

THE COUSCOUS WESTERN:

Linked Novelettes

and

Critical Thesis on Literary Idiosyncrasy

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SUMMARY

‘THE COUSCOUS WESTERN: Linked Novelettes and Critical Thesis on Literary Idiosyncrasy’ is a creative and critical writing PhD that encompasses two components—a collection of novelettes and a critical thesis. The creative component is entitled *The Couscous Western*. It contains five novelettes and one novella, all of which are connected, all of which display the applicability of particular methods of literary hybridity. The stories are linked by particular characters and places. The novelettes are ‘Your Son Is with Pollen and Dust,’ ‘The Last Shot of Ahmed Bey’s Cannon,’ ‘The Couscous Western,’ ‘Muslims Can’t Live Like Beats,’ and ‘Colonels Don’t Confess.’ The Novella is called *The Seven Dates of Omar Sharif*. The six creative works feature a diversity of characters and endorse many motifs, places and even genres. Some elements of the six creative works are socially and magically real, others fantastical. They star Algerian and non-Algerian characters, some based in Algeria, others stranded in the UK. The stories address themes of Islamophobia, religion, morality, nostalgia and unhomeliness. As for the critical component, it consists of four chapters that investigate a variety of topics. The opening chapter pertains to the exclusion of anglophone North African literature from African literature, referring to the history of this separation, its architects and its current sponsors. I also make a case for its gainful inclusion in African literature. I introduce, enumerate, explain and exemplify my own seven methods of literary hybridity in the second chapter. Four of them are linguistic, originating from a defamiliarisation of English. The three others are formal ones that spring from neo-adaptations of Arabic storytelling traditions. In Chapter Three, to manifest further the originality of my hybrid text, I study the conventional methods of hybridity exercised in four fiction works written by two anglophone North African writers: Hisham Matar and Laila Lalami. The fourth chapter concludes the thesis by not only disclosing the limitations encountered while implementing my literary hybridity methods in the creative component, but also discussing the implications of defamiliarisation.

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INTRODUCTION

This critical component investigates the effects of literary hybridity on anglophone North African literature. It first attempts to evaluate the position of this emerging literature among the literatures of the African continent. Although several North African writers have written and published their works in English, this literature remains separated from and rarely associated with African literature. After reviewing certain arguments explaining this separation, I offer my own in this thesis. Further, I make an appeal for an applicable inclusion of anglophone North African literature into African literature, referring to the genesis of particular North African works written in English, which have gained global attention and recognition, namely works authored by Ahdaf Soueif (Egyptian), Hisham Matar (Libyan) and Laila Lalami (Moroccan). Equally importantly, in this component, I exercise and advocate my own adaptation of literary hybridity. To attain its linguistic and formal characteristics, seven techniques endorse the term and are applied in the creative component.

This research presents an opportunity for me to place my own creative thumbprint and stamp on the English text. Linguistic hybridity is familiar to me. I grew up in Algeria using a hybrid register, a mix of conversational Arabic and French words, Tamazight, Turkish and, most recently, English. I intend to transfer a similar register into my English prose as I will hybridise my collection by employing cultural and linguistic features unique to the region of North Africa generally and Algeria particularly. Intelligibility is key to this endeavour, and every effort will be exerted for it to be achieved in the creative writing part. I also aim to open a discussion about including anglophone North African literature to African literature, explaining the significance and literary gains of this unity. It is my hope that works by the authors mentioned above—and those of other North African writers—will be canonised into

African literature. This inclusion will certainly enrich African literature and grant it a better position among world literature.

To pursue this research, I am motivated by three pronouncements made by Chinua Achebe (1975), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2009) and Hisham Matar (2007). In *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, Achebe (1975, p. 103) called for a 'new English' that could be attained by bending it 'to suit its new African surroundings.' I aim to do so in writing my creative part. In *Translated by the Author: My Life between Languages*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2009, p. 18) speaks of his experience writing in English and describes the process as 'a literary act of mental translation.' He evokes self-translation, which I also use in my work. As for Hisham Matar, in an interview entitled *A Conversation with Hisham Matar*, he (2007, p. 248) mentions the presence 'an Arab hum' present in his prose, a particular form of cultural hybridity that characterises his work. In a similar vein, I intend to *arabise* my work, reaching for my own idiosyncratic and aesthetic hum, through using Arabic words and Arabic cultural features that already exist within the English language. I refer to this process as 'the defamiliarisation of the English language.'

The structure of the critical component comprises four chapters that inspect my research topic from different perspectives. In Chapter One, to appeal for an inclusion, I review previous arguments that have attempted an explanation of the detachment of North African literature from African literature and provide mine. I refer to the history of this persistent separation and the agents that keep it operative to this moment. I also argue in favour of including anglophone North African literature in the canon of African literature. Chapter Two introduces, explains and exemplifies my seven methods of formal and linguistic hybridity. Therein, I propose my version of linguistic hybridity, after reviewing similar notions identified by Bandia (2008) and Zabuz (2007), linking it to the phenomenon of Englishes. I also identify and elucidate my methods of formal hybridity, which I flesh out through

borrowing and tweaking three storytelling traditions from Arabic literature. Several questions arise here: How is my literary hybridity different from that of other African writers? If my literary hybridity is one of my creative thumbprints, what are its features? And how can these features be applied successfully to warrant intelligibility and to tailor a new English as a mark of distinction?

