mind the sharp dichotomy between literary Arabic with its high
prestige, as the most important part of the cultural heritage shared by Arabs; and the colloquial dialects, called *al-'ammiiyya*, “the vulgar idiom,” regarded as a corrupt form of the literary language. (12)

While Milson provides an accurate description of the prevailing views on Arabic, it is necessary to question the part of this statement that projects upon literary Arabic a faculty of universality that makes it “the same throughout the Arab world.” This issue is at the heart of the various and complex views on the language today. What Milson calls literary Arabic, in fact, also varies considerably from one region to another, although nowhere near the extent to which the various regional dialects of Arabic differ. Yet, Milson’s position is symptomatic of a widespread feeling across Arabic-speaking regions that the language of Arabic literature is, or at least should be, universal regardless of discrepancies between the language of writing and the language of everyday experiences.

Linguists define diglossia as the result of the development of two varieties of a language, a high variety called H, and a low one called L, which results in a hierarchy within the language. In Arabic, the L class, called *al-'ammiiyya*, refers broadly to a variety of the language that fluctuates depending on the region in question. *Al-'ammiiyya* is referred to as *al-darija* in the Maghreb, which in itself indicates the way that this language varies regionally. The H class of Arabic, however, is less clearly defined. Most scholars see it as being actually comprised of various kinds: classical Arabic, a language associated with Islam and the Quran, on the one hand, and a more contemporary version called Modern Standard Arabic, on the other. The language of the Quran is sometimes considered a separate sub-category, while diachronic classifications can distinguish between classical, middle and Modern Standard Arabic. Keith Walters reminds us of the
important fact that classical and Modern Standard Arabic are perceived as a single entity, 

*al-fuṣḥa*, by native Arabic speakers (527).

In fact, it is linguistic scholarship rooted in languages other than Arabic that has determined these categories, which reflect the concerns of researchers more than they inform us of the mechanics of diglossia in Arabic. For example, the emphasis on the “classical” aspect of H Arabic from a French perspective reflects a colonial vision of Arabic culture as anachronistic. In contrast, the American concern with “standard” Arabic indicates a political interest in finding a practical way to deal with a vast Arabic-speaking world. As a result, many American operatives were left disadvantaged when they entered Iraq because, although the teaching of the language in the United States has included some varieties of spoken Arabic, the focus was on Egypt and the Levant.

Many other terms have been applied to H Arabic, but it is always in opposition to an L variety that is not usually written. The use of certain forms of Arabic in writing and not others is crucial to this issue. It is a form of H Arabic that became the standard language of literature. For this reason, I will refer to it here as literary Arabic, and the diverse regional varieties of L Arabic, by opposition, will be identified collectively as spoken Arabic to underscore the fact that they are typically not associated with writing, although they could, of course, be rendered phonetically in the Arabic alphabet just as well as in any system of orthography.

While some Arabic speakers are not necessarily self-conscious of this dichotomy between written and spoken Arabic, and navigate fluidly between the two, which they consider to be part of one continuum, the situation is different in the Maghreb. Indeed, spoken Arabic in this region is considered, both in the Maghreb and outside it, to be
significantly different from written Arabic. This only enhances the difference of status between the two varieties. In other words, the status of spoken Arabic is so low in the Maghreb that that of literary Arabic is all the more high by contrast. Perhaps an explanation of this lies in the fact that many languages have impacted spoken Arabic in the Maghreb in many ways. These languages include French (and to a lesser extent Spanish) as a result of colonialism, but also, perhaps more importantly, the many varieties of Berber spoken throughout the Maghreb.

As a result, writers from the Maghreb tend to overcompensate by exaggerating the literary quality of the Arabic that they use. This means avoiding the use of spoken Arabic vocabulary (loan words from Berber, French, or Spanish, for example), as well as syntactic and grammatical constructions known to be peculiar to the Maghreb. This constraint is especially valid if these arabophone authors from the Maghreb have to turn to publishers elsewhere, as the case of Leila Abouzeid that was analyzed in chapter one illustrates. Consequently, although literary Arabic varies slightly regionally (albeit not to the extent that spoken Arabic does), the language of Arabic literature has become homogenized to a large extent, which results in a sometimes significant gap between the literary text and the lived experience.

Some arabophone novelists from the Maghreb have challenged the dominance of a standard language of modern Arabic literature by including a certain amount of spoken Arabic in their works, mostly in rendering dialogues. Among the most important of these works are Mohamed Choukri’s *Al-Khubz al-hafi*, the trajectory of which, as we have seen in chapter one, exemplifies the status of Arabic from the Maghreb in the realm of Arabic literature, as well as Mohamed Berrada’s *Lu’bat al-nisyan* (1987) [*The Game of*
Forgetting (1996)]. Berrada is one of Morocco’s foremost writers and literary scholars, yet he has received relatively little critical attention outside of his country. The exception was his second novel, the subject of an article by Nasrin Qader in 2000. His first novel, \textit{Lu’bat al-nisyan}, has become an exemplar of the use of spoken Arabic in literature. However, the occasional use of spoken Arabic to render dialogues in this novel only emphasizes the fact that most of it is actually written in literary Arabic.

Some authors from the Maghreb, aware of the unnatural quality of their writings in literary Arabic, address the issue explicitly. In his autobiography \textit{al-Rahil}, for example, Larbi Batma interrupts the narrative to express frustration at having to translate from one kind of Arabic to the other to convey Moroccan lived experiences in writing:

أتممى أن يكون شرحي لهاته الجمل “الدارجة” صحيحا، لأن اللغة الدارجة، ولا أقول اللهجة الدارجة، لها معاني صعب ترجمتها. (25)

I hope that my translation of these “darija” phrases is correct, because the darija language, and I am not saying the darija dialect, has meanings that are hard to translate.

These kinds of apologetic passages are common in francophone literature from the Maghreb. In those cases, it is assumed that readers may not be familiar with Arabic or Berber, and some un-translated terms, phrases, or expressions are explained either in the narrative or in footnotes. In fact, the use of such explanatory footnotes by Driss Chraïbi has been the object of an interesting study by Jeanne Fouet. However, when an advisory passage such as the one by Larbi Batma cited above occurs in texts written in Arabic originally, they demonstrate the distortion that exists between two varieties of the
language, and the indirect trajectory (from spoken to literary) that this language takes in order to appear on the page.

Nevertheless, the gap between spoken and written Arabic is not unique to the Maghreb. Certain Egyptian authors, such as Tawfiq al-Hakim, have also advocated a larger place for spoken Arabic colloquialisms in their works. Still, the most influential Egyptian writers, such as Taha Hussein, have generally kept to literary Arabic. A perfect illustration of the stance of these authors on the homogenization of the language of Arabic literature can be found in a remark by Naguib Mahfouz, from an interview with ‘Abd al-Tawwāb ‘Abd al-Ḥayy’s. In spite of employing colloquial terms in his writings, Mahfouz fundamentally opposed the use of spoken Arabic in literature:

"I recognize only literary Arabic as a language of writing. The colloquial language is not even a full-fledged language [...]. The colloquial language is one of the many woes from which the people suffer, and of which they will surely get rid when they progress. I consider the colloquial language a social disgrace, just like ignorance, poverty and disease!"
Because literary and spoken Arabic are perceived to be practically two different languages, writing in Arabic can become an alienating process. This situation accounts for the fact that many authors from the Maghreb still write in French, even though it was predicted that francophone literature in North Africa would not last beyond its first generation of authors in the mid twentieth century. French, in fact, is not necessarily more foreign to North Africa than is literary Arabic. In order to persist on an arabophone trajectory without conceding spoken Arabic, therefore, it becomes necessary for these authors to find generic alternatives to writing. The Algerian Kateb Yacine, for example, turned to theatre after establishing his reputation as a francophone novelist, and spent most of his career producing plays in spoken Arabic and Berber.

To return to the case of Assia Djebar, for her to write in Arabic as an Algerian author would require performing a tedious linguistic effort, because there exists no precedent for a written form of the Arabic spoken in the Algerian region of Cherchel that she was interested in when she was making *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua*. In addition, to have tried to write in the regional spoken Arabic would have made the publication and distribution of that work particularly difficult, and financially unviable, as it would have a very narrow potential audience. The alternative, to compromise and write in literary Arabic, would alienate her work from its subject. As mentioned above, most arabophone novelists from the Maghreb at the time had to publish their works in such places as Egypt or Lebanon, which resulted in the erosion of their regional quality in favor of the construction of a pan-Arab identity whose character is considerably removed from the immediate context of the societies of the Maghreb.
Given the dynamics of spoken and literary Arabic, film and certain of its techniques enable Djebar to address these language issues directly and to show the discrepancy between the various forms of Arabic in ways that would be impossible in a novel. The goal in making *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* was to give women who were erased from official histories their turn to speak by allowing them to tell their own stories directly, not through a portrayal by actresses, and in their own voices. As the original meaning of the word nouba suggests, it is, in a sense, quite literally these women’s turn to speak, and they do so in their own words rather than through a homogenized literary form of Arabic. Yet, literary Arabic is actually used in *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua*, even extensively. However, it is never spoken directly, and used only in voice-over narration.

This dynamic is obvious from the very beginning of the film. *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* starts with the credits and a few opening shots consisting of images that will recur later in the film. One of these is a particularly beautiful freeze frame of a woman crossing a street. She resembles a musical note on a staff as she is seen from above on the pedestrian crossing, which underscores the importance of music in the movie. Afterwards, a text written in literary Arabic rolls on the screen to explain the purpose of the film and its double dedication: first, to the Hungarian musician Béla Bartók, whose music is used in the film, and who researched Algerian music in the early twentieth century; second, to Zoulikha, a local woman who became legendary because she defied the French during the Algerian war for independence. As this text appears on the screen, an off-screen voice proceeds to read it aloud. Literary Arabic, then, while
being the first language spoken in the film, is clearly presented as inseparable from the written form from the outset.

Following these openings, the protagonist, Lila, stands silent in the first scene while her thoughts are pronounced off-screen in literary Arabic. The content of these thoughts is ironic, as she says “I speak” in her mind’s voice, repeating it three times, while her lips remain motionless. The character does not speak, and talking in the alien language that is literary Arabic seems impossible as it is in contradiction with her identity. This identity issue is suggested by her next sentence: “I don’t want anyone to see me as I really am.” Lila’s explicit desire to communicate is accompanied by the frustration of being unable to do so, and her thoughts are expressed by an off-screen voice, outside of any actual dialogue on-screen. The feminist dimension of speaking in this case has been much analyzed by scholars such as Mildred Mortimer and, more recently, Stacey Weber-Fève, as well as by Djebar herself (Vaste est la prison). However, the linguistic dynamic that is in place here should also be taken into account, especially because the film was made at a moment in Djebar’s career when issues of language seemed particularly important. The method of using literary Arabic only off-screen is consistent throughout the film, as this form of the language is never pronounced by anybody in a scene but only in voice-over narration, thereby accentuating its artificiality. The fact that Djebar never produced any writing in Arabic suggests that cinema, because it allows for such devices as the use of off-screen and voice-over narration, can be a medium better suited than novels and short stories to render this dual aspect of language and the problems associated with diglossia.
Another, more recent Algerian film also uses this technique: in *Viva L’Aldjérie* (2004) by Nadir Moknèche, the absence of Arabic is deafening considering that the movie is set in Algiers. Shot almost entirely in French, the film was criticized by some of its early reviewers, such as Olivier Barlet, as being marked by a Eurocentric view of the Maghreb and being too far removed from Algerian realities, partly because of the prevalence of French over Arabic. However, the film was made at a time when people believed that the civil war in Algeria was ending. If we consider *Viva L’Aldjérie* to be essentially a story about rehabilitation after the traumatic experience of this conflict, the relative absence of Arabic takes on a new meaning, because part of healing from the trauma of this religious war is reconciliation with the language of Islam. As in *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua*, the language spoken directly on screen in *Viva L’Aldjérie* is significant; characters address each other in French. Arabic, literary or spoken, is mostly just part of background noise in the beginning. The first time the audience hears Arabic distinctly is from loudspeakers rather than spoken by actors. The film oscillates between two scenes, one in which the Quran is blasting from a mosque, and one in which a character is drinking in a bar while listening to a recording of the artist Cheba Djanet. Going back and forth between these two scenes, one in which the Quran stands for literary Arabic, and the other where the singer uses spoken Arabic, already establishes the duality of the language. Then, towards the middle of the film, a character receives a phone call and starts to speak in Arabic, but immediately steps off-screen, as if to highlight the absence of Arabic in the scene. It is only at the very end of the film, as a character’s healing journey reaches its end, that she steps onto a stage and proceeds to
sing a song with lyrics in spoken Arabic, marking the first time that the language is really used directly on screen in the film.

