



Remapping the Geographies of North African Anglophone Literature: Towards Transcending the Legacy of Literary Apartheid

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Abstract

North African Anglophone writing is burgeoning as a dynamic yet under-recognized literary field at the crossroads of Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. Set between the overarching Arabophone and Francophone literary traditions of the Maghreb and the globally canonized Anglophone literature of sub-Saharan Africa, this literature occupies a peripheral position both geographically and epistemically. This article examines the conditions of this marginalisation, tracing how colonial histories, racialised geographies, and institutional biases have constructed a literary cartography that excludes English-language writing from North Africa. It also explores how writers from Egypt, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco have used English to articulate hybrid identities, diasporic belonging, and resistance to neocolonial and global hegemonies. By engaging a postcolonial theoretical framework, the study argues that North African Anglophone literature challenges established canons and destabilises the inherited binaries of "North African" versus "African". Ultimately, this growing corpus calls for a rethinking of African literary geography itself, one that recognises North African English voices as essential contributors to the transnational and multilingual twenty-first-century African literature.

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1. Introduction

One of the most striking shifts that marked the twenty-first century is the accelerated connectedness between different parts of the globe on multiple levels including the economic, cultural and digital sectors. Globalization has dissolved many of the traditional boundaries which once limited dialogue and exchange between nations, opening new channels that rather allow the negotiation of hybrid spheres, and that reconfigure such notions as identity, nation and belonging. Contemporary literature could not help but adapt to the new realities of these vertiginously globalized realities. The comparatist and literary scholar David Damrosch argues that it is obvious that internet pushes us farther and farther towards a planetary culture where national differences become local(izing) differences (24). Accordingly, a new literature labelled “world literature” has surfaced from this fluid and highly permeable sphere; it celebrates transnational orientations that interweave different languages, cultures and geographies.

This tendency towards a “world literature” that is more cosmopolitan and dialogic has broadened the scope of representations and discussions on various transnational concerns as migration, hybridity, exile and transcultural identity. In this regard, Damrosch asserts: “World literature is the result of give-and-take operations where all sides introduce their own cultural and ideological agendas. World literature is “always as much about the host culture’s values and needs as it is

about a work’s source culture. It is an interactive, dynamic exchange” (283). Contemporary writers who sought to voice themselves within the new realm of globalization experimented with language and opted for innovative ways of expression that align with the transnational nature of their writings. Thus, world literature becomes a site for hyphenated and borderless identities seeking meaning through cross-cultural dialogism which transcends the perpetual dichotomy of national/colonial. In this sense, literature becomes an active agent reflecting the emerging spirit of globalization and shaping its processes as well.

The entire world has been profoundly affected by the phenomenon of globalization and its circuitous energies, and North Africa has not been spared its crucial impact. Globalization and multinationalism have impacted North African literature as they helped usher in a new literary current that is after transcending the traditional monopolizing binary of Arabophone/Francophone literatures, seeking rather a ‘third space’ that addresses a broader, more global readership all while negotiating and voicing local and global concerns. The adoption of English as the language of expression by many North African writers as Ahdaf Soueif, Laila Lalami, Hamza Koudri, Hisham Matar and Fayssal Bensalah, to cite just a few, stands as a form of challenge and resistance against the inherited colonial dynamics of categorisations that have long defined the range of possibilities for North African literature.

However, despite the fact that many North African writers creatively crafted and published their works in English and won prestigious prizes, their literature remains vexingly separated and hardly associated with the larger framework of African Anglophone literary works. In fact, these writers are still struggling to carve out a space within the literature of the very region they originate from and represent. This selective tradition, as Raymond Williams would call it, is perpetual till the present day when definitions of African literature by canonized writers as Achebe, Ngũgĩ, or Paul Bandia tend to recognise and overtly privilege sub-Saharan literary production.

Even in its contemporary, diasporic and transnational redefinitions, the category often renders North African writings imperceptible despite their parallel preoccupation and engagement with broader African literary concerns as postcolonialism, neo-colonialism, immigration, belonging, diaspora, hybridity, and exile. There are, in fact, many historical, ideological and political reasons behind the reinforcement of this exclusion. The exclusive inclusion of works by Achebe, N'gugi, Soyinka and other sub-Saharan writers in most universities' syllabi is further evidence of this discriminatory policy that is institutional, editorial and academic.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the often-overlooked contribution of North African literature to the cultural and linguistic enrichment of the continent's literary traditions. Paradoxically, this emerging wave of North African Anglophone literature benefits from little visibility and

recognition particularly at the continental level. This paper seeks to evaluate the condition and the status of North African Anglophone literature, contributing to the few available discourses and the limited body of scholarship on the marginalized and underrecognized voices from North Africa in the mainstream African literary canon. Accordingly, this article reaffirms that North African Anglophone literature occupies a significant historical, cultural and epistemological role in underscoring African literature both continentally and globally. Moreover, it highlights its seminal yet frequently disregarded contribution to the development and expansion of the field.