To frame my work within the region of North Africa, I have selected four works to be investigated in Chapter Three, written by Hisham Matar and Laila Lalami. I have selected those two writers for three reasons. Both authors grew up partially or entirely in the region and reflect its cultures in their works. Their countries of origin were not completely colonised by an English-speaking country. This means that to them, English is an adopted language rather than a colonial one, hence the exclusion of Ahdaf Soueif in this chapter. The third reason concerns their prose, in which I have detected translingual and formal traits borrowed from the Arabic language and Arabic literature. The works by Hisham Matar are: *In the Country of Men* (2007) and *Anatomy of a Disappearance* (2011). The ones written by Laila Lalami are: *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005), and *The Moor's Account* (2015).

Lastly, in chapter four, I discuss the developmental processes and compositional challenges of applying my methods of literary hybridity in the creative component, titled *The Couscous Western*. I also reflect critically on the limitations and implications of the defamiliarisation of the English language. What were the challenges I faced while attempting to defamiliarise my English prose? Can other writers apply this concept in their works?

As a literary artist, my objectives are well-defined. I am a Muslim writer who writes Muslim characters with certain concerns and preoccupations. It is my responsibility as an artist to transmit them and flesh them out with words as I hopefully do in *The Couscous Western*, a collection of six creative works. Notably, concerning word count, the stories are

long. Five of them are novelettes ('Your Son Is with Pollen and Dust,' 'The Last Shot of Ahmed Bey's Cannon,' 'The Couscous Western,' 'Muslims Can't Live Like Beats,' and 'Colonels Don't Confess'). The word count of these stories is between eight thousand words and thirteen thousand words. For this reason, I specifically call them novelettes rather than short stories, whose word count tends to be between two thousand words and five thousand words. My stories, in other words, are too long to be called short stories and too short to be called novellas. In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Chris Baldick (2001, p. 174) defines a novelette as an 'extended short story.' My novelettes are that—extended short stories. *The Seven Dates of Omar Sharif* is a novella, which is a piece of prose 'intermediate in length and complexity between a *SHORT STORY and a *NOVEL' (Baldick 2001, p. 174). *The Seven Dates of Omar Sharif* is longer than the five novelettes. Its word count is more than eighteen thousand words.

As a researcher, I am conscious of my position in this field of cultural production. I aim to distinguish my fiction by challenging the semantic authority of the English language to problematise ideas of idiosyncrasy, continental identity, language and meaning. This is my intervention and my contribution to the creative field. My hopes are also to contribute to the literary culture of my country. Algeria houses many skilled writers who write either in Arabic, French or both. I aim to be among the first Algerian writers who write in English. I want to write Algerian characters in English. I want to write Algeria in English

CHAPTER ONE

ANGLOPHONE NORTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

ON EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION

1.1. ENCAPSULATION

In this chapter, I revise the conventional expression ‘African literature’ as it was defined classically upon its genesis and as it is being defined presently. I contest the existing definitions as being traditionally selective of Sub-Saharan fiction and seriously excluding of anglophone fiction works from North Africa, which have become globally celebrated. This exclusion disparages the continental identity of prominent North African writers, namely Laila Lalami (Moroccan), Hisham Matar (Libyan) and Ahdaf Soueif (Egyptian). I argue that the definition of anglophone African literature needs to be updated to include this clique of North African writers for several reasons (discussed in this chapter). I argue that their African-ness is seriously ignored. So I appeal for the inclusion and canonisation of their works into African literature, while reviewing previous arguments that have attempted to explain the detachment of North African literature from African literature, and provide mine.

My argument for inclusion hinges on an important yet often ignored development that has occurred in the literary sphere of the African continent—North Africans write books in English now. Several anglophone North African authors have been creatively active for years. They produce prominent literary works written in English. They have won major literary prizes. A new literary tide is emerging in North Africa and is trying to position itself among the literatures of the region. Arabophone and Francophone literatures have dominated the region for decades, but now another one is sprouting, written in English. Although few in number, the North African authors in question have attracted a significant number of readers.

They have scored representation in the global literary canon, but not in the African canon. The chapter then attempts to answer the following questions: Why is the continental identity of anglophone North African writers still undermined, and why are their works still largely excluded from the African canon? Do their works deserve canonical status within African literature?

Before all else, it is imperative to elucidate several points that contextualise this study. This study, to begin with, focuses essentially on anglophone literature, and any references made to language here are about the English language. It argues that anglophone North African writers are invisible in the canon of African literature in English. It does not deal with the canons of Arabic and French literatures. Secondly, I occasionally refer to the conventional definition of African literature as Sub-Saharan literature instead, which covers Sub-Saharan authors and their various works. This label has been used and overused by many forces for so long that it has shaped the perception of African literature. Notice that although the general adjective ‘African’ is generally employed, it refers only to the sub-Saharan part of Africa, henceforth my revised classification. Further, I employ the terminology ‘Anglophone North African Literature’ to categorise three writers as ‘anglophone North African writers,’ who are: Laila Lalami, Hisham Matar and Ahdaf Soueif. I have selected the trio because they are prominent, award-winning, successful, and recognised in the global canon. As for the general term ‘African literature,’ it will eventually encompass both Sub-Saharan and North African literatures in this study.

This research is conducted in the hope of cementing anglophone North African literature to African literature and re-establishing the continental identity of the authors in question. It is thought-provoking and astonishing that the prefix ‘North’ still manages to split a continent into two parts in terms of geography, race and literature. As I explain below, this remains a colonial detachment, which is being ideologically sponsored and employed by several forces

to separate people who live alongside each other. Literature has the power to unite people, and I am convinced that this potential attachment will certainly achieve that—join the two regions. In addition, it will reinforce the literary wealth of African literature. Those outliers, those North African writers, break the literary tradition of the region of writing in Arabic or French. They write in English, which could disclose that the English language is entering new spaces that do not have an English-speaking history and presence. Moreover, to be gained from this reinstatement is the circulation, recognition and representation (CRR) of the North African writers' works in African literature. These identifiable characteristics, among others, are mainly awarded to writers who fall within the existing category of 'African literature.'