The dynamics of Arabic and the challenge of writing in a language that does not necessarily have an established and codified written form find an echo south of the Sahara. Indeed, writing in an African language is sometimes not easy because there are often no precedents, or, if these precedents exist, they may be inadequate. The case of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o once again offers a perfect example. In order to write in Gikuyu, he had to make linguistic decisions to single-handedly codify a written form of the language to use in his novels. In Decolonising the Mind, he describes aspects of this process in writing his first Gikuyu novel Caitani Mũtharabainĩ [Devil on the Cross]:

Gĩkũyũ language had been reduced to writing by non-native speakers such as European missionaries and they could not always identify the various lengths of vowels. The distinction between the short and the long vowel is very important in Gĩkũyũ prose and poetry. [. . .] I tried to solve the problem by using double vowels where I wanted to indicate the long vowel. (74)

Cinema can solve these kinds of linguistic obstacles and challenges, although not entirely without any difficulties. As Armes notes: “The production problems of the Wolof version [of Sembène’s film The Money Order/Mandabi (1968)] point to the difficulty at this time of making specifically African films that use the language of the people” (Third World 286). Yet, these language problems are more easily avoided in films than in the case of novels, because the director can count on the actors to improvise unscripted dialogues.
The crucial importance of language in Sembène’s choice to use cinema over written media such as the novel is essential for yet another reason. As mentioned above, language has been at the center of African literary criticism from its beginnings. Chinua Achebe commented extensively on the use of English with a distinct African identity, and in francophone West Africa, and specifically in Sembène’s Senegal, Leopold Senghor’s praise of the French language in some of his poems is still the object of much debate among scholars. Most African authors in the second half of the twentieth century wrote in a European language but attempted to assert their identity by bending the rules of orthodox English and French. A classic example of this process is Ahmadou Kourouma’s *Les Soleils des indépendances* (1968), in which the limits of French syntax are stretched to convey a Malinké quality. Rosemary Schikora has noted several oral elements in this novel that bridge the gap between narrator and audience (812), a pattern that starts with the first sentence of the novel, although it is less apparent in the English translation: “Il y avait une semaine qu’avait fini dans la capital Koné Ibrahima, de race malinké, ou disons-le en malinké: il n’avait pas soutenu un petit rhume…” (9) [“One week had passed since Ibrahim Kone, of the Malinké race, had met his end in the capital city, or, to put it in Malinké, he had been defeated by a mere cold” (3)]. Here, the simulation of Malinké speech is an attempt to create the impression of an oral exchange between the narrator and the reader in spite of the limitations of the written word on the printed page.

In *Les Soleils des indépendances* as well as many other francophone West African novels, the language in which conversations take place is rarely clear. Although all dialogues are rendered in French, the reader must assume that certain characters at times actually use other languages, such as Peul or Wolof. As mentioned before, cinema, unlike
novels, offers the possibility to address sociopolitical issues without an estranging language barrier. Unlike written literature in Wolof that would require more linguistic gymnastics, cinema frees the author of the constraints of writing. In film, the spectator is immediately aware of language choice and code switching. In Xala, for instance, the language in which the characters express themselves is incredibly significant. The crucial scenes where the main character and his daughter insist on speaking to each other in French and in Wolof respectively, or when the main character’s request to address the Chamber of Commerce in Wolof is denied, are completely lost on the reader of the novel because on paper it is entirely delivered in French. One example of the way that the novel impedes on the immediacy of the language choice significance is a scene, absent from the film, in which Hadji’s daughter Rama, a character who insists on using Wolof rather than French, is pulled over by a policeman while driving with her fiancé Pathé:

- Vos papiers, s’il vous plait, Madame!

Rama observa Pathé, se retourna vers l’agent avec féminité et dit en Wolof:

- Mon frère, que veux-tu ?

- Vos papiers, répétait l’agent en français.

- Mon frère, pardonne-moi mais je ne comprends pas ce que tu dis.

- Tu ne comprends pas le français ? questionna-t-il en wolof.

- Je ne comprends pas le français mon frère. (74-5)

‘Your driving licence please, madam.’
Rama glanced at Pathé, turned, all feminine, to the policeman and said in Wolof:

‘My brother, excuse me, I cannot understand what you are saying.’

‘You don’t understand French?’ he asked in Wolof.

‘I don’t understand French, my brother.’ (43)

Rama does know French, but refuses to use it for political reasons. The transcription of her side of the dialogue in French in the novel defeats the point that she makes. In the film version, however, although this particular scene is absent, the character of Rama is able to deliver her lines in Wolof directly.

Sembène attempts to foreground Wolof in the novel, for example by mentioning Kaddu, a Wolof-language newspaper that was a novelty in Dakar, where French and the heritage of colonial language policies dominate. He is, however, able to highlight Wolof more efficiently in the film, for example by showing griottes singing in Wolof at the wedding. One of the most important ways in which Sembène is able to highlight Wolof onscreen better than in the novel is the use of songs in that language throughout the film. These songs, as Josef Gugler and Oumar Cherif Diop have pointed out, “constitute a major co-text” (150). However, at times, many characters who might normally be speaking Wolof actually speak French. This may be attributed to a desire to keep the plot moving without subtitles for the benefit of audiences who may not know Wolof.

Both Sembène and Djebar had to deal with the constraints, demands, and urgent requirements of neocolonial verbal expression, each in a specific linguistic context. And, as exemplified by La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua and by Xala, they found film to be better suited than novels for the incorporation of important languages in their
respective societies. The main difference between the two has to do with their particular languages. The tension between French and Wolof is reminiscent of conflicts between any colonizing and colonized languages, and is embedded in the history of French colonial language policies. In the case of Algeria it is Arabic that, in a sense, plays the role of a colonial language, due to the hegemony of a standardized form of Arabic over the literature of the Maghreb. Although linguistically the regional spoken varieties of Arabic in the Maghreb are not as foreign to literary Arabic as Wolof is to French, projects such as La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua assert an individual identity through language.

Furthermore, cinema in general is better suited than writing to convey an individual identity in the case of Arabic, not only because films are not bound to a standardized written language, but also because they can be particularly well suited to address language issues, as the use of voice-over narration illustrates. Just as Wolof and French are understood to be two distinct languages, each with a clearly defined connotation in a colonial context, literary and spoken Arabic function in effect as two separate languages, and should be understood politically as such. The connoted superiority of the one and inferiority of the other result in a dynamic that is similar to the colonial relationship between French and West African languages, as well as between French and Arabic. Thus, when Arabic is used in the Maghreb to assert a regional identity in opposition to the standardized language of Arabic literature, as is the case with Djebar’s La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua, it ceases to be the language of a distinct Arab World, and can be considered to be the language of an African literary expression instead.
Cinema in the Maghreb helps construct a distinct literary identity within the vast panorama of the Arabic-speaking world because it is an adequate medium for the use of spoken Arabic. Since the nineteen seventies, when *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* was made, Assia Djebar still has not written in Arabic. Even today, her film, which is, after all, in Arabic, finds interest among French and francophone studies specialists more than those who work on Arabic. While this may be indicative of a failure to take off for a literature in spoken Arabic in the Maghreb, developments in the cinema of the region are a testament to the increased interest in asserting a regional identity through language. This care about authenticity in cinema in this area of the world can be traced back at least to the Italian filmmaker Gillo Pontecorvo’s work in North Africa in the nineteen sixties, which yielded the cinematic masterpiece *The Battle of Algiers* (1965). In this, as well as many of his other films, Pontecorvo preferred to use non-professional actors to give priority to authenticity. As a result, he cast Saadi Yacef of the Front de Libération Nationale to play his own role, although his character was given another name in the film.

A more recent example of the ability of cinema to make use of spoken Arabic is *Ali Zaoua* (1999), a film by the Moroccan Nabil Ayouch about slum children in Casablanca. The children in this film were played by actual orphans and abandoned children who were essentially portraying themselves. This approach has been called “a new realism” as the limited use of professional actors results in a genuine portrayal of a social problem in urban Morocco (Armes, *Postcolonial Images* 169-77). More importantly, however, the authenticity of the performers and the realistic quality of the way they deliver their lines illustrate the singular role of film in the Maghreb’s cultural
production when it comes to the use of spoken Arabic. One of the challenges that cinema in the Maghreb faces in this regard, however, is the dependence on foreign funding, which is more available for films in French that are likely to yield a profit in Europe. Yet this was not the case for *Ali Zaoua*, which was financed by a French television network and a number of French, Belgian, and other European agencies, in addition to receiving some of its funds from Morocco (Gugler, “Ali Zaoua” 376).

The use of spoken Arabic in dialogues has since increased in films from the Maghreb. The most recent example of this increase is the controversial *Casanegra* by Nour-Eddine Lakhmari, which, according to Natasha Senjanovic, caused a scandal in Morocco, presumably for its crude portrayal of the city of Casablanca and its inhabitants. The use of spoken Arabic on screens, which has indeed become expected of Maghrebi films, suggests that authenticity of language is a key issue for the future of cinema in the region. Furthermore, because films have played a leading role in highlighting this linguistic issue in ways that literature has not, cinema is also becoming gradually more important to all fields interested in cultural production in the Maghreb.

The future impact (or lack thereof) of these developments, not only on arabophone literature but also on the teaching of Arabic as a foreign language, will be significant, and should be observed closely. This is because Arabic instruction, as an index of the perceived value of some regional varieties of speech over others, informs us on the orientation of the language. So far the dominance of Egypt’s dialects in media across the Arabic-speaking world is why many professors of Arabic encourage their students to learn Egyptian spoken Arabic as a complement to the literary Arabic that they teach them in the classroom. In fact, most advise students to learn Egyptian spoken
Arabic by invoking the presence of that country’s vernacular on screens across the Arab world. As a case in point, the editors of *Al-Kitab*, one of the most popular Arabic manuals for English speakers, write in the introduction of their textbook:

 لماذا العامية المصرية بالتحديد؟ وما الحل إذا لم يكن المدرس مصريا؟
والإجابة ببساطة وبعيدا عن أية حساسيات قلابة أن العامية المصرية هي أكثر العاميات العربية انتشارا على امتداد العالم العربي ونظرة بسيطة على خريطة برامج الإذاعة والتلفزيون في أي قطر عربي تكشف لنا هذه الحقيقة. (XX)

Why the Egyptian colloquial in particular? And what is the solution if the instructor is not from Egypt? The answer, simply and regardless of any regional sensitivities, is that the Egyptian colloquial, of all the Arabic colloquial varieties, is the most widely spread across the Arab World. A quick look at the program grids of radio and television in any Arab area reveals this truth.

While, as the editors of *Al-Kitab* suggest, Arabic teachers have so far favored Egypt when it comes to the instruction of spoken Arabic, they have also tended, even if inadvertently, to discourage the study of other varieties of spoken Arabic. The importance of cinema in that regard is paramount, because it is the wide distribution of Egyptian audiovisual media rather than any intrinsic aspect of Egyptian spoken Arabic that validates this
attitude. The increased use of spoken Arabic in cinema in the Maghreb, therefore, may force us to rethink Egypt’s dominance in that field.