This article is, therefore, a call for recognition of this literature as a consistent and integral part of the African literary canon. Its inclusion, it is maintained, will undoubtedly enrich African literature and grant it a better position within world literature. Egyptian authors as Ahdaf Soueif with her seminal work *The Map of Love*, (1993) and Noor Naga's *If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English*, (2022), Libyan Hisham Matar's *My Friends* (2024), Moroccan Laila Lalami's *The Moor's Account* (2014) and Algerian Hamza Koudri's *Sand Roses*, (2023) are voices that resonate on the transnational literary scene, yet their recognition within the continental landscape remains, unfortunately, obscured.

The article is divided into two sections; the first section explores the colonial genesis of exclusion of North African Anglophone literature from African literary canons. A backward glance at the colonial practices and

legacies that racialized Africa and African literature by extension is imperative for a thorough discussion of the particular condition of North African Anglophone writings paradoxically marginalised within the presumable postcolonial African canon.

The second part of the article functions as an urgent call for the recognition and broader dissemination of this evolving literary landscape. It advocates for a critical reconsideration of the institutional and canonical inclusion of these works, emphasizing the need to reassess the frameworks that have historically marginalized them. At the same time, it offers illuminating glimpses into the momentous achievements of a carefully selected group of representative writers, showcasing their contributions and the transformative potential of their literature within and beyond their regions.

2. The Genesis of Exclusion of-North African Anglophone Literature from African Canons

Africa, as a continent, actually carries a “double” perception. For a non-African, there is only one Africa which is sub-Saharan Africa, for an African, there are distinctly two Africas; North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. This division was actually promulgated by the colonial apparatus to separate people who live near each other. The ultimate aim behind this separatist stratagem was to weaken the continent to facilitate the process of colonisation. In this regard Fayssal Bensalah contends:

this separation has deep, historical roots. It magnetizes its power and persistence from major historical

decisions, whose consequences remain effective to this moment. I am, of course, implicating those who divided to conquer, those who separated the continent to weaken it. I am implicating the European colonial enterprise. (The Exclusion of the North African Novel)

This separation between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa that is essentially motivated by geopolitical motives translates into both international and continental manipulative policies that aim at fragmenting the continent despite all its shared cultural and historical foundations. Africa was racialised to end up with a North African part labelled as ‘Arab’, ‘Amazigh’, ‘Muslim’ or ‘White’ and a sub-Saharan part as ‘Black’. This blackness becomes the ultimate mark of “Africanness”. In her article “Examining Canonization in Modern African Literature”, the Frank Porter Graham Professor of Africana Studies Tanure Ojaide puts it this way:

The African literary canon is based on the African-ness or Africanity and what it constitutes in literary terms. Africa is a geographical, political, and socio-cultural entity. For this reason, the African in this essay is not limited to the racial but also covers the totality of a diverse continent. African writers are those writers that express the African sensibility in their works. This is significant as critics have been shy to address the position in African literature of non-black writers of South Africa and also of Arab writers in North Africa. (1)

This passage exposes the struggle which North African literature is still waging for the recognition of its Africanity. This separatist and segregating spirit was, unfortunately, inculcated in the minds of Africans themselves who internalised, either consciously or unconsciously, this separation. The latter became, by extension, deep-seated in academic institutions. Fayssal Bensalah maintains:

North Africans rarely associate themselves with the African continent, attributing themselves to the Middle East instead, obeying this colonial value, either consciously or unconsciously. In Algeria, for example, when receiving typically Black African tourists and guests, we refer to them as 'African tourists. Even Algerian institutions do so, such as newspapers and TV channels. Similarly, Africans outside of North Africa join us in this orientation, considering us 'White Arabs', 'Berbers' or 'blancs' (Whites). (The Exclusion of North African Novel)