Before presenting evidence of this current exclusion, one must refer to its roots first. Who is responsible for the detachment of North Africa from Sub-Saharan Africa? Who/what has split the continent into two? Certainly it was a powerful decision executed by a powerful force. This separation has deep, historical roots. It magnetises its power and persistence from major historical decisions, whose consequences remain effective to this moment, as argued below. 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.

Ziad Bentahar (2011, p. 2) argues that the disjunction of North African literature from African literature occurred in the 'twentieth century' when 'the study of African literature emerged as an academic discipline,' creating the symbolic existence of two Africas. True, academic studies of this literature may have officiated the separation, but they did not initiate it. Historically, the colonial enterprise did, grounding the first judgment of African-ness on race. To inaugurate this separation, exclusionary terms were coined by the colonial powers in the nineteenth century, especially at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, which ominously redefined 'the ethnic, geographic, historic and cultural landscapes of many African peoples' (Olusegun-Joseph 2012, p. 220). It certainly has done that; the continent was dismantled and

snapped into two regions. North Africa was allotted to what is now called the Middle-East, which was an ‘Orientalist re-mapping’ based on the region’s ‘predominant Islamic cosmic leaning and Arabic socio-cultural predisposition’ (Olusegun-Joseph 2012, p. 220). It was called ‘White Africa’ or, to use another term commonly employed by French geographers, ‘*l’Afrique blanche*’ (Brown 1967, p. 465). As for Sub-Saharan Africa, it was renamed ‘Black Africa,’ a designation that heavily relied on race and skin-colour, which still thrives to this moment. Significantly, this term is *the term* that represents the entire continent. It is the term that defines the image of the continent in general, which is a black continent, populated by a black race (it still amuses me that people in the UK still ask me: If you’re from Africa, why aren’t you black?). This is the traditional designation that is still being used. Africa, in other words, only refers to the Sub-Saharan part.

It is crucially important to learn that this colonial separation is well and alive. Those colonial assumptions still persist. They are nurtured by many forces, some opaque, others visible, some international, others continental. The orientalist views of North Africa still frame the region and its people as ‘Arab,’ ‘Berber,’ ‘Muslim’ or ‘White.’ The racial views of ‘Sub-Sahara’ still advertise the continent as ‘black.’ True, many international forces nurture the persistence of this separation for various reasons and objectives, but I am particularly interested in the African forces that do the same. The African people themselves still believe that there are two Africas. This belief still creates an ‘estrangement’ and a ‘distance’ between North Africans and Sub-Saharan. It is included in conversations, and, more sinisterly, it is deeply rooted in African societies, establishments and institutions. It has been, in a way, institutionalised. Notably, 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 addition, we North Africans are more concerned with

what happens in the Middle East than with what happens in Sub-Saharan Africa. We have, in a sense, ‘turned our backs on the continent.’

In Algeria, for example, when receiving Sub-Saharan tourists, we refer to them as ‘African tourists.’ Even Algerian institutions do so, such as newspapers and TV channels. Here is an example. Ennahar TV is a popular Algerian news channel. It has more than nine million subscribers on YouTube. Months ago, it (2022) published a video titled ‘*African Refugees: This is How They Live and This Is Their Route.*’ It is about ‘African refugees’ in Algeria. In the video, we see an impoverished, miserable slum somewhere in Algeria, occupied by a group of ‘Africans.’ The voiceover of an Algerian female journalist likens it to a distinct ‘African neighbourhood’ because those people live in a ‘simple way.’ Why are they labelled ‘African’? It is simple—they are Sub-Saharan and black. In another reportage released by the same channel (2017), a similar slum in Algeria is called ‘Africatown.’ Similarly, Sub-Saharan join us in this orientation, considering us ‘White Arabs’, ‘Berbers’ or ‘*blancs*’ (Whites). I illustrate here with a scene from a video released by Kkoubai (2022), an Algerian Youtuber, whose videos are seen by millions worldwide. In the video, he is in Cameroon, in a Cameroonian market to be specific. He wanders the market and speaks to the merchants, who keep referring to him as ‘le blanc’ or ‘Monsieur Le Blanc.’ Apparently, by the nickname, they mean he is ‘non-African or European’ because he repeatedly explains that he is ‘not blanc’ but ‘from Africa.’

I must refer here to another major historical phenomenon that still estranges North Africans and Sub-Saharans—the trans-Saharan slave trade. For a long period of time, North African merchants were actively involved in the trafficking and enslavement of Sub-Saharans across the Sahara Desert to North African and Middle Eastern nations. In *The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade*, John Wright (2007, p. 114) reminds us that that Libya’s Tripoli ‘was always a main Mediterranean outlet of black slaves traded across the Sahara,’ and this lasted ‘over a

thousand years’ as it was ‘the terminus of the main caravan trails of the central desert.’ Morocco, John Wright adds, ‘defied most international abolitionist pressures throughout the nineteenth century and for most of it continued to offer trans-Saharan slave-traders a large, lucrative and seemingly almost insatiable domestic slave market’ (2007, p. 137). This is an old wound that still ignites and charges tension between the two regions. The legacy of this infamous trade still impacts North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa in divisive ways. On occasion, it throbs and reminds us of its lasting, divisive effects. It, in fact, throbbed again recently. In March 2023, the Tunisian government marshalled a policy to deport Sub-Saharan immigrants out of its lands. This sent a wave of disapproval across Sub-Saharan Africa, especially after the video of an elderly Tunisian man talking about his grandfather’s past as a slave trader went viral on social media. It was shared on X by many popular online pages, namely *Africa Facts Zone*, which has more than a million followers. In the video, the old man argues that the values of those Africans ‘cannot be implemented in Tunisia’ for they are ‘not compatible with ours.’ Then he adds, ‘my grandfather used to buy and sell them’ (*Africa Facts Zone* 2023).¹

In short, this colonial and historical separation has been institutionalised, and it affects literature. What started as a geographical and racial detachment has led to a literary one. It submits to the same tradition. It keeps it alive. It states that Africa is Sub-Saharan, and so are its writers. This tradition is enduring and potent, and it can be evidenced.