The rise of spoken Arabic in recent films from the Maghreb, as noted, reveals a distancing from the standardized language of Arabic literature, and forces us to question the separation between North and sub-Saharan Africa on a linguistic basis. This rise also indicates that Arabic can be a legitimate idiom of African literary expression, so long as it is a spoken variety of the language, since literary Arabic has aimed at constructing a standardized Arab identity oriented instead towards a distinct Arab sphere. The case of *La Nouba des femmes du mont Chenoua* shows that cinema is better suited to the use of spoken Arabic than are more conventional forms of literary expression such as novels. Assia Djebar’s use of Arabic in her film, and its similarity to Ousmane Sembène’s use of Wolof in *Xala*, also suggests that North African cinema, as a result of the linguistic complexities of that region, fits into the same framework of multilingualism as its sub-Saharan counterpart. However, although films are singularly adapted to employing spoken Arabic, other media have also been using the language more adequately than writing in the Maghreb. One of these is music, which constitutes the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4:
FROM GNAWA TO GHIWANE AND BACK: THE VISIBILITY OF AFRICAN
IDENTITY IN MOROCCAN MUSIC

The most compelling argument against the separation between North and sub-Saharan Africa can be found when studying the musical cultures of Morocco. This is not only due to the fact that music, like cinema, is not dependent upon a written support and therefore allows more readily for the use of spoken vernaculars to claim a distinct identity, but also because African music is different from Western literary forms, such as the novel, in terms of its ability to evoke connections across Africa. Through the Sahara desert, this is mainly apparent in the importance of Gnawa brotherhoods—whose historical origins are in sub-Saharan Africa—in shaping contemporary Moroccan identity. The distinctive ritual of the Gnawa indicates that music is a space where North Africa’s links with sub-Saharan Africa are strong. In fact, two generations of Moroccan musicians who wished to distinguish themselves from other groups in the Arab World have emphasized their connection to Africa by using various Gnawa elements in their own music.

The most recent of these generations of musicians has emerged over the course of the last decade. It is centered on the metropolitan area of Casablanca, and is closely linked to the development of the city’s music festival/competition Boulevard des Jeunes Musiciens that enables amateur groups to perform alongside professional and established artists. Many of the bands that constitute this new generation have claimed (more or less explicitly) an African identity while making a conscious effort to assert their Moroccan individuality. In addition, their lyrics invite the listener to compare them to musical
groups from a previous generation, such as Jil Jilala and Lemchaheb, and mainly to the legendary Nass El Ghiwane, who were at the forefront of the Maghreb’s musical landscape of the nineteen seventies. This connection is particularly significant because of the importance of Gnawa music to Nass El Ghiwane themselves. Indeed, Nass El Ghiwane have always made a conscious effort to distinguish themselves from other groups in the Arabic-speaking world precisely by incorporating elements such as Gnawa instruments, melodies, and rhythms in their own music.

In this chapter, I will establish continuity between Nass El Ghiwane and a selection of groups from the new generation of Moroccan musicians that includes Awdellil, Barry, Fnaïr, H-Kayne, Darga, and Hoba Hoba Spirit by analyzing the important role that Gnawa music has played for all of these artists. The purpose is to show that two different generations of Moroccan musicians’ use of Gnawa music links the musical production of Morocco to sub-Saharan Africa, which reflects the dynamics at play in the country’s overall cultural identity and its ambiguous position between Africa and the Middle East. Ultimately, the attitude of these Moroccan artists indicates that music, as an idiom of cultural production, is a space where North Africa’s African character is particularly visible.

I will start by sketching a history of the Gnawa, and explore their role as a link between Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa, before moving to an analysis of how they were incorporated both by Nass El Ghiwane and the new generation of musicians. Some scholars have studied the Gnawa from ethnographic and musicological perspectives, but Nass El Ghiwane, however, has received surprisingly little scholarly attention outside of Morocco considering the colossal impact that the group had on the musical landscape not
only of Morocco, but of the entire Maghreb since the nineteen seventies. It should be noted, however, that Nass El Ghiwane has started attracting more attention recently; for example, the journal *Transition* published an interview with one of its members by Elias Muhanna in 2003. As to Barry, Fnaïr, H-Kayne, Darga, and Hoba Hoba Spirit, they have so far been covered mostly in a few magazine and newspaper articles in Morocco, although they have generated much interest on various Internet websites, blogs, and online forums. In this chapter, I intend to build upon the existing scholarship on Gnawa, as well as to continue the fledging conversation on Nass El Ghiwane, and initiate a new one on a new generation of Moroccan musical groups.

The Gnawa can be described as a Sufi order, even though they are not typically recognized as such. As David Goodman notes, Gnawa musicians are Muslims who claim Sidi Bilāl al-Ḥabashī as a patron saint, and whose organizational practices are comparable to those usually found in Sufism (38). Nevertheless, in the public eye, the Gnawa are viewed primarily as musicians. Gnawa music is characterized by distinctive beats and the use of Gnawa instruments, which are the *gembri* (see Fig. 1), the *qraqeb* (see Fig. 2), and the *tbel* (see Fig. 3).
Fig. 1. Photo of *gembri* (Chlyeh viii).
Fig. 2. Photo of *graqeb* (Chlyeh ix).

Fig. 3. Photo of *tbel* (Chlyeh ix).
The *gembri*, sometimes also called *sintir* or, more rarely, *hejhouj*, is a bass-like string instrument that has been described by Goodman:

To Western audiences a gembri may resemble a small square form of our guitar or lute. It has a frame with skin from camel’s neck stretched across it, out of the frame box extends a two foot long neck onto which three strings made of goat intestine are fastened with cloth or leather straps. At the top of the neck is a removable piece of metal onto which numerous metal rings are hung. (62)

Goodman has also described the other two Gnawa instruments, the *qraqeb*, which are metal castanets, and the *tbel*, which is a large drum:

Qraqeb are two pairs of approximately foot-long twin concave metal segments each joined with a metal ring at one of their ends. They are brought together by opening and closing the thumbs and fingers, one hand following the other, and produce a very full and distinct metallic rhythm. An additional form of percussion used by the Gnawa is T’bel t’bûela. These are large two sided goatskin bass drums. They are struck together with a curved ‘sahla’ (a fig wood stick) to play deep notes from the center, and a flexible olive branch termed ‘tarrach’ for rapid snare sounds. (62)

The Gnawa are primarily found in Morocco, although similar groups exist throughout the Maghreb. These groups may, however, go by different appellations outside of Morocco. For instance, Goodman notes that in Algeria, they are generally referred to simply as devotees of Sidi Bilal, but may be called ‘*usfan* in some regions of the country, and in Tunisia they have been known as *Stabali, Sudani*, or even *Bori*, a term
that crosses into parts of Libya (36). The largest of these communities, however, is that of the Gnawa in Morocco. Today, the Gnawa frequently perform their music for various audiences, and many have released albums that have been extensively distributed worldwide. A renowned yearly world music festival in the city of Essaouira bears their name and has contributed to bringing their music to a more conventional stage format (Majdouli 94). This commoditization of Gnawa music, however, should not be construed as a symptom of the erosion of their other religious activities. Rather, it is indicative of the importance of Gnawa music not only to Moroccan music at large, but to the Gnawa as well.

Although Gnawa music today is more often than not consumed for entertainment, it is rooted in religious and medical purposes. As Philip Schuyler has explained, music is an integral part of a Gnawa ceremony (called lila, Arabic for night, or derdeba), during which it is used to communicate with saints and spirits:

The saints and spirits each have their own tunes, and a given melody (with or without a sung text) is said both to attract the spirit and to indicate its presence. Thus, the performance of a particular tune may be used to summon the saint or spirit who “owns” that melody; if the music then sends one of the participants into trance, that is taken as proof that the spirit has responded to the summons. In other cases the spirit may first possess a devotee, and then express (through the dancer’s mouth) its desire for the appropriate tune. (5)

Music is not the only element in a Gnawa ceremony, but it is primordial to the spiritual and medicinal purposes of the ritual. Gnawa music is, however, often heard out
of the context of a *derdeba*, partly because of its increasing popularity for entertainment purposes, as mentioned above, and also because of its frequent use in public to entertain tourists from both within and without Morocco. A visitor to one of the Moroccan cities with a large Gnawa population, such as Essaouira or Marrakech, will very likely see Gnawa musicians playing for tips, either in a group or alone and sporting only one of the three instruments (see Fig. 4).

![Gnawa musician playing a *gembri* on the streets of the city of Rabat. Photo by the author.](image)

While the precise geographical and chronological origins of the Gnawa are uncertain, it is clear that they have their roots in sub-Saharan Africa, and, as scholars such as Viviana Paques (1991) and Bouazza Benachir (2005) have suggested, the Gnawa
presence in Morocco is related to a history of trans-Saharan slave trade. Goodman has noted that performance lyrics during *derdeba* ceremonies refer to the Moroccan conquest of the Songhai Empire in 1591, and the northward movement of people that ensued, most notably the constitution of the ‘Abid [slave] Army of the sultan of Morocco (46-8).

Goodman, however, warns against seeking a single moment of migration. Indeed, while increases in northward migration were probably significant after 1591, there are indications of a sub-Saharan presence in Morocco prior to that. As early as 1185, for instance, the Almohad sultan Ya’qub al Mansour ordered a south-facing city gate named Bab Agenaou to be built in the city of Marrakech. The similarity of Agenaou to Gnawa, and the probable connection to Ghana, suggests that the term was used in connection with sub-Saharan Africa and its populations in Morocco well before the conquest of the Songhai Empire (Hale, *Griots* 363-4).

However, the connections between slavery, the racial element that it implies, and the arrival of sub-Saharan African people in North Africa, are not clear. While the importation of slaves from sub-Saharan Africa to the Maghreb has been established historically (Ennaji 1997), the capture and enslavement of Europeans by Barbary pirates is also well documented (Milton 2004). The fact that sub-Saharan Africa has not been the only supplier of slaves in Morocco suggests that the Gnawa should not be equated with slavery in a simplistic way; they may have been migrating north in other capacities as well even after the conquest of the Songhai Empire in the late sixteenth century.

Moreover, although the Gnawa today are still associated with blackness in the popular imagination, complexion should not the primary defining criterion because it is entirely subjective.
Due to the long history of miscegenation in North Africa and the Mediterranean basin at large, race in these areas is often established socially, economically, geographically, and culturally, rather than merely on the basis of melanin. For this reason, imposing racial categories on the Gnawa is unreliable. In spite of the fact that the Gnawa’s sub-Saharan origin has resulted in their being essentially identified as black, their skin color varies considerably. Conversely, many dark-skinned Moroccans are not necessarily affiliated with the brotherhoods. As an example of these racial complexities, Majid Bekkas, the internationally-known Moroccan guitarist who also experimented with Gnawa music, was the object of an article by the journalist ‘Az al-Dīn al-Hādif in a May 2008 issue of the magazine *Nīshān*, with a picture of him playing the *gembri* and a headline that read “مجيب بقاس: الڭناوي الأبيض” [Majid Bekkas: The White Gnawa] in spite of his being darker-skinned than some Gnawa (36).

In spite of the lack of detailed information on the origins of the Gnawa, their connection to sub-Saharan Africa is certain, and its memory is prominently present in Gnawa activities today. These sub-Saharan roots are mostly evident in Gnawa jargon. In *derdeba* performance lyrics, there are references to *al-Sudān*, the broad Arabic name for sub-Saharan Africa in general, and to specific sub-Saharan peoples, particularly the Bambara. However, As Bertrand Hell points out, the Gnawa themselves do not know the meaning of many of these ceremonial terms, and are not aware of what they specifically designate (73-4). These references constitute an inherited and collective memory that vaguely rather than accurately connects the Gnawa to their sub-Saharan history. In her analysis of the most important yearly Gnawa ceremony that takes place over various days
during the month of Cha’bān of the Islamic calendar, Viviana Paques transcribed some of these songs that include references to sub-Saharan African peoples. In these selected examples, the m’allem (M) or master of ceremony sings a phrase, to which he receives an answer from the chorus (C). In this first case, I have highlighted references to the Fulani and to the Bambara from West Africa and the Gikuyu from East Africa, who are called Bambari and Kuyu respectively, as well as to *al-Sudān*:

M: *Fulani* lalla yumma, *Bambari* lalla yumma

C: lalla yumma waye waye yumma

[...]

M: uled *Sudān*, uled *Kuyu*

C: a sidi a rasul Allah (Paques 265-6)

M: *Fulani* saint Yumma, *Bambari* saint Yumma

C: saint Yumma waye waye Yumma

[...]