Moreover, Yomi Olusegun-Joseph explains the complex dynamics of the colonial discourse and the hidden frameworks that shape the representation of Africa and the Middle East in Western thought asserting:

I argue that this gap was informed by the midwifery of what I call 'the Orientalist unconscious', a schema that was subtly influenced by the Manichaean colonialist narratives that drew the paradigms of Europe as Self and Africa as other, and that represented both in the binary

oppositional terms of White and Black respectively, excluding Arabised North Africa from its terms of categorization. (224)

-Hence, setting a clear definition of what African literature is has always been a complex question, controversially debated for decades. Many African and non-African critics have raised fundamental questions about what constitutes African literature: Is it literature produced in Africa or about Africa or in African Languages? These interrogations were discussed in Uganda in 1963 in "A Conference of African Writers of English Expression". The problematic has not been fully resolved and the definition has continued to be shaped and reshaped over time to include each time new generations of writers. Today, Sub-Saharan African writers with transnational, transcultural and diasporic orientations are celebrated continentally and internationally. Nevertheless, the sprouting North African Anglophone literature remains perpetually marginalised from the African literary tradition.

The exclusion of North African anglophone literature from the African literary canon during the early post-colonial era (1960's and 1970's) can be logically justifiable and understood as literary production in English at the time was really minimal. Most of the literature of the Maghreb and North Africa was actually produced in French and, later, in Arabic. Nevertheless, maintaining this marginalization to the present day is no longer comprehensible nor admissible. Many North African Anglophone voices are remarkably flourishing, prolific, and globally engaged. They are paradoxically

gaining considerable recognition outside Africa, and many of their writings have begun to book their place on the international shelves.

Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999) was short-listed for the Booker Prize, translated into more than 30 languages, and sold a million copies. She has also been awarded the Blue Metropolis Literary Prize (in Montreal). Her articles for the Guardian are published in the European and American press. Soueif was the first recipient of the Mahmoud Darwish Award in Palestine (2010), and received the European Cultural Foundation's 2019 Princess Margriet Award. Hisham Matar is another example of the international acclaim garnered by North African Anglophone writers. He has been nominated for the Booker Prize twice, first shortlisted for *In the Country of Men* for the Booker Prize in 2006, and longlisted for *My Friends* in 2024. His memoir *The Return* was the recipient of the 2017 Pulitzer Prize, the PEN/Jean Stein Award and the Rathbones Folio Prize. His most recent novel, *My Friends*, won the Orwell Prize for Political Fiction 2024.

Unfortunately, even the very contemporary definitions of African literature tend to marginalise North African Anglophone writings. In his book *Translation as Reparation* (2014), Paul F. Bandia, the Cameroonian scholar and a key voice in postcolonial translation studies and the politics of language in Francophone and Anglophone literatures and cultures, examines the complex condition of African literature and all the challenges it continues to encounter. However, within the panoply of the

writers he mentioned, he parochially remains within the cycle of sub-Saharan writers citing Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Thiong'o, and Ayi Kwei Armah without the slightest attention or mention of North African Anglophone writers as Leila Lalami, Noor Naga or Hamza Koudri to name just a few. In his essay "Questioning the Place of Moroccan Literature in the African Canon", Youssef Oubihi, comments:

I eagerly headed to the book shop as soon as I heard that Mũkoma wa Ngũgĩ's book, *The Rise of the African Novel*, was available for purchase...Wa Ngũgĩ devoted his book to answering some crucial questions about the African novel, the African writer, and primarily the situation of the African languages. As its title might suggest, the book traced the rise of the African novel from its very beginning, focusing on the actual significant and pivotal point in its path. As I leafed through the papers, reading line after line, paragraph after paragraph, and chapter after chapter, small striking questions began to form in my mind: Isn't Morocco an African country, and its literature an integral part of African literature as well? Aren't Moroccans speaking an African language?