¹ <https://twitter.com/AfricaFactsZone/status/1631768027514433536?lang=en>

As an African writer and citizen, the success of African literature gladdens me. African anglophone literature is widely celebrated and recognised by readers. This English-writing prose has achieved global recognition and gained an influential position in world literature. Its position in the world literary system is no longer marginal, but prominent. Its works are shortlisted for and awarded literary prizes almost every year. It is widely read and enthusiastically awaited. For example, *The Death of Jesus* (2020) by J.M. Coetzee (a South-African writer) was cited by *The Sunday Times* as one of ‘the most awaited novels in the English-speaking world’ (Holgate 2019). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian novelist, has attained global fame for being both a virtuoso novelist and an ardent feminist. Imbolo Mbue (Cameroonian) reportedly sold her first book—*Behold the Dreamers* (2016)— ‘for a million dollars’ (Robertson 2016). Author of the critically acclaimed *An Orchestra of Minorities* (2019) and *The Fishermen* (2015), Chigozie Obioma, another Nigerian, was declared by *The New York Times* as being an ‘heir to Chinua Achebe’ (Fiammetta 2015).

However, there is a concern here. The more I research African literature, the more I discover this conservative tendency to concentrate on Sub-Saharan writers, especially on black, Sub-Saharan writers. The spotlights are kept on them, adhering to a selective continental tradition. This is an adamant and clear literary organisation. This proclivity, as I argue in this chapter, is constantly assisted and endorsed by several agents—literary institutions, reputable magazines, academia, and even particular Sub-Saharan writers.

Let’s begin with a telling example that reveals this tendency. The 2015 Man Booker Prize longlist included thirteen names, among whom were Laila Lalami and Chigozie Obioma. Although both authors are African-born, only Chigozie Obioma was announced by the Prize committee as African, while Laila Lalami’s African-ness was clearly obscured. This exclusion was subsequently echoed in an article by *The Guardian’s* Mark Brown (2015), who identified Chigozie Obioma as ‘the sole African writer on The Man Booker Prize longlist.’ A

swift, questioning response came from Laila Lalami, who, citing *The Guardian* and the article's link, tweeted, 'Guardian: "The sole African writer [on the @ManBookerPrize longlist] is Chigozie Obioma." Ummm..... <http://t.co/dBo3E5yWW7>' (Tjie 2015). Then, asserting, she added, 'I am African. It's an identity I'm often denied but that I will always insist upon.' In response to Lalami's protest, the article was amended. What is intriguing is that instead of updating the phrase that described Chigozie Obioma as 'the sole African writer' on the list to the 'two African writers' on the list, it was deleted entirely.

The definitions of African literature, both classical and contemporary, still nurture the exclusion. They still turn their backs on the North, even when they include words such as 'African languages' and 'indigenous languages.' Notably, defining African literature has always been an elusive task, although many scholars (Paul Bandia, 2014, Ziad Bentahar. 2011) and writers (Chinua Achebe, 1975, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986) have tried. It was not defined satisfactorily when it emerged during the 1960s and the 1970s, and it is still loosely defined at present. It is a contentious term complicated with many questions. What is the language (s) representative of the continent? Should it be an indigenous language, or a colonial one? Does African literature refer to African writers resident in Africa and writing in indigenous African languages? To answer some of these questions, a conference in Makerere, Uganda, was held in 1962. Its objective, in Chinua Achebe's words (1975, p. 91), 'failed.' It could not settle on a certain definition of African literature. Instead, it disclosed many. Achebe (1975, p. 92) famously declared that he does 'not see African literature as one unit but as a group of associated units—in fact the sum total of all the national and ethnic literatures of Africa.' He advocated the inclusion of all languages in the definition, both indigenous and colonial, that are being used in Africa by all Africans. In *Themes and Attitudes in Modern African Writing*, Nadine Gordimer (1970, p. 9) updated the definition, including non-Africans who write about the African experience:

My own definition is that African writing is writing done in any language by Africans themselves and by others of whatever skin color who share with Africans the experience of having been shaped, mentally and spiritually, by Africa.

Her definition, notice, is broad and inclusive. It is even diplomatic, declining to limit this literature to a particular region, language or race. It goes beyond geography and race. Yet, decades later, she declared Achebe—Nigerian, black and Sub-Saharan—as ‘the father of African literature’ (Flood 2009). Of course, the term has been redefined throughout the years, enhanced, debated, and reshaped to include a new generation of African writers, modern concerns and niche aesthetics. It advertises new natures now: diasporic, transnational and transcultural. It has eradicated stereotypes, but also strengthened others. However, it is my conviction that one feature remains unchanged—it still obscures North Africa and its emerging anglophone literature. It still considers Sub-Saharan writers its legitimate representatives and salient authors.