M: sons of *Sudān*, sons of *Kuyu*

C: my lord, prophet of God

Besides the three sub-Saharan ethnic groups mentioned in the example above, the Gnawa also allude at times to the Hausa. However, it is undeniably the Bambara who are referenced the most often, as this second example illustrates:

M: Waye waye Bambara Bambara

C: waye waye Bambara Bambara

M: wa allahakbar Bambara Bambara al walidin Bambara Bambara (bis)
C: waye waye Bambara wa l walidin Bambara Bambara (Paques 269)

M: Waye waye Bambara Bambara

C: waye waye Bambara Bambara

M: and God is great, Bambara Bambara, the parents, Bambara Bambara (bis)

C: waye waye Bambara, and the parents, Bambara Bambara

The word waye, essentially untranslatable, is an exclamation of enthusiasm (cf. yippee in English). The recurrent use of the word Bambara, however, should not be read only as a deliberate and specific reference to the sub-Saharan people who bear that name, but also, perhaps, as a widely employed designation for various peoples.

In addition to ceremonial chants, many terms originating from sub-Saharan African languages are found in other aspects of Gnawa jargon. The word gembri, for instance, probably comes from gambare, the Soninké word for lute. These terms of sub-Saharan origin, along with the frequent mentions of ethnic groups such as the Bambara, serve a collective memory that connects the Gnawa to their sub-Saharan history.

Furthermore, Gnawa music, because of its significant presence throughout Morocco, within as well as without its ceremonial context, has become an emblem and a vehicle for the artistic and cultural connection between Morocco and sub-Saharan Africa.

The importance of music for the Gnawa invites comparisons with sub-Saharan griots, especially considering that some griots are likely to have been present among the sub-Saharan peoples who came to Morocco, and from whom the Gnawa descend. In his seminal work on griots (1998), Thomas Hale notes similarities between the two, such as
the resemblance of the gembri to lutes commonly used by griots in Senegal, Mali, and Niger (see Fig. 5).

![Photo of griot lute by Dwain Harbst (Hale 150).](image)

Although it is not certain that Gnawa instruments originate from sub-Saharan Africa, this is highly likely, and today they symbolize a link between North and sub-Saharan Africa. Hale even ventures the hypothesis that the words Gnawa and griot may be etymologically connected. However, he considers the Gnawa to be distinct from griots:

The music of the gnawa refers to languages and places in sub-Saharan Africa and often includes words that the singers do not understand today. The link between them and sub-Saharan Africa has therefore survived but
in a syncretic form that contains traces of many cultural activities tied to blacksmiths, griots, and sorcerers. The gnawa I interviewed and saw performing in October 1992 in Marrakech were clearly different from griots. Yet the sounds and rhythms of their music echoed much of what one can hear today on the other side of the Sahara. (364-5)

Although the connections of the Gnawa to sub-Saharan Africa are not accurate enough to link them directly to griots, the two share at least one quality, that of visibility. Indeed, in spite of the differences in their respective roles, the Gnawa are, much like griots, particularly noticeable in their society, not only to foreigners, but to other members of that society as well. It is partly because of the spectacular nature of their ceremonies, with their musical component, that the Gnawa are the most visible in Morocco. This has led to a widespread consumption of their music for entertainment purposes by Moroccans and non-Moroccans alike. However, the visibility of the Gnawa through their music has also spread through their impact on other types of Moroccan music.

As David Goodman remarked, “the uncertainty concerning the history of the Gnawa is coupled with a wide agreement as to their tremendous influence on the music and ritual of religious orders throughout the country” (64). Viviana Paques, among others, has analyzed the relationship between the Gnawa and other orders in Morocco, such as the ‘Issawa and the Ḥmadsha, and the important role that the Gnawa played in providing an example to be followed by these other brotherhoods for codifying their own rituals (1991). In addition, the musicologist Ahmed Aydoun has addressed more
specifically the impact of Gnawa music on other registers of Moroccan music that are not necessarily linked to religious orders:

   En effet, nous retrouvons des éléments de la musique gnawie dans d’autres genres marocains: a l’intérieur de la musique andalouse marocaine (mode raça pentatonique), chez les rwayes (le mode agnaw caractérisant la tessiture aigue du chant), et dans les phases extatiques de plusieurs confréries dont notamment les hmadcha et les aissaouas. L’influence gnawie est présente aussi dans la chanson dite moderne depuis les années 40. (105)

   Indeed, we find elements of Gnawa music in other Moroccan genres: in Andalusian Moroccan music (pentatonic raça mode), among the rwayes (the agnaw mode being what characterizes the high-pitched texture of the singing), and in the ecstatic phases of many brotherhoods including the hmadcha and the aissaoua. The influence of the Gnawa has also been present in what is called modern Moroccan song since the forties.

The considerable impression made by Gnawa music on various other Moroccan musical genres has lead to a sustained presence of their distinctive sound throughout Morocco. Because the Gnawa constitute a link between North and sub-Saharan Africa, Moroccan music is, therefore, a privileged space for the visibility of North Africa’s own African character and African cultural identity.
When it comes to the impact of the Gnawa on other forms of Moroccan music that are not necessarily affiliated to a religious order, scholars, including Ahmed Aydoun, often give the group Nass El Ghiwane as an example. According to Bertrand Hell:

La popularité de la musique gnawa en dehors de la sphère des adeptes remonte au Maroc aux années soixante. Le groupe pop Nass El Ghiwan effectua de larges emprunts au répertoire de la confrérie et cette influence se renforça à partir de 1979 lorsque Abderrahman Paco, un authentique maâlem, rejoignit la formation comme bassiste. Très prisé de la jeunesse, Nass el ghiwan familiarisa toute une génération avec les sonorités du gumbri et des crotales. (343)

The popularity of Gnawa music outside of the sphere of the adepts goes back to the sixties. The pop music [sic] group Nass El Ghiwane borrowed extensively from the brotherhood’s repertoire, and this influence strengthened starting from 1979 when Abderrahman Paco, an authentic m’alem [Gnawa master], joined the band as a bass player. Very popular among the youth, Nass El Ghiwane familiarized a whole generation with the sounds of the gembri and the qraqeb castanets.

The amazing popularity of Nass El Ghiwane and their extensive use of Gnawa instruments, rhythms and melodies, as well as the addition of an authentic Gnawa musician to their line-up, make them emblematic of the significant presence of Gnawa music in the Moroccan musical landscape at large.
To briefly note the development of Nass El Ghiwane, Larbi Batma and Boujemaa Hgour formed the group in the mid-sixties after they initially started writing songs together while they were actors in the theatre troupe of the leading Moroccan playwright Tayeb Essidiki. This background in drama is noteworthy because Essidiki was fond of using songs in his plays, causing Larbi Batma and Boujemaa Hgour to start singing together as stage actors. Later on, they were joined by Omar Sayyed, a fellow actor in the same troupe, and Aziz Tahiri. According to Larbi Batma’s autobiography, they were looking from the outset to use authentic Moroccan acoustic instruments for accompaniment, and while they had many percussive instruments to choose from, they had some difficulty finding stringed instruments that were authentically Moroccan. Eventually, they decided to use the *gembri*, which Batma calls the *sintir*:

"ذهب بوجمعة والطاهري الى مدينة مراكش، والتقيا بشخص 'غناوي'

يسمى 'لمعلم باقيو' واشتريا من عنده آللة 'الستنتر' التي كانت مغمورة، يقتصر وجودها ومعرفتها كالة على طائفة 'غناوي' فقط." (115)

Boujemaa and Tahir went to Marrakech to meet a Gnawa person called m’alem Baqbo, and they bought from him a sintir, which was then an obscure instrument that was only found and known among the Gnawa.

Thus the Gnawa, although of sub-Saharan origin, played instruments considered authentically Moroccan. Aziz Tahiri was the one to play the *gembri/sintir*, while the others sang and played various kinds of drums. They also called upon a friend of theirs, Allal Yaala, to join them and play the banjo. Unlike the others, Allal had received formal
musical instruction. Although trained in the ‘ud, the traditional fretless Arab lute, Allal preferred the banjo, perhaps because it allowed him to play on stage standing up (which is impossible with the ‘ud, which must be placed on the musician’s lap when played), and because the banjo’s metallic tuning pegs were more convenient than the ‘ud’s wooden ones that caused the instrument to go out of tune more frequently.

The use of the gembri by Nass El Ghiwane ensured that elements of Gnawa music obtained significant exposure through the band’s increasing popularity. However, if Gnawa music was not yet an essential feature of Nass El Ghiwane’s sound, it would become so after the departure of Aziz Tahiri in the early seventies and the arrival of his replacement Abderrahmane Paco. In fact, Paco was a genuine Gnawa master from the city of Essaouira. As Larbi Batma has reported:

بعد الاستماع إلى عزفه، قررنا ضمه إلى المجموعة مع إعطاء صبغة فنية لأن لديه لطريقة عزفه، لأنه كان لا يعرف إلا على الطريقة "الغناوية".
وكنا نحن في حاجة لعزف على "السنتير" بطريقة تبع كليا عن تلك الطريقة، وتسابر الطريقة الغيزوية وهكذا بدأنا إنهلالة أخرى جديدة.

(122)

After listening to his playing, we decided to include him in the band and to give an artistic flair to his instrument and his playing, because he only played the Gnawa way and we needed a sintir player who would play in a completely different way. He took to the Ghiwane way and so we took a different start with new songs.
Abderrahman Paco became a crucial driving force in Nass El Ghiwane’s song writing, especially after Boujemaa Hgour’s untimely death in 1974. Abdelhaï Sadiq has identified two song-writing tendencies, that of Larbi Batma on the one hand and that of Abderrahman Paco on the other, both at the core of Nass El Ghiwane’s artistic production (2006). According to Sadiq, the dominant musical influences of the group were the musical traditions of the Gnawa and Ḥmadsha religious orders. The songs that exemplify them the best are also marked by a strong scenic and vocal input on the part of Paco and his gembri (38-9). Nevertheless, as mentioned before, the Gnawa also played an important part in shaping the music and rituals of various other religious orders throughout Morocco. The Ḥmadsha elements, which Nass El Ghiwane used in their music, have their own origins in Gnawa traditions as well (Aydoun 105).

Thus, the musicians of Nass El Ghiwane were instrumental in amplifying the Gnawa presence in Moroccan music, thereby contributing to make North Africa’s connection to sub-Saharan Africa particularly visible in this medium. After Abderrahman Paco’s departure from the group and Larbi Batma’s death in the nineteen nineties, Nass El Ghiwane hired replacement players and the group has remained active, playing concerts regularly, and releasing re-recordings of their old songs as well as new material. Although they have retained a solid fan-base, they are no longer the cultural phenomenon that they were in the seventies. However, they have become a household name, and most Moroccans think of them affectionately, even those who did not know their music in its heyday.

As pointed out by Abdelhaï Sadiq, Nass El Ghiwane was the artistic reflection of the geo-historical and socio-political context in which it emerged. According to him,
events such as those of May 1968 in France and the Arab defeat by Israel in 1967 impacted Moroccan youth, sparking their political consciousness and pushing them to question Morocco’s position in the Arab World (31). This issue of Morocco’s relationship with the rest of the Arab world is particularly important. In fact, the break with “oriental” forms of Arabic music was a self-conscious decision that Nass El Ghiwane members have acknowledged on many occasions. For example, in Ahmed El Maanouni’s 1981 documentary Al Hal [Trances], Omar Sayyed declared:

أنا أتدعوا في 46 و 45 و 47 و حتى 48، هذا الشباب ديا ل هذه السنوات هذه، الأربعينات و الخمسينات إذا بغينا، كلهم كانوا مولوعين بالأدب الشرقي، أي النغمة الشرقية: محمد عبد الوهاب، فريد الأطرش، أسهمان، فيروز، ليلي مرايا، عبد الحليم [حافظ]، المرحومة.