This longstanding marginalisation which recurrently questions the "Africanness" of North African literary voices is still operative. The racialized perception of the continent led to the creation of a monopolizing cultural organization with special ideological

orientations. It exclusively reads sub-Saharan productions as African and as creative overlooking other groups including North African Anglophone writers. In his article “Discourses and Disciplines: African Literary Criticism, North Africa and the Politics of Exclusion”, the Nigerian scholar Yomi Olusegun-Joseph argues:

A disturbing canonical template of reading African literature as essentially ‘black’ and as an activity sited within the discursive geography of a ‘sub-Saharan’ space characterises a spurious and transcendentalist assumption of African literary criticism. By implication and in practice, writings of North African extraction are either marginalised or excluded within its disciplinary imaginary. This exclusionary device is (no) thanks to a persistent memory that forgets North Africa within a discursive complicity that tends to persecute it on linguistic and racial lines, nullifying it as ‘Arab’. (1)

This tradition hardened to become institutionalised and the case of Heinemann’s African Writers Series (AWS) is particularly representative in this context. Being one of the most influential publishing projects in the history of modern African literature under the general editorship of Chinua Achebe, the AWS overtly favoured and only underscored sub-Saharan writers as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah, Bessie Head, Nadine Gordimer, Ama Ata Aidoo, Nuruddin Farah and Buchi Emecheta and many others. In his

In Pursuit of Publishing, Alan Hill acknowledges this asserting that, “the plan was to start a paperback series, confined to black African authors” (123).

Accordingly, Heinemann’s African Writers Series contributed significantly to reinforcing the distinction between North African literature and that of sub-Saharan Africa. Many critics attribute this divide to Britain’s relatively limited historical presence in North Africa. Yomi Olusegun-Joseph maintains, however, that Britain continues to pursue a persistent, and often frustrating, “desire to realize a body of Commonwealth literature (basically produced in English), which was flowering on the sub-Saharan landscape. By extension, Heinemann, in its ‘African Writer’s Series,’ was signally allocating the site of Africanness in contrivances that marked the North out” (225).

The African Writers Series, therefore, opened the gates to an international readership for Black African authors, an advantage, as noted above, largely denied to North African writers. This marginalisation engenders several negative consequences, particularly the restricted visibility and limited opportunities for North African authors. Excluded from the dominant criterion of “Africanness”, a notion implicitly tied to “Blackness”, their literary endeavours often remain obscured, with little access to broader African or global markets. What is especially striking is that North African writers, in a paradoxical turn, sometimes participate in this exclusion by distancing themselves from African literary traditions. The Moroccan poet Youssef Oubihi clarifies:

The phrase ‘African literature’ instantly brings to mind *Things Fall Apart*, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and many other great novels, but you never immediately think of any piece written by a Moroccan author (or any North African one, not even the Egyptian Nobel Prize winner, Naguib Mahfouz). And when you hear ‘Moroccan literature,’ your mind conjures up pictures of *For Bread Alone*, *This Blinding Absence of Light*, *Year of the Elephant*, and other phenomenal works that are no less astonishing than the ones mentioned earlier. (Questioning the Place of Moroccan Literature)

Furthermore, Heinemann’s African Writers Series has left a lasting legacy, most notably in its crucial influence on the publishing industry. This institution, despite the significant positive advances it brought to African literature and here specifically the sub-Saharan writing, has come to operate like a sieve sifting and filtering and determining who can legitimately claim the label of an “African writer”. This influence extends into major award institutions, where the exclusion of certain North African Anglophone writers has been particularly striking. It is imperative in this context to highlight the case of the Moroccan writer Laila Lalami.

Laila Lalami is often labelled by institutions as either Moroccan or American (because she lives and works partially in U.S.A). She left her native country for studies but she spends considerable time in Morocco. Her first productions were published by Algonquin

Books, which released her debut short story collection, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, in 2005. Her first novel, *Secret Son*, was also published by Algonquin in 2009. She is recognised as a diasporic voice. However, when her debut novel, *Secret Son* (2009), was longlisted for the 2010 Orange Prize for Fiction as fiction from ‘Morocco’ and not ‘Africa’. The 2015 Man Booker Prize announced her as an ‘American’, which clearly irritated her to assert publicly “I am African”. She also replied with an assertive tone to *The Guardian* for ignoring her Africanness by declaring that Obioma was “the sole African writer” on the list.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, from Nigeria, benefited from a completely different treatment by the same institutions which denied Laila Lalami Africanness. Despite their shared experiences as being diasporic writers who both travelled to the U.S.A for education; they both write in English; and they both published their debut works with the same press, the Nigerian Adichie is naturally perceived as an African writer whereas Lalami struggles for this label. Adichie’s writings are widely recognised across the continent and canonised into the African literary tradition by virtue of her blackness.