I do not dispute the classical definitions of English-writing African literature that exclude the Maghreb and North Africa. They had a plausible reason. Who, during the 60s and 70s, was prominently writing in English in Francophone North Africa? The region’s countries had just gained their independence from France, and their authors certainly wrote in French, not even in Arabic. Although Algeria gained its independence in 1962, its first Arabic novel ‘did not make its appearance until 1971 when Abdelhamid Benhedouga published *Rih al Ganub* (Wind from South)’ (Bois and Bjornson 1992, p. 105). The region was naturally obscured, only occasionally mentioned as part of the African literary tradition. In addition, as I explain later, the African Writers Series (AWS) and its engineers played a major role in this orientation. My dispute, however, is with relatively contemporary definitions of African literature that still exclude the North, despite its notable literary presence. To illustrate, let’s

observe Paul Bandia's contemporary definition. In *Translation as Reparation*, Bandia (2014, p. 13) states:

It can be assumed that African literature remains that literature which conveys African thought both traditional and modern, and deals with the African experience, both ancient and contemporary. It is the sum total of all the national and ethnic literatures.

The verb 'remains' implies stability, steadiness, and unchangeability. Reading his book, one prepares for a thorough exposition of 'African thought,' but he only refers to the usual suspects: Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi and Gabriel Okara. He also mentions a younger generation—Ben Okri, Chris Abani, Calixthe Beyala and others, all Sub-Saharan.

Popular Sub-Saharan writers influence the exclusion of North African literature, perhaps unintentionally by constantly recommending reading their fellow Sub-Saharan authors. In her well-known, widely viewed TED talk, entitled *The Dangers of a Single Story*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) alerts us to the stereotypes affixed to the African continent and supports under-represented minorities. She cites episodes from her American experience, in which she was judged stereotypically. She was asked whether her favourite music was 'tribal.' After reading her first novel, one of her professors accused it of lacking 'African authenticity.' Chimamanda then critiques the Western image of Africa as a continent riven by wars and poverty. She explains that the problem with African stereotypes is that they are 'incomplete.' I find it thought-provoking that she, years later, would fall into her own idea of 'the single story.' Is limiting African literature to Sub-Sahara not a 'single story'? Is it not an 'incomplete' stereotype? Alexandra Wolfe's article (2015) in *The Wall Street Journal*, entitled 'Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie on the World of African Literature: The Best-selling Author on the Diversity of African Writers and her Life in Nigeria and U.S.,' was written after she had interviewed Chimamanda. Chimamanda hopes to 'show Africa's range of

stories.’ She indicates diversity. She provides a list of African writers who should be read more. One might expect the list to include a diverse range of writers from all parts of Africa. But she then selects two African novelists whom she thinks should be read by a wider audience—Teju Cole (Nigerian) and Achille Mbembe (Cameroonian), both Sub-Saharan. This proclivity is common among Sub-Saharan writers. Here is another example. Blessing Musariri is an influential Zimbabwean writer. In a published interview entitled ‘The Best African Novels Recommended by Blessing Musariri’ (2021), the author recommends ‘the best African novels, books that had a big personal impact and have stayed with her’ (Roell 2021). The books are distinctly Sub-Saharan. Here is the list: *The Famished Road* by Ben Okri, *The Memory of Love* by Aminatta Forna, *Burma Boy* by Biyi Bandele, *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Opening Spaces: An Anthology of Contemporary African Women's Writing* by Yvonne Vera. Many other examples populate the Internet. Just google ‘African novels’ or ‘best African novels’ and the recommendations will certainly highlight books written by Sub-Saharan writers.

This exclusion is even echoed in films and documentaries. In a recent BBC documentary titled *Africa Turns the Page: The Novels that Shaped a Continent*, David Olusoga (2021), the presenter, talks about the African novels that ‘helped transform the image of Africa itself.’ Olusoga explains that ‘the African novel has become a superpower in the world of the novel.’ Although the inclusive word ‘African’ is repeatedly employed, we only see pictures and scenes of particular African writers, black ones, the usual suspects—Ben Okri, Aminatta Forna, Chinua Achebe, Buchi Emecheta and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Even when the documentary attempts to include a contemporary African writer, it obeys the same, old trend—it selects a young Nigerian writer: Oyinkan Braithwaite, writer of *My Sister, The Serial Killer* (2018). So Africa has not really turned *that particular* page, has she?

Simply put, there is some process of exclusion at work, either advertent or inadvertent. It is persistent and clear, and it has serious consequences on North African writers, myself included. Essentially, this exclusion damages the circulation, recognition and representation (CRR) of the North African writer's works in the African market. Doseline Kiguru (2016, p. 204) states that 'the uneven distribution of economic and cultural capital results in misrepresentation, or lack of representation, within the canon.' True, the uneven—or non-existent—distribution of the North Africa novel in Africa impacts CRR. If a North African novel is unrecognised, unrepresented and unadvertised as a part of African literature, it will be unlikely circulated in the African market; and thus, unlikely to be represented within the canon of English-language writing. Why would it? Nobody knows of its existence. It is invisible. It will, therefore, unlikely reach African readers in bookshops. It will unlikely be taught in an African literature course. It is worth mentioning that political forces influence this proclivity. For example, because of particular governmental policies, Hisham Matar's books and journalism had been 'banned' in Libya (Matar, 2016, p. 81). He wrote about a society which may not have known of his existence, or his efforts to voice its concerns. I myself have never encountered a work by this North African author in any Algerian library or bookstore, not even in translation, not even in university libraries. Therefore, the meagre distribution—or nonexistence—of this anglophone literature in the region cripples the circulation and recognition of the North African novel in the continent.

In *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, John Guillory (1993, p. 9) emphasises that one of the problems that affects canon formation is the 'problem of access to the means of literary production and consumption.' In this regard, being absent from the African canon obscures the North African writer and cripples the circulation and consumption of their works in particular locations. It marginalises them. It limits their readership. It denies the writer economic and cultural capital by depriving them of publication. It excludes them

(and me) from having access to literary prizes, funds and the opportunities associated with African literature. Let us consider a hypothetical situation. Let's assume a situation where the University of Ibadan in Nigeria wanted to invite an 'African writer' to speak about African literature. Would it invite Hisham Matar, or Ben Okri? Would it invite Laila Lalami, or Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie? The selection would certainly gravitate towards Ben Okri and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Now, this begs the following questions: What are the literary roots of this exclusion? Why does this constant obscurity persist? Who/what sponsors it?