كلثوم...مولوعين بواحد التصور بالنغمة الشرقية. وحتى أنا كنت من ضمن ذوي الناس، الى درجة أنني دخلت إلى إداعة الضار البيضاء باش نولي مطرب كنغني النغمة الشرقية. يكون عشقني من هذه في الخبيرة مش مصيبة ولكنها واحد الخلاصة، هو المرحوم جومعة.

قال لي: "أنت واحد الإنسان مغربي خاصك تقلب على مسائل مغربية ذيالك التي توجد فيها ذاتك وتهني ادبك الشعبي هو الأول عاد تقلب على ادبر ولا أنغام أخرى ذيال دول أخرى."
People who were born in 46, or 45, or 47 or even 48, the youth of that generation, the forties and fifties if you will, were all fond of oriental arts, that is to say oriental tunes: Mohammed Abdel Wahhab, Farid El Atrache, Asmahan, Fairuz, Leila Mourad, Abdel Halim [Hafez], the late Umm Kulthum...Fond of it to a point you can’t even imagine. And I was among these people too, to the extent that I went to Casablanca’s radio to sing oriental tunes. Who saved me from this—in fact I wouldn’t call it a disaster, but it would have been an error, it was Boujemaa may he rest in peace.

[...] He told me: “you are a Moroccan individual, you must search for some of your own Moroccan stuff, in which you’ll find yourself, and sing your own popular adab first, before you go looking for adab and tunes from other countries.”

Thus, most Moroccan artists at the time imitated the music that came from the eastern parts of the Arab world, which they identified as a vague “orient” that canonized Arabic music nonetheless. To Moroccan audiences, Nass El Ghiwane appeared novel because they were radically breaking with the format codified and canonized by Egyptian, Lebanese, and Syrian singers; paradoxically, they were also very familiar because they borrowed from recognizable traditional Moroccan elements. Most importantly, Nass El Ghiwan sang in the familiar spoken Arabic of Morocco rather than the alien vernacular of eastern singers, often even including Berber words.
As Hassan Narraïs explained when contextualizing the emergence of Nass El Ghiwane in Ali Charef’s DVD documentary *Le Souffle Ghiwani*, the Moroccan public, caught between the musical production of other countries in the Middle East and the traditional Moroccan repertoire, was ready for an alternative. Nass El Ghiwane borrowed from this Moroccan catalogue and revived it, drawing mostly—although not exclusively—on Gnawa music:

We feared the invasion of oriental songs at the time of Umm Kulthum, Farid El Atrache, Abdel Halim Hafez and so on. And, at the same time, there were the classical Moroccan songs. Therefore, the Moroccans were particularly waiting for a change.

What is particularly interesting here is precisely the decision to grant Gnawa music such an important role, given the question of identity and position within the Arab world raised by Sadiq. Considering Gnawa music as an indigenous Moroccan art, albeit with its roots in sub-Saharan Africa, indicates a will to embed national identity within the rest of the continent rather than adhere to a pan-Arab identity. The fact that this connection to Africa was most apparent in music is further evidence that this medium is a space where North Africa’s link to sub-Saharan Africa is particularly visible.

Following Nass El Ghiwane’s example, other similar groups were formed, including Jil Jilala and Lemchaheb. These other bands also revived Morocco’s musical
patrimony, giving an important place to the Gnawa, either directly or indirectly by borrowing from other types of Moroccan music, such as that of the ‘Issawa and the Ḥmadsha who had borrowed from the Gnawa themselves. The issue of rejecting Middle Eastern music in favor of African motifs to construct a distinct national identity remained relevant for later North African artists, and is particularly pertinent for the new generation of Moroccan musicians.

After Nass El Ghiwane’s success peaked in the seventies and into the early eighties, the Moroccan public’s interest shifted to other forms of music. Old stars like Um Kalthum and Abdel Halim Hafez were replaced by a new generation of singers from the east, such as Amru Diab and Kazem Al Sahir. Many Moroccan artists adopted their style, and the situation was similar to the one described by Omar Sayyed concerning the generation born in the forties. Some Moroccan singers, such as Samira Saïd, even relocated to Egypt and started singing in an Egyptian accent in order to reach a broader audience. Simultaneously, Raï music, a genre steeped in the rural cultures of the Oran region in western Algeria, morphed into a more commercial variety that began gaining considerable popularity in all of the Maghreb (Bouziane and Hadj). Although still carrying a strong Algerian identity, Raï took a more polished form in order to better infiltrate international markets, particularly in Europe, and lost part of its uniquely North African character in the process.

This is not to suggest that music ceased to be a space exceptionally propitious for North African artists to lay claim to their place in the African community. The aptly named Algerian group Gnawa Diffusion actively pursued this agenda from their formation in France in 1992 and through the nineteen nineties, until their disbandment.
after fifteen years of activity. Gnawa Diffusion’s lead singer and principal composer was Amzigh Kateb, son of the renowned Algerian writer Kateb Yacine who was mentioned in the previous chapter; they younger Kateb frequently positioned himself as an African artist during his tenure with Gnawa Diffusion through such songs as “Daka bambara,” “Lalla Mira el Gnawia,” and “Douga Douga.”

After the tumult in the media which followed the terrorist attacks of September eleventh 2001, and the delicate place in which the Arab world found itself on the global stage, the identification of the Moroccan public with, and massive consumption of Middle Eastern cultural production became problematic. Therefore, the context was right for a new group to revive Moroccan artistic identity the way Nass El Ghiwane had done years earlier. While these general circumstances created a similar situation throughout the Maghreb, Morocco was at the forefront in terms of musical developments as will be discussed below. Nevertheless, some groups from elsewhere in the Maghreb also fit into the same artistic current as the new generation of Moroccan musicians, such as Djmawi Africa in Algeria. Amel Abou el Aazm and Badre Belhachmi have suggested that it is the Algerian civil war that stalled the development of a new generation of musicians in that country, and that Tunisia, although hindered by censorship, is gradually becoming the site of sizeable young musical activity (82).

In addition to the fact that the political and musical landscape of Morocco in the wake of the new millennium was ready for the emergence of new artists, three important elements precipitated the rise of the new generation of Moroccan musicians. These were the creation of the Casablanca music festival Boulevard des Jeunes Musiciens, the active
involvement of the francophone magazine *Telquel* in the promotion of new musicians, and the increased access to and use of the Internet in Moroccan society.

The Boulevard des Jeunes Musiciens, or “L’Boulevard,” is a yearly music festival that gives musicians the possibility to play their music to large audiences. The festival has been increasingly successful since it was first held in 1998. By separating the groups into different categories such as hip hop, reggae, fusion, rock and heavy metal, the festival not only offered a platform for the development of urban Moroccan music, it also fostered the development of a wide array of genres. The most successful members of the new generation of Moroccan music have all been recurrent participants.

Following the success of “L’Boulevard,” the number of music festivals in Morocco has increased dramatically. One significant example is Mawâzine, a yearly festival in the capital, Rabat. This festival is remarkable for various reasons. The mere scale is imposing. Nine stages were set throughout the city for the 2008 edition, and more than a hundred concerts, most of which were free, took place over nine days. However, Mawâzine is also noteworthy because it is a state-funded event, which validates the status of young Moroccan musicians. Although conceived as a celebration of international music that hosts artists from a vast array of countries, many groups from the new generation of Moroccan musicians were also invited to participate in this event, and even received royal encouragements in the form of a monetary contribution from King Mohammed VI at the end of the festival.

The magazine *Telquel* has also enthusiastically participated in the promotion of groups from the new generation. Not only did they publish several articles about these groups, as well as interviews with their members, but they also included sampler compact
discs entitled “Stoune” with some of their issues, thereby ensuring an unprecedented large-scale distribution of the music. The first of those sampler discs, which came as a supplement to the summer 2004 double issue (number 138-139), was instrumental in bringing mainstream recognition to this new generation of Moroccan music. Since then, the presence of young Moroccan musicians in the pages of various magazines has increased noticeably.

The role that the Internet has played in the rise of a new musical scene in Morocco is best exemplified by the case of Awdellil, an anonymous amateur rapper, whose first piece “Raw Daw” had a sensational success when it was made available to download for free on the Internet in 2003. The song’s penchant for coprology broke the linguistic taboos of Moroccan music, and encouraged the use of distinctly Moroccan Arabic in singing rather than the replication of Egyptian standards. Following Awdellil’s example, other groups used the Internet to promote their music. Hoba Hoba Spirit, for example, also made their entire first album freely available for download from their website in 2003. In addition to the music circulating online, its promotion, including in the Moroccan diaspora, was enhanced by the creation of various blogs and forums, most notably raptiviste.net, yabiladi.com and casafree.com.

The many new groups that have emerged as part of this new generation are associated with various musical genres, including hip hop and rap, rock, and heavy metal. The overlap between these registers, however, is often overlooked. While interest in this new generation of musicians has increased in recent years, it has also remained very specific to one of the various forms in which young Moroccan musicians express themselves. Jennifer Needleman and Joshua Asen’s documentary *I love Hip Hop in
Morocco (2007) focuses, as its title suggests, on hip hop and rap. In his book Heavy Metal Islam (2008), Mark Levine analyzes the meaning of that music among youth in societies across North Africa and the Middle East, including Morocco, but the scope of his study does not go beyond hard rock and heavy metal.

The new generation of Moroccan musicians should be analyzed as a whole because all its members are part of a single movement, regardless of their musical genre. Five groups in particular were at the forefront initially, and will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter. These are Barry, Darga, Hoba Hoba Spirit, H-Kayne, and Fnaïre. While these bands are characterized by a wide array of styles and genres, they fall broadly under one of two categories, hip hop and fusion. Darga and Hoba Hoba Spirit play a similar mixture of rock and reggae, while Barry plays a unique mixture of various genres ranging from jazz to reggae. These three groups fall under the generic term fusion, because their musical styles consist of the combination of various genres. Aware of the limitations of conventional labels of music genres, Hoba Hoba Spirit calls their songs haiha music (haiha being an untranslatable Moroccan slang term that roughly means “commotion”). The groups H-Kayne and Fnaïre play hip hop. Although H-Kayne’s music could more accurately be called rap, the term hip hop in this case refers to a broad musical and artistic culture that includes rap music.

Unlike their predecessor Nass El Ghiwane, this new generation did not borrow from Morocco’s musical patrimony through an extensive incorporation of traditional instruments, rhythms, and melodies. Rather, musicians from the new generation play Gnawa instruments only sporadically, while expressing themselves primarily in the more conventional formats of contemporary music. Today’s artists prefer to rely on more
common musical forms such as hip hop and rock, and use the instruments typically associated with those genres while only occasionally incorporating a *gembri* or *qraqeb*. However, the new artists frequently reference the Gnawa and sub-Saharan Africa in their lyrics, unlike Nass El Ghiwane who employed Gnawa musical elements but rarely mentioned them explicitly.

As outlined in the previous chapter, the African character of North Africa is more apparent through the use of spoken than written Arabic. Because songs, like films, are not dependent on a written support, they are well suited to convey spoken Arabic characteristics. Songs also allow young Moroccan musicians to use code-switching and include French terms, a characteristic of language that the Maghreb shares with West Africa but not with much of the Arab World. The connection of the new generation of Moroccan musicians to sub-Saharan Africa is therefore performed primarily at the level of language. It is mostly through their lyrics that they vindicate a strong national identity by claiming an African character, either directly from the Gnawa or indirectly through Nass El Ghiwane, which makes the musical association between North and sub-Saharan Africa more explicit than in the case of previous generations. Besides, their incorporation of the French language is an important link with sub-Saharan Africa; as noted, French serves as a reminder of the importance of a common experience of French colonialism that Morocco shares with West Africa, but not with most of the rest of the Arab World outside the Maghreb.