It is, therefore, clear that the genealogy of exclusion of North African Anglophone literature stems from a longstanding and lingering exclusionary policy rooted in persistent colonial practices which sustained the concept of ‘two Africas’. This racialised and misleading perception engendered a separation of North Africa from sub-

Saharan Africa obscuring the continent's deep interconnectedness and cultural richness. In his article "Mapping Africa: Problems of Regional Definition and Colonial/National Boundaries", Ralph. A. Austen explains the complex cartographic politics of Africa "Africa is perhaps the most "mapped" of the world's major regions ... there is, however, a geographic convention of dividing Africa into Mediterranean and sub-Saharan zones, with the former treated as an extension of the Middle East ("Maghreb" the Arabic term for North Africa) while the latter is the "true" Africa".

This double vision that is inherited from colonial cartographies is not merely a geographical invention; it has become an epistemic and a literary border. Works by eminent North African Anglophone writers are not considered 'African' and canon-worthy and this is demonstrated in their remarkable absence from universities' syllabi on the continental and international levels, and within academia in general. In fact, this condition limits their visibility and their readership by extension. This will inevitably affect their status and even their economic revenues since they are not perceivable on the continent's markets despite their preoccupation with all that concerns Africa. North African Anglophone literature pioneered by Ahdaf Soueif, Hisham Matar, Laila Lalami and others is a burgeoning movement that deserves genuine and serious attention. Their significant contribution to the literary realm is worthy of recognition and canonization within the broader African literary landscapes. In his essay "The North African Novel in English: What Is

It? How Is It?" Fayssal Bensalah raises an awakening call in the following manner:

It takes a village to raise a child. Indeed, it does. And it also takes a continent to nurture a literature, to feed it, to protect it, to help it mature, to help it reach its potential. Let's do that then. Let's water the North African novel in English with recognition, with acknowledgement, with attention. Let's embrace it. Let's build a bright future for it. And it will certainly make us proud.

3. Centring North African Anglophone Voices: Towards a Decolonial Cartography of African Letters

Having outlined the manacled constraints that have relegated this category of literature to the fringes of recognition, this paper calls for the reclamation of a rightful place for this emerging tide. It argues that sustained insistence on its inclusion can catalyse canonical and institutional reforms that accord this literature the over-due and legitimate status it merits within the field of African literary studies. The task, it is well maintained, could duly be described as amounting to a decolonial one, given the covert and neo-colonial mechanisms that continue to obscure these works from visibility and recognition.

Drawing on Frantz Fanon, the tacit exclusion of this literature can be understood as a form of "capillary colonisation", an epistemic subjugation that demands an emancipatory intervention. Recognition, then, is not merely restorative; it constitutes a critical step toward dismantling enduring colonial

epistemologies within the literary field. Anthologies about African literature ought to be supplanted with the inclusion of names from this tide, and the canon reconfigured. If canonicity is measured by readership, reception and aesthetic and literary merit, then the writers that this article underscores, have successfully met all these standards as will be outlined next.

Chief among the strong assets of this literature is the very condition of its liminality, which, I argue accords it an inclusive and dialogic nature that enriches its content. Its intersection with Arab, Berber, African, Mediterranean and colonial languages and cultures sets North African Anglophone literature in a state of in betweenness celebrating hybridity and diversity. Hence, North African literature is marked by linguistic and cultural plurality drawing on various historical, ideological, political and cultural traditions that subvert monosemic thinking for more multilayered reflexions. The North African writers who opted for English as the language of their literature actually seek a “third space” as Homi Bhabha maintains. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha refers to liminality as a transitory, in-between state or space, which is characterized by indeterminacy, ambiguity, hybridity, potential for subversion and change. He further “stresse[s] the importance of border locations as the threshold environment, where subjectivity finds itself poised between sameness and ‘alterity’ and new discursive forms are constituted” (155). It is contended that this shifting and evolving discursive sphere of literature harbours an unparalleled

potential for subversion and transformative change.

Many North African writers experimented with writing in English as a liminal language to craft complex and hybrid narratives attempting to challenge traditional literary traditions. It is this ‘liminality’ that allowed them a deep engagement with national and transnational themes and to rethink their individual and collective identities and histories. This tradition, so to call it, has a considerable number of representatives whose productions garnered prestigious acclaim internationally, harvesting numerous literary prizes as the Pulitzer Prize, The Booker Prize, the National Book Award among many others. In this regard, Fayssal Bensalah firmly takes a decisive stand against Nadine Gordimer’s claim that the Nigerian Chinua Achebe is the father of African literature, unequivocally asserting instead that he recognizes Ahdaf Soueif as “the mother of the African novel in English”.