1.2. EXCLUSION

My argument here draws on Raymond Williams's 'selective national tradition' theory. In *Marxism and Literature*, Williams (1977) scouts the field of literature from the sixteenth century onwards, theorising the existence of a discriminatory approach to valorising literary works and determining literary value. Williams (1977, pp. 50-51) observes that not all 'fiction' was considered 'imaginative' and not 'all that had been written' was mentioned, but only certain 'great' or 'major' works were selected relatively for criticism and attention. One impact is this 'consequent grading of 'minor' works and an effective exclusion of 'bad' or 'negligible' works, and a practical realisation and communication of the 'major' values' (p. 50). This process, as Williams explains, became a 'selection' and a 'tradition' (p. 50) of 'an actively shaping force' (p. 114). Additionally, Williams (p. 114) alerts that this selective tradition is the 'most powerful practical means of incorporation,' and that it is 'powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification.' It is 'an evident expression of the dominant and hegemonic pressures and limits' and an 'aspect of contemporary social and cultural organization, in the interest of the dominance of a specific class' (p. 116). This hegemonic development, consequently, often obscures and leaves certain groups 'stranded.'

In the context of this study, it is argued that certain anglophone North African authors are considered ‘negligible’ as African writers by virtue of tradition. The North African authors and their creative works are unidentified as ‘African’ by several forces, adhering to a selective tradition, continental rather than national. The creative hegemony of Sub-Saharan writers recognisably started in the 1960s and 1970s and continues to this moment, unabatedly. They are credited for the most creative output and input in English. This trend, shaped by several forces, has generated a ‘cultural organisation’ that conventionally expects creative works in English from a ‘specific class’ (Sub-Saharan writers) and leaves certain groups who do not conform to ‘certain values’ stranded and excluded from the literary heritage of the continent (North African writers).

This traditionalist pattern of identification and incorporation has become a monopoly, an essentialist approach that constantly reads African literature as ‘Sub-Saharan.’ To achieve my aims, I categorise these values into three: institutional, colonial, and authorial. I also refer to the individual and institutional agents that keep sponsoring this orientation and ensuring its persistence. This literature, in other terms, has been racialised to represent black writers, or Sub-Saharan writers, in general. To guide this section, I bounce between two sub-questions: who started this literary tradition, and who still nurtures it?

Tradition, as Raymond Williams (1977, p. 114) asserts, is the ‘surviving past.’ In this view then, it is imperative to refer to the history of African literature to understand its current definition, which has been influenced by several literary forces—publishing houses, the institutions of literary prizes and famed magazines. The African Writers Series (AWS) deserve to be referred to first. It is not a secret that Heinemann’s African Writers Series (AWS), officially initiated in 1962, delivered African literature to international readers. The series embraced and commercialised Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Nadine Gordimer, Nuruddin Farah, Leila Aboulela, Jamal Mahjoub, and many others. Conceivably, without the

AWS, non-African readers would have known little about African literature. The late Alan Hill, who was profusely praised by Achebe for promoting African literature, was Heinemann's publisher who inaugurated the series. In his autobiography, *In Pursuit of Publishing*, Hill (1988, p. 145) writes that the series was 'to alter the world's perception of Africa and its people.' It certainly has, particularly in institutionalising Sub-Sahara as the leading bearer of African literature, a cultural image that still stands globally and locally to this moment.

Before the ground-breaking series was launched, most of the literature disseminated in the British Empire's colonies were educational textbooks, written by British writers, distributed by British publishers. Heinemann, essentially an Educational Publisher, rallied to the continent, among other publishers, because of the imposition of a British educational system in the colonies. The market was booming and solely secured for British book traders. This scramble was largely, as Becky Clarke (2003, p. 163) terms it, a 'colonial mission.' And the mission was to fill a literary vacancy, because, concerning the literature of the region, 'there was no canon of established texts' (Clarke 2003, p. 163). Alan Hill (1988, p. 145) reflects on this:

As I now discovered when I visited Nigeria for the first time in 1959, British Publishers operating within West Africa sold mainly text-books and regarded the territory as a place where you sold books rather than a source for new writers. Moreover, the books sold were almost all written by British authors and produced in Britain. They were taking profits out of West Africa and putting nothing back in the way of investment in local publishing and encouragement of local authors.

The resurgent popularity of the AWS opportunely coincided with a major movement that was expanding in the region in the 1950s. Freshly independent Sub-Saharan countries were

replacing the previously enforced British educational system—which undoubtedly highlighted British writers—with African works written by Africans. The AWS, thus, was embraced by various educational institutions that valorised them, inserted them into their curriculum and taught them as African literature. Chinua Achebe pioneered the African Writers Series with *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Other writers followed his lead, sprouting from Sub-Saharan, where the British Empire exercised the most linguistic and colonial dominion. It is important to learn that the AWS was meant essentially for ‘black African writers.’ Yes, it underscored black writers actively and deliberately. Alan Hill (1988, p. 123) admits this in his memoir, writing that ‘the plan was to start a paperback series, confined to black African authors.’ Blackness was a guiding criterion. In fact, it still is a guiding criterion. Even when Heineman decided to publish Arab writers who were born in African countries, blackness remained a criterion. An example is Tayeb Salih, whose *Season of Migration to the North* was published as part of the African Writers Series in 1969. Indeed, Heinemann publishing house played a consequential role in the classification and thereby canonisation of African literature, and many other institutions, operating today, still respect this tradition, still ignoring the North. Heinemann’s institutional legacy still lives at present.