By repeatedly referencing the Gnawa, the lyrics of the songs of the new generation of Moroccan musicians re-locate Morocco in Africa by opposition to the Middle East, thereby embedding this new generation in the tradition started by Nass El
Ghiwane. In fact, the music of Nass El Ghiwane is frequently referenced. In the song “F-L L’houma,” for instance, H-Kayne quotes Nass El Ghiwane’s song “Mahmouma” in the chorus, and Hoba Hoba Spirit has recorded a version of “Fine Ghadi Biya Khouya,” one of Nass El Ghiwane’s most famous and recognizable numbers. However, it is Fnaïr’s song “Naghmat Bladi” [my country’s melody] that best indicates the continuation of Nass El Ghiwan’s project of reviving Morocco’s musical patrimony, even though it does not mention the group:

مغربي فنان فبلادي ماني إنسان عادي ما نعيش راضي الى ماحبيت نغمة بلادي.
باغي نسمح لأولادي نغمة بلادي ضاعو فنانة كبار كتبوا حروف الفن بالنار
مشات ايام الناس الخيار سعدوا قلوب كدار خلاوا كنوز ما تعبرها بالقطار

Moroccan, artist in my country, I ain’t no regular guy. I won’t live at peace unless I bring to life my country’s melody. I wanna make my children listen to my country’s melody. Great artists are gone. They carved the letters of art in flames. Gone are the days of valuable men who brought happiness to many hearts and left treasures beyond measures.

The high national consciousness and the nostalgia that appear here are comparable to those exhibited by Nass El Ghiwane. The historical circumstances,
however, differ. While Nass El Ghiwane was formed in the wake of French colonialism, the strong national identity of the new generation of Moroccan musicians is not directly related to a nascent nationalism as much as it is a reaction to the image of Arab civilization conveyed by the media, especially since the civil war in Algeria in the nineteen nineties and the events of September eleventh 2001, both of which a large portion of Moroccan youth did not identify with.

Besides a few allusions to Nass El Ghiwane, and similarities to their political attitude, there are also many references to the Gnawa to be found in the lyrics of songs by this new generation of Moroccan musicians. Barry, for instance, pays homage to the Gnawa in his song “Riht El Jaoui” [Smell of Jaoui, a type of incense frequently used in Gnawa ceremonies]:

گناوی إفريقي، من باماكو، جا من السودان للموغادور.

گناوی إفريقي، من تومبوكتو، جا من السودان للصورة.

Gnawa, African, from Bamako, came from al-Sudān, to Mogador [an old name of Essaouira].

Gnawa, African, from Timbuktu, came from al-Sudān, to Essaouira.

Barry is also noteworthy for using Berber in some songs, as in the opening of “Matisha,” one of the group’s most recognizable pieces.

Hoba Hoba Spirit’s first album, released in 2003, contains a song entitled “Soudani” in which the group even references the Bambara in pure Gnawa fashion.

Moreover, generally speaking, Hoba Hoba Spirit is particularly vocal about relocating Morocco in Africa. In the song “Maricane” [America], they sing the story of a Moroccan
man who tries to flirt with an American woman. He finds it difficult to make her visualize Morocco on a map, and insists that it is in Africa. In another song about religious extremism in Islam entitled “Basta Lahia” [Enough with the Beards], they sing the following bilingual line, which contains both English and Arabic: “I was born in Casa, إفريقي مية فالمية [one hundred percent African]!”

On the second album, Blad Skizo, released in 2005, Hoba Hoba Spirit has continued to emphatically claim an African identity by opposition to an Arab one. The songs “Aourioura” and “Seddina (wa Choukrane)” are particularly noteworthy in that regard. In “Aourioura” they state:

نكره الخاليجي، ما عنديش "اكسون" مصري
ما نديرش كليب في البحر والدريات ك بالرالونتي

I hate music from the Gulf, I don’t have an Egyptian accent
I won’t make a video on the beach with girls in slow motion [a familiar cliché in contemporary Middle Eastern pop music].

In “Seddina (wa choukrane),” which concludes Blad Skizo, the group uses Gnawa instruments and Gnawa melodies, and sing an entire verse in Berber, using the sounds “waye” and “wayou” to make voice modulations that are typical of Gnawa music:

Waye azul fellawan
Hoba Hoba rouh youchkane wayou
Ya na wayli f blad skizofrani
Hia bladi ou hna Hoba wayou
Waye azul [Hello] to all of you

Hoba Hoba are coming, wayou

I am in a schizophrenic country

It’s my country and we’re Hoba, wayou

What is most noteworthy in this Berber verse is the use of the greeting “azul.” Meaning literally “close to the heart,” this term is archaic and not widespread among the dialects of Berber spoken in Morocco, where Arabic greetings have permeated the language. Today, “azul” is commonplace only in the region of Kabylia in central Algeria. Therefore, the use of the greeting “azul” has become politically charged and indicative of a strong assertion of identity, as it connotes a wish to revive ancient Berber culture. In the two other albums that they have released since, Hoba Hoba Spirit have continued to emphatically relocate Morocco in Africa, and to mention the continent repeatedly through various songs.

Generally speaking, fusion groups are more self-aware and explicit about locating themselves within Africa by incorporating some Gnawa elements in their music, although none do it to the extent that Nass El Ghiwane has. Members of Barry, for example, occasionally play *gembri* or *qraqeb*. The case of Darga, however, is more telling in that regard, for a significant portion of their live shows consists of a long segment of Gnawa music in which some members in the group trade their usual instrument for a *gembri* and *qraqeb* (see Fig. 6). Darga also has a song simply entitled “Africa,” which they dedicate to the Burkina Faso-born musician Cheikh Lo. Not only is “Africa” a good example of songs’ ability to convey a more accurate idea of Morocco’s spoken Arabic through code switching, it also constitutes one of the most explicit declarations of affinity with sub-
Saharan Africa on the part of the new generation of Moroccan musicians. In this case, the singer addresses both North and sub-Saharan Africa, using the pronoun “we,” and argues against the separation between the two regions on the basis of the shared experience of colonialism, even including terms in French to underscore this common colonial past:

فرقونا سنين وأعوام
وَكَالِو عَلِينا
وَنساو راحنا عاشتين متوالمين من زمان
بَاك استعمرونا ونهبنا جميع، وجا الاستقلال وتقعنا
جميع

We have been separated for years and years
And they said of us that we were different races
They forgot that we lived in harmony since a long time ago
Didn’t they colonize us and pillage us together, and then independence came and we were oppressed together?
Fig. 6. Some of the members of Darga playing qraqeb and a gembri during a concert. Photo by Amel Abou el Aazm.

Hip hop and rap groups constitute a less obvious example of this claim for an African character. In the case of those genres, declarations of African identity, while less apparent than in fusion, are still present implicitly, for example in the song “Issawa Style” by H-Kayne. There, they reference the ‘Issawa brotherhood, which, as mentioned above, is largely indebted to the Gnawa in terms of their aesthetic. Given that H-Kayne are from the city of Meknes, which does have a large ‘Issawa presence but is not one of the Moroccan cities with the largest Gnawa population, their choice of referencing the former order rather than the latter is not surprising. Nevertheless, it is an indication of their identification with an element of Moroccan culture particularly steeped in an African character.
From this evidence, it is clear that the African character of Morocco is particularly visible in its musical production, thanks to the vast presence of Gnawa music. This African character is understood to be intrinsic to Moroccan identity, rather than exogenous, and can also be more or less visible. It peaked in the seventies with Nass El Ghiwane and their extensive use of Gnawa elements, but receded in the eighties before returning to the forefront with a new generation of Moroccan musicians in the new millennium. It is important to read the increased presence of African elements in Moroccan music against a historical context. Indeed, the African components in Morocco’s cultural identity are an artistic reaction against a political situation.

Ultimately, the connection of Morocco to sub-Saharan Africa evident in the country’s musical scene invites us to reconsider the conventional understanding of Arabic cultural production as discrete from larger African traditions, but also forces us to include North Africa in the wider framework of African arts. While Moroccan musicians have borrowed from arts rooted in sub-Saharan Africa, music south of the Sahara has also been impacted by North Africa. In eastern Africa, Taarab, the music that Omani Arabs brought to Zanzibar and which then spread through Tanzania, borrows stylistic elements from Egyptian music (Fargion 200). The musical influence of the Maghreb on sub-Saharan Africa from a broad historical perspective has been the object of some studies, for example by Lois Ann Anderson, but further research still needs to be done on this topic. Although contemporary musicians from both North and South of the Sahara often share the same stages at festivals in Europe or in Africa itself, the impact of this new generation of Moroccan musicians south of the Sahara has not yet been significant. However, the participation of Hoba Hoba Spirit in the international cultural and sporting event Jeux de
la Francophonie in 2005 in Niamey, Niger, where they were awarded the silver medal in the musical category, suggests that further connections between the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa will be framed within a francophone postcolonial context.
CONCLUSION

To return to the initial question posed in the introduction to this study, the evidence presented suggests that various forms of cultural production in North Africa can be considered African. The diverse North African works analyzed here show connections to sub-Saharan cultures, inviting us to view both regions as a whole. Although North Africa has had intimate ties with the Middle East since the Arab conquests of the seventh century, categorizations that have excluded North Africa from African cultures, and in particular from African literatures, stem from the political climate of the second half of the twentieth century. The Sahara desert does not constitute a boundary to the transfer of cultural references from one side to the other. Scholarship on African literatures should not, therefore, exclude the northern part of the continent, and, conversely, the study of North Africa cannot be adequate unless it eliminates the racial, religious, linguistic, and political stereotypes that prevent the region from being framed within the larger context of Africa.

I do not suggest that scholars who specialize in North African literatures and cultures renounce the Middle Eastern orientation of their research in favor of an African one. Instead, I argue that since they study North Africa they are already Africanists, but perhaps unknowingly so, due to the rigidity of academic labels. There is a need for greater dialogue between scholars of sub-Saharan Africa and those of the Arab world who may not hitherto have been aware of the relevance of their respective work to one another. In this comparative spirit, many who study North African cultures today will
find scholarship on African literatures to be as pertinent to their analyses as research on their Arabic counterparts.

Ceasing to view North and sub-Saharan Africa as separate areas is imperative not only for those who look upon Africa from the outside, but for those on the continent also. If artists such as the current generation of Moroccan musicians are actively seeking to raise awareness of the African dimension of North Africa’s cultures, it is because they are sensitive to the fact that many within their own societies today are oblivious to their cultural ties to sub-Saharan Africa. This is due not only to a widespread tendency to consider “Arab” and “African” to be mutually exclusive identity markers, but also, in some cases, to a desire to associate with Europe by claiming the Mediterranean basin as a foundation for North Africa’s cultural space. An example is the position of the celebrated Moroccan author Tahar Ben Jelloun, who resides in France. In a 1991 interview with Thomas Spear, published two years later by *Yale French Studies* in an English translation by Caren Litherland, Ben Jelloun was asked if, as a Moroccan, he identified himself as African, and if he viewed Morocco as African. To this the Moroccan author answered with a definitive “No,” before adding:

In Morocco one tends to feel more Arab than African. We’re really in the Northernmost part of Africa and we have a very different history.

Personally, I don’t feel at all African. That’s not a pejorative or mean statement, but I don’t feel African because I have no ties to Africa. (31) The fact that many North Africans today still do not consider themselves to be African, while others do, reveals the complexity of the region, but also makes all the more urgent
projects that reflect this complexity by reminding us of the links between North and sub-Saharan Africa.

Ultimately, the classification of North African literature has to do with the limitations of the way that we view and categorize cultures. The benefit of asking whether North Africa is Arab or African is that it leads to questioning the extent to which a part of the world can be defined as a single place. The North African examples analyzed in the preceding chapters, from Chraïbi’s assertion of a Berber Morocco to Nass El Ghiwane’s incorporation of Gnawa elements in their music, reveal a certain malaise in North Africa about being viewed as part of Arab(ic) literatures and cultures only, and a need to find an alternative space for the articulation of a North African literary and cultural identity. The elimination of the disconnection with sub-Saharan Africa is a necessary step in order to reach the formation of this space.