I align with Bensalah’s assertion, further insisting on recalibrating the African literary canon, by reshuffling the paradigms that privilege some figures while eclipsing others as well as by dismantling the deep-seated hierarchies that define the range of possibilities for African writers. It is then advocated that recognition must be reconfigured and duly redistributed for fair visibility and rightful acknowledgment of the North African Anglophone literary productions, whose complexity, nuanced themes, and transnational dimension among many other merits are worthy of voicing. Ahdaf Soueif, who has been recognised as the most influential cultural and political

commentator and activist of Egypt, assiduously contends in her interview “In a Conversation with Ahdaf Soueif” that:

what good fiction does is it arrives at universal feelings, values, truths that every reader can understand, can feel part of, but it does that by being very specific and very individual. And possibly the kind of future that we need to try to imagine now carries something of this and that it needs to be at the same time imagined at a very local level, but also at a global level.

Soueif’s conception of what constitutes “good fiction” resonates strongly with Toni Morrison’s literary philosophy, recalling the Nobel laureate’s insistence on attributing literature a global dimension. Adopting this approach, they both portrayed the existential dilemmas of their characters imbuing them with a universal dimension, highlighting the interconnectedness of personal and global experiences. Furthermore, Soueif’s assertion that a good fiction is the one which transcends geographical and cultural boundaries to capture universal feelings and realities reflects her nuanced approach to literature. She calls for a literature that balances the dual parameters of specificity and universality. Her insights are widely embraced as she advocates for a fiction that addresses individual local experiences while contributing to a collective understanding of global concerns. This perspective gave Soueif’s writing its dialogic quality and contributed to her widespread international acclaim.

Soueif’s literature features a sophisticated amalgamation of the

personal with the political. Her work explores political concerns shedding light on her country’s intricate relationship with the West and its impact on Arab identity in an unstable political environment. She likewise addressed the enduring legacies of colonialism and delves into gender issues unravelling the complex dynamics of women’s agency and sexuality. Soueif’s literature is characterized by a sophisticated blend of the personal and the political. At the same time, her work explores political concerns, shedding light on her country’s intricate relationship with the West and its impact on Arab identity in a volatile political landscape.

In her novels *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) and *The Map of Love* (1999), Soueif interweaves her female characters as they intimately grapple with love, desire and identity formation to extend the debate to broader political concerns as colonialism, nationalism and belonging. She gracefully portrays the complex emotional and ideological tensions that characterise cross-cultural encounters especially between the East and the West. Her debut work *Aisha* (1983) was appreciated by Edward Said who recognised her qualities as a new postcolonial writer who successfully voiced the intriguing legacy of colonialism aligning her with canonical African figures. Her preoccupation with history and politics has secured her engagement and articulation of hybrid identities navigating their lives across cultures. In her most acclaimed novel *The Map of Love* (1999), Soueif subverts the binary of coloniser/colonised foregrounding fluid spheres where histories and cultures intersect. Her

engagement with the complex issue of cultural identity intersects with canonical African writers' concerns as Achebe and Ngũgĩ. Similar to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's literary preoccupations, Ahdaf Soueif examines aspects of memory, otherness, diaspora, immigration, and exile. This should grant her the legitimate recognition as a rightful African writer who amply deserves canonisation.

Ahdaf Soueif is not the only pioneer of this new tide; Hisham Matar, likewise, stands as a pivotal figure in the emerging and dynamically shifting field of North African Anglophone writing. He is a writer whose reach and readership are both substantial and incontestable. His engagement with the fraught political and social landscape of Libya, particularly the oppressive atmosphere of the pre-revolutionary era and the upheavals that followed the Arab Spring, has granted him a distinctive and authoritative place within contemporary literary discourse. In 2006, he published his seminal work *In the Country of Men* which was met with great praise and appreciation by renowned authors and critics. It earned him many awards: the 2006 Guardian First Book Award, the 2007 Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize, and the 2007 Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Europe and South Asia. It was also shortlisted for the 2006 Man Booker Prize. His novel *The Return* (2017) validated further his status as a new celebrated voice and the first North African Anglophone writer to win the Pulitzer Prize in 2017.