This institutionalisation is condensed perfectly by Becky Clarke (2003, p. 165), who writes that the AWS was ‘established as the canonical series of African literature...the series has become the standard bearer—the canon.’ This institutional value has created a monopoly, currently patronised by the publishing industry. Bourdieu (1993, p. 42) underscores that ‘the fundamental stake in literary struggles is the monopoly of literary legitimacy.’ Contextualising his view here, I contend that the publishing industry and award institutions have assumed the role of literary gatekeepers, deciding ‘who are authorized to call themselves [African] writers’ (Bourdieu 1993, p. 42). They have the authority to exclude as well as to include. They have the authority to influence how we see certain writers and literatures. This

monopoly is an extension and a culmination of Heinemann's institutional value, still operative, still adamant. To illustrate, consider the literary history of two African writers who share analogous experiences: Laila Lalami (Moroccan) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Nigerian). They both share the following history: they left their respective African countries for education in the US as youths (Laila was twenty-two, Chimamanda nineteen); they write in English; they currently live in the US (a host country), where they also work; they are diasporic writers, who also frequently visit their home countries. Notably, their debut works were published by the same press: Algonquin Books. Despite these similarities, only Chimamanda's works have been canonised automatically into African literature, considered essential, and are 'being studied across the continent of Africa' (Adichie 2018). She is publicly identified as African by publishing houses and award institutions. *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), her debut novel, was reviewed by *The Telegraph* as 'a fresh new voice out of Africa' (Hope 2004). More importantly, upon publication, *The Observer* deemed it distinctly 'African' (Waterstones 2020). First, what makes *The Observer*'s columnists the judge of this? And secondly, I wonder, what makes certain novels 'African' while others remain 'non-African'? Laila Lalami's works, apparently, are 'non-African.' She is labelled by institutions as either American or Moroccan, never African. Her debut novel, *Secret Son* (2009), was longlisted for the 2010 Orange Prize for Fiction as fiction from 'Morocco' (*The Independent* 2010). The 2015 Man Booker Prize announced her as an 'American' (The Booker Prizes 2015). The obfuscation, as mentioned in the introduction, clearly troubled her, prompting her to announce forthrightly that she is 'African' (Tjie 2015).

Reputable magazines and mainstream newspapers foster this tradition. Fiammetta Rocco (2015) of *The New York Times* writes that 'one of the most remarkable literary developments of the past decade has been the more or less simultaneous eruption onto the world stage, after a long fallow period, of nearly a dozen popular new novelists from Africa.' The adjective

‘new’ promises change, revision and inclusion. It implies there is something new under the African sun. No, the article reveals, there is not. Rocco respects the same old tradition, naming several authors from Sub-Saharan Africa: ‘Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, NoViolet Bulawayo, Teju Cole, Alain Mabanckou and Dinaw.’ I find what she exposes next and how she frames it particularly exclusionary. She informs that ‘these writers voices... are as distinct as the African countries they come from, whether Nigeria in the west, Zimbabwe in the south or Ethiopia in the east.’ She, surprisingly, stops here. What about the North? She ignores it altogether. I have already mentioned in the introduction Mark Brown’s article in *The Guardian* (2015), but let me remind the readers of another issue. The article, against which Laila Lalami protested, was amended. Instead of updating the phrase that described Chigozie Obioma as ‘the sole African writer’ on the list into the ‘two African writers’ on the list, it was deleted entirely. Laila Lalami’s attempt to self-include, to self-canonise, failed. These institutions overpower the writer, who apparently cannot self-canonise, who is evidently unable to include themselves. She could not reinstate her own continental African identity.

As I explained above, this traditional exclusion is a colonial value that advertises the existence of two Africas. It is deeply rooted in the continent and engrained in the African people. This colonial value is also tenaciously implanted in African academia, and it is manifested in the curricula of African universities, which still define—either advertently or inadvertently—an African writer as a Sub-Saharan writer, which still consider the African novel to be a Sub-Saharan novel. This literary organisation influences canon formation. Canons are the classic works that are repeatedly taught in certain educational institutions. Canons, as Trevor Ross (1998, p. 4-5) confirms, ‘are made and preserved within critical and academic institutions.’ The word ‘preserve’ is a key word. Canons keep a book alive, read and taught by posterity. They keep ‘certain values’ alive by teaching them, reproducing them and ensuring their existence and persistence. This is exactly what the traditionalist educational

systems of African universities do. They preserve the literary organisation that highlights Sub-Saharan writers and obscures anglophone North African writers.

I illustrate this point with the following research conducted by scholars Lily Saint and Bhakti Shringarpure. They (2020) conducted a continental survey entitled *African Literature Is a Country*, to determine which works are taught most in African universities. They contacted more than 250 African literature professors, many of whom were members of the prestigious *African Literature Association*, to learn which works and writers occupy their curricula. The research reveals that ‘671 texts’ were listed. They disclose the following count: ‘novels (369)’ ‘short stories (101), ‘memoirs, biographies and autobiographies (46), poems (56), plays (39), essays and non-fiction books (28) and anthologies (32).’ They also inform that ‘South Africa dominated with 106 authors on the list, followed by Nigeria (62) and Kenya (30).’ Unsurprisingly, recurrent authors on the list include: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, J.M. Coetzee, Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Tsitsi Dangarembga and NoViolet Bulawayo.