It is my hope, nevertheless, that readers will not construe my thesis as an advocacy of the “Africanness” of North Africa at the expense of the region’s other cultural connections. Had North Africa always been paired with sub-Saharan Africa but separated from the Middle East, that approach would have been equally inadequate, and also necessary to reconsider. Instead, my wish is to draw attention to the limitations of Area Studies when this academic system of knowledge, although conducive to multidisciplinary activity, is not paired with a comparative perspective apt to take into account the various complexities of a given region. In the case of North Africa, labeling the area with any single label—be it African, Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, or any other—implies an insularity that diminishes understanding of the region, and thereby gives the observer an inaccurate view of its cultural production.
By ridding ourselves of inflexible academic boundaries, it becomes possible for future research to take a further step and consider not only North Africa but also the rest of the Arab World to be equally relevant to analyses of African literary cultures, and vice versa. In other words, it is necessary to reconsider not only the validity of the Sahara as a cultural boundary, but that of the Red Sea as well. Naturally, this is an issue that requires a fundamental reassessment of identity. North Africa has been seen as African, Middle Eastern, or Arab. But to understand the multiple dimensions of this region and its people, one must step back to view them from a much wider angle that does not exclude any of the descriptions listed above. Such an approach would be desirable not only from an intellectual perspective but on a purely human level as well, as it would surely yield a better understanding of spheres that overlap in many respects.

The fundamental issue is not to which area North Africa belongs, Arab or African, but instead how its literature can it carve its own identity while remaining connected to other literary traditions. In order to avoid placing North African literature into a paradigm where it fits with the rest of Africa only as an alternative to the Arab World, it is equally necessary to cultivate a broadened inclusiveness in other directions, such as including North African works in the study of African literatures. The current trends in African Studies point in that direction. Let me finish, then, by mentioning an example that is indicative of this inclination to bridge North and sub-Saharan Africa. The American Institute for Maghrib Studies (AIMS) and the West African Research Association (WARA) have co-organized a two-part conference that will take place in 2009 and 2010 in Tangiers, Morocco and Dakar, Senegal respectively. This conference, entitled Saharan Crossroads/Carrefour Saharien, reveals exactly an increased interest in
bridging North and sub-Saharan Africa. Its purpose, as indicated in the call for papers posted on the AIMS website, is precisely to counter the fact that “Africa has traditionally been viewed through a bifocal lens in which the Sahara Desert has been perceived as an impenetrable barrier dividing the continent.” That has been the purpose of this study too.
APPENDIX:

SONG TEXTS

The purpose of this appendix is to supplement the discussion of music in chapter four. My aim is to provide English speakers with access to representative song texts, which indicate the link between North and sub-Saharan Africa that is visible in Moroccan music.

1 Nass El Ghiwane

In *Protest song marocaine*, his 2006 study of Nass El Ghiwane, Abdelhaï Sadiq identified two song-writing tendencies at the core of the group’s artistic production, that of Larbi Batma on the one hand and that of Abderrahman Paco on the other. To illustrate this point, Sadiq included in his book annotated translations of two songs, “El Mjezra” and “Zad el Hem,” exemplifying each of these two tendencies. To build on Sadiq’s project, I have included here translations of additional songs that were part of the repertoire of Nass El Ghiwane. The texts of songs included here are from *Klām al-Ghiwān*, a book edited by Omar Sayyed in 2007, in which he has collected the lyrics of all the songs composed by Nass El Ghiwane.

1.1 “al-Siniya” and “Sifek Bettar”

The first two texts included here, “al-Siniya” (1969) [The Tray] and an excerpt from “al-Sīf al-Battār” (1974) [“The Sharp Sword”] demonstrate the extent to which Nass El Ghiwane’s musicians have tapped into Morocco’s own oral traditions rather than imitated Egyptian and Lebanese singers, as was common at the time the group was formed. Larbi Batma explains this process in his autobiography:

اما أغاني الطوائف الدينية والرومايا فلا وجود لها على الساحة الفنية. فجعلنا من هاته الأنواع اتجاهًا وجهنا اليه تفكيرنا وبحثنا ... ألفنا كلمات...
As for the songs of religious orders and Sufi brotherhoods, they had no presence in the artistic arena. So we made of these genres the direction towards which we oriented our intellect and research… We composed lyrics whose content relied on old songs that we updated and to which we gave a dissident and political twist.

“al-Siniya” and “al-Sīf al-Battār” are two examples of this artistic and political attitude on the part of Nass El Ghiwane. Both songs illustrate the group’s concern for social issues such as poverty and economic inequality. The historical and political context in which these songs emerged, a little more than a decade after national independence in 1956, is marked by a disillusionment that stands in sharp contrast with the optimism of the early nineteen sixties, common to most African nations at the time.

As I pointed out in chapter three, there are no established rules for writing spoken Arabic. For this reason, the spelling of terms is subjective, and individual opinion on orthography may differ. In the present song transcriptions I have used the spellings and punctuation chosen by Nass El Ghiwane member Omar Sayyed in his 2007 book Klām al-Ghiwān, a collection of the lyrics of all the songs recorded by the band. However, this is not to suggest that these are the right spellings. Rather, the point is to move away from the constraints of writing, and appreciate these examples of oral literature in their own right, without relying on a written support for validation. In fact, other members of Nass El Ghiwane have spelled the same words differently. In a 1999 historical study of the
practice of tea drinking in Morocco, Abdelahad Sebti and Abderrahmane Lakhsasi included a copy of the lyrics of this song handwritten by Batma, where he used spellings different from the ones used by Sayyed.

1.1.1 “al-Siniya”

“al-Siniya” is a particularly important song for the group because it was the first one they recorded. It remains their most emblematic piece, and the one with which they are most commonly associated. The text was penned by Larbi Batma, but he credits its genesis to Ba Salem, an old beggar from Hayy Mohammadi, his neighborhood in Casablanca. According to Batma’s autobiography, Ba Salem had become acquainted with Batma’s father, and would visit often (109). When the father was not present, however, he would smoke marijuana with Larbi, and tell him stories of his past, about the Sahara, the colonial period, and resistance against the French colonizers. Ba Salem had memorized much Hassania poetry from a region in the Sahara desert in southern Morocco, but had forgotten most of it in his old age, so he merged the verses that he remembered together. Larbi Batma took verses from Ba Salem’s poetry and included them in this song.

The song is essentially a lament and conveys a sense of sadness that reflects the general disillusionment of Moroccan society in the early nineteen seventies. “al-Siniya” is also a typical Nass El Ghiwane song, insofar as its lyrics are very metaphorical, often quite obscure, and open to a variety of different interpretations. Rachid Aadnani has suggested that a concern for censorship could be at the root of the multi-layering of these texts (26). The multiplicity of possible interpretations of many of Nass El Ghiwane’s songs, however, was certainly a factor in their wide-reaching success. Additionally, the
syntax in this text is unusual, even by spoken Arabic standards, and conveys a sense of anguish and torment that mirrors the content of the lyrics. In order to convey this quality in my translation, I have sacrificed readability and attempted instead to retain as much of the fragmented spontaneity of the oral performance as I could.

الصينية

فین اللي يجمعو علیک اهل النية
أه يا الصينية..!
دوک اللي بیوسوک..
فین اهل الجود والرضى..
فین حياتي..فین حومتي واللي لیا
أه يا الصينية!!
واعر بلاه ما ساهل حب الكاس
أه يا غیات ما نسک الخاطر
واعر بلاء ما ساهل عشق الناس
أه يا غیات حرام ينسک الخاطر
واعر بلاء..جائری بغرامه...
والعنابر الى يجي گدامه...
والنعناع والشبیة...
أه يا الصينية!!
أیا ندامتی ویا ندامتی

The Tray

Where are those who gather around you, those of good faith,
Oh, tray!
Those who keep you company…
Where are those of generosity and blessing…
Where is my life…where is my neighborhood and what is mine
Oh tray!
Hard is its addiction, it’s not easy loving the glass
O helper, the mind hasn’t forgotten you
Hard is its addiction, it’s not easy loving people
O helper, it’s a shame if the mind forgets you
Hard is its addiction… came to me with its passion…
And amber, if it came in front of it…
And mint and sage…
Oh tray!
Oh regret, oh regret

1 In Morocco, tea is usually drunk in glasses rather than cups.

2 Literally, sin.

3 Amber, mint, and sage are ingredients used in the preparations of tea. Of these three, only mint is regularly used. Sage is less common, but also used relatively frequently. Amber is more rarely used.
Why is my glass sad among all glasses?

Oh regret, oh regret

Why is my glass wandering, weeping, adding to my sadness?

Why is my glass crying alone
Why is my glass mourning its luck
Why is my glass, my poor glass, this is its misery…it’s out of luck…?

Oh tray!

Oh regret, and heat of my pot, where will I warm it up?

Oh regret, my pot is caught between two braziers

One is full of coal

The other, through drifting fires, ashes its coal became

To my heart burned with separation…what is the pot’s fault

Oh tray!

Oh regret, why is my sugar incapable of curing this bitterness?

Oh regret, why is my mint incapable of releasing its greenness?

Why is everything sterile?

Why is my body abandoned like this…denied, oppressed?

Oh tray!

If you don’t see me, pray God to have mercy on my soul
I am gone and torment took me away
My family and friends aren’t ready to see me go
Bahr al-ghiwan ma dakhleh bulanai
Taa nubit lil-shikhain ma tssiq biya
Ana ya Milaflay vin nibiyنجيک
Wally jinnak zaarini
Yjjal dnb al-dinia glliek antt lli
Farrqetini
Wtannubit lil-shikhain ma tssiq biya

The Ghiwane Sea,\(^4\) I didn’t enter it on purpose
I call on my Sheikh,\(^5\) don’t grow weary of me
My companion, where can I come to you
If I come to you comfort me
The burden of the world be on you who have left me

I call on my Sheikh, don’t grow weary of me
God’s offering, Boualam Jilali\(^6\)
I am gone and torment took me away
My family and friends aren’t ready to see me go
The Ghiwane Sea, I didn’t enter it on purpose
The world is like naked clothes
Beauty bowed to Hadda and her sister Wardia\(^7\)
I am gone and torment took me away
My family and friends aren’t ready to see me go
The Ghiwane Sea, I didn’t enter it on purpose
My parents, I beg you, don’t blame me in pain
My parents, I beg you, don’t blame me in addiction

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\(^4\) The sea metaphor carries a connotation of tumult rather than peacefulness.

\(^5\) The reference to a sheikh here is indicative of the Sufi roots of this song. In Sufism, a sheikh transmits to a disciple the spiritual influence received from his or her own sheikh, in an uninterrupted chain of initiation. This Sufi reference gives the song a local cachet rather than a standard Islamic identity.

\(^6\) A reference to Shaykh Muhyiddeen Abdul Qadir Jilani (1077-1166). Born in the city of Jilan, in the northwestern province of Persia, he is the founder of the Qadiri Sufi Order.

\(^7\) Hadda and Wardia are female names that respectively mean “sharp” and “pink.”
My addiction…my pain…my misfortune

My enemies cried for me

My family and friends aren’t ready to see me go

The Ghiwane Sea, I didn’t enter it on purpose

I am gone and torment took me away

My family and friends aren’t ready to see me go

The Ghiwane Sea, I didn’t enter it on purpose

1.1.2 “al-Sīf al-Battār”

Another important song that exemplifies the extent to which Nass El Ghiwane has tapped into Morocco’s own oral traditions is “al-Sīf al-Battār.” Like “al-Siniya,” this piece also stemmed from a beggar’s song. In his autobiography, Larbi Batma has given an account of the way in which he encountered this song (87-8). He remembers an old man by the name of Mekki, who was traveling with his daughter from Ouarzazate to Casablanca. They came upon Batma’s village, where they stayed in a guest house behind his grandfather’s tent. Batma recalls Mekki’s stories of the Sahara desert and its people, and the way he sang with his daughter while he played a drum that he carried with him. Batma reveals that Mekki’s song was incorporated in “al-Sīf al-Battār,” with some additions. The following is the excerpt that comes from Mekki’s song.

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8 The expression “my enemies cried for me” means that one is so miserable that even their enemies do not wish them harm anymore but become sympathetic instead.

9 While the adjective al-battār simply means “sharp,” it is possibly also a reference to a sword famously owned by the Prophet, which was also called al-Battār.
The rich man died, my friends, talba\textsuperscript{11} and commoners are following him

Some read\textsuperscript{12} by his head, some holding rosaries beside him

They followed the funeral incanting, caught by the scent of the heir

[...]