Matar's works have gained prominence not only for the geopolitical crises they address but also due to the elegant narratives with which he portrays

them. Deeply attuned to the unsettling and slipping conditions that followed the fall of the old regime, Matar stands out as a keen observer of the traumatic disorientation that is engendered by radical rupture. His discursive strategies are actually powerful and intricate. His reliance on strategic gaps and fragmentations reflect the very structure of postcolonial memory with its inherent instability, unreliability, ambiguity and paradoxes. Matar merges memory, loss, exile and political violence all while adopting a restrained yet exceptionally sensitive and soft tone. Through both his novels and memoirs, he articulates the complex condition of postcolonial Libya that is marked by wounds that are not yet healed. His fiction, it must be noted, is not confined to mere local concerns, it rather significantly contributes to the broader African literary discourse on history, trauma and identity providing compelling reflections on the lingering legacies of colonial and dictatorial repression.

Nevertheless, despite being internationally acclaimed, Hisham Matar's writing remain obscured in Libya and the whole continent due to censorship. His works were completely banned from Libyan universities and book stores. This has inevitably contributed to his absence from African literary tradition. Matar, just like Soueif and many other North African Anglophone writers; still struggle to affiliate himself with mainstream African writers. Most of the times he is referred to as Anglo-Arab and not African.

Laila Lalami, from Morocco is already mentioned in this article, however, the merit she gained from international institution deserves attention. Her debut

work *The Moor's Account* won multiple major awards. She is a novelist and essayist who constantly grapples with displacement, identity, migration, hybridity and the enduring legacies of the colonial enterprise. In her novel *The Other Americans* (2019), she explores the perilous journeys of Moroccan immigrants crossing the Mediterranean portraying their dilemmas as they are confronted to multiple settings and cultures. She highlights their fractured hopes and disillusioned dreams being torn between the dual feeling of belonging and unhomeliness. Moreover, Lalami is preoccupied with voicing the unvoiced in the stories of nine characters, each with a different perspective. In an all-inclusive vision, Lalami displays an ambivalent perspective on issues related to identity and belonging through the polyphonic structure of her novel. Despite the fact that her protagonist in the novel is Moroccan, his existential crises remain universal representing the condition of marginalised minorities in contemporary America.

Lalami's works deserve recognition and canonisation within the mainstream African literature for their engagement with the large continental preoccupation with colonial memory, racism, postcolonial condition and the constant negotiation of identity amid a globalised world. She enriched the African canon bringing valuable insights into the experiences of a large number of Africans living in diaspora. Her adoption of English introduces North African realities to an international readership as it is maintained by Christián H. Ricci "As a matter of fact, Anglophone Moroccan literature opens up large avenues for Moroccan literature as a

whole because it addresses a potentially wider Anglophone readership and makes issues such as Moroccan identity politics, poetics of hybridity, exile, and cultural nomadism visible to Western academia" (5). However, her acknowledgement as an African writer is overshadowed as she continues to be labelled "Moroccan-American novelist" in most literary and cultural cycles.

Hamza Koudri is another promising Algerian Anglophone writer. He lives in Algiers and he is currently the Country Director of the British Council in Algeria supervising programs in English and in higher education and culture. Being passionate about historical novels, he started crafting his novel *Sand Roses* after a creative writing course with the American writer Elizabeth Kadetsky, and spent nearly a decade investigating the history and visual/archival traces of the Ouled Naïl dancers and colonial Bousaada. His debut novel *Sand Roses* (2023), distinguished as the runner-up for the Island Prize (2021–2022) for Debut African Novel, has been steadily garnering significant international acclaim. It is published by Holland House Books (UK). The novel registers an anti-colonial historical moment against the French while also retrieving the blurred history of the semi-nomadic Ouled Nail community. The novel is set in the Algerian city of Bousaada during the 1930s. It chronicles the disillusioned dreams of twin sisters, Salima and Fahima, who arrive at Bousaada with aspirations of building successful dancing careers. He juxtaposes the city's alluring promise of glamour and beauty with the cruel and brutal reality it has become under the French coloniser.

The city becomes a stage for both colonial violence and entrenched communal forms of oppression.

By adopting divergent philosophies, Koudri's protagonists in the novel challenge stereotypical representations of African womanhood. Salima's and Fahima's distinct perceptions of life and happiness embody his nuanced views on gender issues subverting the prototypical and conventional image of the colonial-era woman as inherently victimised. The novels' pivotal incident; the sisters' killing of a French soldier in self-defence catalysed a profound transformation in their lives forcing them into an intricate navigation of resistance and resilience amid harsh conditions of violence and alienation. In a multilayered and immersive discourse, Koudri explores complex concerns about identity, community, colonial violence and moral dilemmas participation in their representation in the global literary scene.

Last but not least, it bears emphasizing that Fayssal Bensalah is another ascendent voice in this new tide of North African Anglophone literature. He is one of the most engaged writers reclaiming the recognition of this literature which, according to him and to many other writers and scholars, has been excluded from the African canon. He has written two essays entitled "The Exclusion of the North African Novel in English from African Literature" and "The North African Novel in English: What Is It? How Is It?" defending this cause. Bensalah also holds a PhD in critical and creative writing From Cardiff University. His novel *The Couscous Western*, was the

runner-up for the 2023 Graywolf Africa Fiction Prize. His short story, "The Last Shot of Ahmed Bey's Cannon" won the inaugural 2020 Toyin Falola Prize and "Citizen Sarah" was longlisted for the 2023 Afritondo Short Story Prize.

"The Last Shot of Ahmed Bey's Cannon" revolves around the intimate journey of the protagonist Professor Lamin el Oulmi, a French-educated academic who gets back to his native country Algeria in search for emotional closure and revival of an old love affair. His high expectations, however, were, ironically, met by a series of refusals and humiliations. Through Lamin's experiences, Bensalah underscores the emotional and ideological ruptures shaped by historical displacement and cultural alienation offering a sharp reflection on the complex dynamics of belonging and estrangement in a postcolonial context. Through the protagonist's journey, the narrative articulates transnational political concerns that reverberate with larger diasporic experiences.

Bensalah's *The Couscous Western* (2023), Linked Novelettes and Critical Thesis on Literary Idiosyncrasy is a piece of historical fiction. Its flamboyant French colonel protagonist is nicknamed by his soldiers as "The Comanche" because he imitates a traditional Native American naming practice, which is to name people around him based on their appearance, actions, character or natural likenesses. His life is turned upside down when he gets kidnaped by a mysterious Algeria man wearing a yellow "cheche"; a traditional headscarf of Algerian males of the period. This incident led to his surreal journey across 1950s Algeria where he got

exposed to the shattering repercussions of the colonial enterprise on both human beings and the environment. Though centring on the Algerian struggle with colonial forces, the narrative addresses global concerns as to the future of climate change. In doing so, Fayssal Bensalah aligns himself with contemporary writers who display a strong interest in climate change and ecocritical preoccupations. In conclusion, Bensalah's work encourages a nuanced understanding and a rethinking of notions of home, exile, belonging in a world fashioned by historical trauma and ongoing disjunctions.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the peripheral status of North African Anglophone literature is actually not accidental; it is the culmination of the intersection of colonial legacies, institutional hierarchies as well as epistemic frameworks that have for decades configured the borders of African literary tradition. The dual marginalisation of English writing from North Africa by both Maghribi and continental African canons has produced a fractured literary geography that shrouded the region's broad and complex cultural and linguistic realities. Nevertheless, the productions of emerging North Africa Anglophone writers determinately shake this imposed cartography since they are constantly making their appearance on some international scenes. Through the adoption of English as their language of expression, writers from North Africa expanded postcolonial African concerns to universal landscapes addressing global readership. Their embrace of English, it must be stressed, did not compromise the very

essence of their cultural African identity. Their narratives' engagement with issues of colonialism, identity, hybridity, displacement, memory, and resistance allowed them to contribute to both local and global dialogues surrounding such preoccupations.

Having examined the bidding forces that overshadowed this emerging field of writing, it becomes evident that African literary cartographies must be reconceptualised. Recognising this body of literature, therefore, requires a thorough reconfiguration of African literary politics; that transcends rigid binaries of North/South, Arab/African, and Francophone/Arabophone. As this paper has argued, the growing corps of North Africa Anglophone literature from Egypt, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco significantly takes part in the continental debates on themes of colonial legacies, postcolonial negotiations of identity and trauma and collective memory in addition to transnational issues of migration, belonging and hybridity. This, undoubtedly, elevates this new tide to the standards of canonical African letters. Its inclusion is not merely a matter of diversification but of a decolonial endeavour that liberates African literary tradition from the lingering neocolonial practices that still shape it. By foregrounding these voices, African literature will certainly gain more visibility, wider representation of the continent's evolving culture and broader contribution to world literature.

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