The poor man died, my friends and nobody went with him

A taleb\textsuperscript{13} read by his head, reluctantly he read

He left a blind mother, on his shadow waiting

This song, like “al-Siniya,” also speaks of poverty and social inequalities, although it addresses these themes more overtly. The recurrence of this topic is one of the reasons why the group had such a significant following among the less fortunate strata of society. The fact that all the members of the group came from a working-class

\textsuperscript{10}According to Batma, the beggar repeated this sentence while his daughter sang the rest of the song.

\textsuperscript{11}Plural of taleb, a man who has memorized the Quran and whose profession consists of reciting its verses at appropriate events, typically at a funeral as is the case here.

\textsuperscript{12}Reading in this context refers to the recitation of the Quran.

\textsuperscript{13}See note 11.
background themselves also helps explain the reason for their credibility among the public.

“Al-Siniya” and “al-Sīf al-Battār” are two examples that illustrate Nass El Ghiwane’s interest in employing their music to revive and record Morocco’s cultural patrimony, and bring the lesser known verbal arts of Morocco’s heartland to the limelight.

1.2 “Nerjak Ana”

When it comes to Nass El Ghiwane’s interest in employing traditional Moroccan elements in their music, the fact that Gnawa arts are considered to be authentically Moroccan rather than exogenous is most interesting for our purposes. Among the numerous examples of Nass El Ghiwane songs that showcase Gnawa influences via the writing of Paco are “Zed al-Ham” (1979), “Lebtana” (1979), “Taghounja” (1981), and “Mahmouma” (1981). The most characteristic of these Gnawa-type songs, however, is “Nerjak Ana” (1979). This song also contains some words and sentences that can be read as possible references to slavery, and therefore allude to the northward migration, forced or voluntary, of sub-Saharan peoples after the Moroccan conquest of the Songhai Empire in 1591.

I Beg of You
The bird absents itself…
The severe punishment…
Its talons did not prevail…and destiny
The sintir roars, its melodies on the rug pouring, and phrasing
This world doesn’t last, don’t complain
Many glorious ones turned to bone\textsuperscript{14} and left it
I beg of you if I go, deliver me from your servitude\textsuperscript{15} if you will
Oh, worries increased
Oh how the heat of death does not burn me\textsuperscript{16}
Oh my Arab brother, oh Arab\textsuperscript{17}
Oh wretched times, oh wretched us, what do I want with this world?
No rest, no order, only chaos and moving on
Of the wickedness of the world my heart is tired, of too much hate, and said…and what it said
Too bad for those who lacked comprehension and increased in torture their thoughts
Black and white is the same, so why does the net wander in the sieve?

\textsuperscript{14} The similarity between the words glory and bone in Arabic creates a clever pun here that is unfortunately lost in translation.

\textsuperscript{15} In Arabic, worshiper and slave are homonymous. Therefore, this is a possible reference to slavery, where the narrator is a slave hoping for death to be a deliverance from life in servitude.

\textsuperscript{16} The meaning is that the narrator does not fear death. The fire metaphor is a reference to the flames of hell, and the fact that he is not afraid of burning indicates that he is confident he will go to heaven.

\textsuperscript{17} “My Arab brother” is ambiguous, and does not reveal whether the narrator is Arab himself. Brotherhood here may be based on a shared religion rather than a shared ethnicity.
Hoba Hoba Spirit is the most prominent group of the new generation of Moroccan musicians, especially as far as the fusion genre goes. Passages that embed Morocco’s identity within an African rather than an Arab framework are too frequent in Hoba Hoba Spirit’s song lyrics to list them all here. However, two of their songs, “Soudani” and “Gnawa Blues,” both from the group’s 2003 eponymous first album, are particularly interesting in their use of Gnawa references. I have transcribed the lyrics included here as they were recorded by Hoba Hoba Spirit on their first album, which I purchased in Morocco in 2008.

The most noteworthy aspect of these songs is the frequent use of code switching. This feature, however, is not unique to Hoba Hoba Spirit, but is prevalent among most Moroccan musicians. Nass El Ghiwane, for example, frequently included Berber words in their lyrics although their songs were predominantly in Arabic. This is clear in the opening verse of the Nass El ghiwane song “Bani al-Insān” (1969), in which I have highlighted the Berber terms:

المحبوب اللي نريد غاس ل طاطا شور لمنابهة عرى رسم الدار

(44)

The loved one that I want went to Tata, near the Menahba [tribe], and left the house empty.  

In contrast, Hoba Hoba Spirit cannot be said to employ occasional words in one language, while most of the song is in another. Rather, they continuously switch between

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18 The words in italics in the translation, “went” and “near,” are in Berber in the original, whereas the rest of the sentence and most of the song is in Arabic.
French and Arabic to reflect accurately the language spoken in the streets of Casablanca and other large Moroccan cities. In addition, Hoba Hoba Spirit employs English in many songs, such as “Gnawa Blues” (2003), “Maricane” (2003), “Marock’n Roll” (2007), and “Radio Hoba” (2008), a language mixture that is rather unusual but not unique for Moroccan artists.  

In addition to the fact there are no established rules for writing spoken Arabic, transcribing Hoba Hoba Spirit lyrics presents an added difficulty caused by the frequent code switching. Further, because the direction of writing in Arabic and French is different, readability is an issue. For this reason, I chose to transcribe these songs in the script most widely employed in writing these lyrics, the one employed by internet users on blogs and websites such as <http://esprithobahoba.skyrock.com/>. In this system of orthography, Latin script is the basis, and Arabic numerals are used to render some Arabic letters that do not exist in the Latin alphabet. The numerals are ascribed to letters on the basis of resemblance. For instance, the number 3 stands for the letter ع, 9 stands for ﺕ and 7 stands for ﺡ. In order to draw attention to which language is actually used originally, I have italicized my translation whenever it is not from Arabic.

2.1 “Soudani”

The title of this song means “from al-Sudān,” the Arabic appellation of sub-Saharan Africa, which was appropriated by the French to refer to that part of the continent until the nineteen sixties. The use of the term by Hoba Hoba Spirit today establishes the connection between sub-Saharan Africa and Morocco.

19 The France-based Moroccan artist Hindi Zahra sings in both Berber and English.
Soudani | Soudani
---|---
Wahya wlad gnawa | Wahya children of Gnawa
Wahya wlad souira | Wahya children of Essaouira
Wafou wafou m3aya | Stand up, stand up with me
Had denia mehboula | This world is crazy

Wayé ya wayééyééé | Waye ya waye ye
Soudani manayou | Soudani manayo
Wayé ya waayé wayé | Waye ya waye ye
Wahya soudani bambara | Soudani Bambara
Dima dima dima jri | Always, always running
Jri bach techri | Running and buying
Dima dima dima chri | Always, always buying
La ghani illa rabbi | No one is rich but God

Wayé ya wayééyééé | Waye ya waye ye
Soudani manayou | Soudani manayo
Wayé ya waayé wayé | Waye ya waye ye
Wahya soudani bambara | Soudani Bambara

Aujourd'hui on sort du système | Today, we leave the system
On oublie les problèmes | We forget the problems
El youma lelit lehwal | Today it's a night of folly
El youma lilat lehbal | Today it's a night to be silly

Wayé ya wayééyééé | Waye ya waye ye
Soudani manayou | Soudani manayo
Wayé ya waayé wayé | Waye ya waye ye
Wahya soudani bambara | Soudani Bambara

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20 These vocalizations do not carry a particular meaning, but they are reminiscent of Gnawa singing modes.

21 The word *manayo* comes from Gnawa jargon, but its meaning is not known. It is likely to be one of the many words of probable sub-Saharan origin that the Gnawa have preserved as a part of their collective memory without retaining their meaning. Another possibility is that it comes from *maniy*, the Arabic word for semen.

22 This mention of the Bambara is more a reference to Gnawa songs rather than to the actual sub-Saharan peoples who live in Mali.

23 This italicized passage is originally in French rather than Arabic. All other italicized passages in this translation are originally in French, unless otherwise noted.
Nayda nayda, roubla nayda
Cha3la cha3la, hahiya tal3a
7amya 7amya, 7ey7a ghadya
Jaya jaya, jedba jayla
Nayda nayda, roubla nayda
Cha3la cha3la, hahiya tal3a
7amya 7amya, 7ey7a ghadya
Nayda nayda nayda
Boumba!
7aja we7da a khouya
El wa7ed houa elli yeterka
Si tu comprends pas ça
Vaut mieux rester chez toi
Wayé ya wayéééééé
Soudani manayou
Wayé ya waayé wayé
Wahya soudani bambara

Bla ma telbess Armani
Hnaya machi el vanity
Pas de videurs ici
This a hoba hoba party
Wayé ya wayéééééé
Soudani manayou
Wayé ya waayé wayé
Wahya soudani bambara

Oublie ce qu’on dit que tu es
Refuse les étiquettes vite collées
Lâche tout et laisse toi glisser
Au moins pendant une soirée
Wayé ya wayéééééé

Rising, rising, turmoil is rising²⁴
Alight, alight, here it is rising
Warm, warm, ħayha²⁵ is moving,
Coming, coming, trance is coming
Rising, rising, turmoil is rising
Alight, alight, here it is rising
Warm, warm, ħayha is moving,
Rising rising rising
Bombshell!
There’s just one thing my brother,
One should take it easy
If you don’t understand this,
You’d better stay home
Wayé ya waye ye
Soudani manayo
Waye ya waye ye
Soudani Bambara
No need to wear Armani
This is not the Vanity²⁶
No bouncers here
This is a Hoba Hoba Party²⁷
Waye ya waye ye
Soudani manayo
Waye ya waye ye
Soudani Bambara
Forget what they say you are
Refuse quick labels
Let go and let yourself slide
At least for one night
Waye ya waye ye

²⁴ The term “nayda” [rising] has sometimes been used to refer to the musical scene of the new generation in Morocco.

²⁵ Hayha music is the term that Hoba Hoba Spirit uses to describe their music, the word ħayha meaning a loud, animated party.

²⁶ The Vanity is an upscale nightclub in Casablanca.

²⁷ The last part of this line is in English in the original.
2.2 “Gnawa Blues”

The song “Gnawa Blues” is one of Hoba Hoba’s songs that are mostly sung in English. The purpose of this song is to define the band’s own musical style and identity, and reveals a concern with not being classified according to typical musical categories. Here, Hoba Hoba Spirit references the traditional Moroccan music genres of cha’bi and ‘ayta in addition to the Gnawa.

Gnawa Blues

Ok, I sing in English
Ok, I can speak French
And maybe if you see me
You could think I’m from Paris

There's been a hurricane
There's been a hurricane
People don't know where they come from
So how could they know where they go?

This is a folk guitar
This is a folk guitar
But this ain’t no European groove that rolls behind me

Egleb, t7an, eloui

Call it African folk
Call it Gnawa blues
it is just rock ‘n roll
Sung by Moroccan soul

---

28 The sudden and seemingly random inclusion of these three Arabic words in this song in English is humorous. Egleb, t7an, eloui mean turn, grind, and twist respectively.

29 It is noteworthy that the group rejects the “European” label in favor of “African” while “Arab” is not even mentioned at all.
Call it cha3bi\textsuperscript{30} funk
Call it 3ayta\textsuperscript{31} jazz
It is just ḥayha\textsuperscript{32} music
Coming from deep of our soul
Don't call it world music
No no no no no world music
I don't know how to call it
It's just the music of my world

Call it African folk
Call it Gnawa blues
It is just ḥayha music
Coming from deep of our soul

These songs show that a rising consciousness of Morocco’s position within an African artistic community has emerged in Moroccan music in recent years. Given that songs permeate the lives of people more readily than other forms of artistic expression, Moroccan music today is increasing awareness among Moroccans of the importance of not separating North and sub-Saharan Africa.

\textsuperscript{30} Cha’bi, literally “popular,” is a genre of traditional North African music that varies regionally. Najat Atabou and Abdelâaziz Stati are among the most important cha’bi musicians in Morocco today.

\textsuperscript{31} ‘Aya, literally “the call,” is another traditional genre of Moroccan music of Berber origins. ‘Aya songs usually address social concerns.

\textsuperscript{32} See note 25 above.
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