It is significant to learn that this survey was undertaken and published three years ago—on 08 August 2020. To frame this further, the two scholars interviewed the Senegalese writer Boris Boubacar Diop. Boubacar (2020) told them that ‘African authors are taught in both [Nigeria and Senegal] however they are almost the same ones since the time of independence.’ He adds that ‘sometimes it feels like students can recite entire passages from these books but also that they only know these.’ Yes, exactly, ‘they only know these,’ to borrow Boubacar’s words. But why do students/readers only know these? It is simple—the canon is closed for some writers. The canon is uninclusive and outdated. It remains traditional, and the tradition states the following: If you are a Sub-Saharan writer, welcome to the canon. If you are not, you are invisible, as are the previously-mentioned North African writers. Because their Africanness is obscured, their works do not circulate in the continent.

Because their works do not circulate in the continent, they remain unrecognised and, thus, unrepresented. In other words, they are not read because they are not considered canon-worthy. They do not conform to the geographical and racial values that could score them a canonical status. They come from the ‘other Africa’ that does not represent the ‘real Africa.’

Intriguingly, this ‘colonial value’ has been and is being nurtured by many academics. In the preface of *The African Novel in English: An Introduction*, Keith Booker (1998), to justify his exclusion of the North, explains that the ‘the cultural traditions of North Africa differ substantially from those of sub-Saharan Africa.’ This insinuates that Sub-Sahara does not share similar cultural traditions as the North, which is erroneous. For instance, two evidently simple cultural aspects—among others—shared by both regions are Islam and Arabic: religion and language. Both have been thriving in Sub-Saharan Africa for centuries, way before the 1900s, in many African countries, such as ‘Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Benin and Nigeria where Islam was known since the 8th century and spread in the early 1000s’ (A Diouf 2021). In fact the number of Muslims has risen from ‘an estimated 11 million in 1900 to approximately 234 million in 2010’ (The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2010). Besides, many Sub-Saharan writers are Muslims who speak Arabic, write in English, and their works have been anthologised as part of African literature. The Sudanese Leila Aboulela is one important example. She is the first-ever winner of the 2000 Caine Prize for African Writing, a prize uncommonly known as ‘The African Booker.’ She authors anglophone texts. She is a devout Muslim and paints most of her work with Islamic references and facts. Another essential example is Nuruddin Farah, a prolific Somali author who also writes about Islamic culture, in English. He has been doing so for more than forty-five years, since the publication of his debut novel *From a Crooked Rip* (1970) by Heinemann, later republished by Penguin.

Sub-Saharan authors with agency influence the separation, especially with their symbolic capital, which Bourdieu (1993, p. 7) defines as ‘the degree of accumulated prestige.’ It covers knowledge, recognition, celebrity, honours, and reputation. This symbolic capital enables Sub-Saharan writers to speak and act as authorities on African literature. They, either home-based or diasporic, are always questioned about African literature in interviews and talks, about its definition, its representatives and its future. Those questions are always broached, and most of those writers do not abstain from offering definitions of African literature and recommendations of the best African works and authors to be read. Through their literary and cultural involvement in the field, they have the authority to include whomever they consider ‘African.’ In this regard, a well-known, well-credentialed author such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (who is followed by millions on social media) can effortlessly canonise any African work that her taste deems worthy and canonical. She is, after all, ‘succeeding in attracting a new generation of readers to African literature’ (Copnall 2011, p. 20). I term this ‘authorial value.’

Fascinatingly, several authors are identified as African and their works have been canonised into Africa literature almost mechanically, although they have spent only a few years in Africa or were not born on the continent entirely. Many of them are second generation immigrants who grew up in the West, but, through patrimony, are referred to as African. Author of the highly praised *Open City* (2011), Teju Cole, for instance, was born in ‘Kalamazoo, Michigan’ (DeRitter 2015). Yaa Gyasi, the acclaimed author of *Homegoing* (2016), left Ghana at the age of ‘ten’ (Maloney 2016). Though born in London and spent most of her life in the US, Lesley Nneka Arimah was shortlisted for The Caine Prize for African Writing three times (2016, 2017, and 2019) and won twice (2015 and 2019). In *Contemporary African Literature in English: Global Locations, Postcolonial Identifications*, Madhu Krishnan (2014, p. 2) audaciously calls this clique of African writers ‘non-African.’

Anglophone North African literature is a recently developed literary space, another reason it is eclipsed and neglected. A few academic studies have been invested in this new space, including it mainly in either *Middle Eastern Studies*, or *North African Studies* journals, but rarely in *African Studies* journals. It is still overmatched and overshadowed by Arabophone and Francophone literatures. Because it is still germinating, it has not been fully charted and studied as a third, independent literature besides the other ones that have dominated the region for decades. Only few writers can be included in this literature, such as Ahdaf Soueif, who is arguably the mother of anglophone North African literature. Achebe was enthroned as ‘the father of African literature.’ I endorse Ahdaf Soueif as the mother of contemporary anglophone North African literature. She became creatively active in the 1980s. Her first published work in English was a short story collection—*Aisha* (1983). *In the Eye of the Sun*, her first novel, was published in 1992. Her third and most prominent work, *The Map of Love* (1999), was shortlisted for the 1999 Man Booker Prize. Being shortlisted earned her cultural visibility, which would aid her subsequently in her political and social activism in Egypt and the Middle East. It would also distract her literary production. She has not published a work of fiction since 2007. Her latest is *I Think of You* (2007), a collection of selected stories previously published in *Aisha* (1983) and *Sandpiper* (1996). Most of her works, importantly, were reviewed by Middle-Eastern journals and attributed to the Middle-East instead of Africa. Upon its publication, for example, her first novel *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) was reviewed by and included in the *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* (Hassan 1994). She would remain in the vanguard of this unplaced literature until the late 2000s, as Laila Lalami and Hisham Matar were making a name for themselves. Both Matar and Lalami published their debut works in the mid-2000s, Laila Lalami with her short story collection *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2006) and Hisham Matar with his novel *In the Country of Men* (2006).

This literature, therefore, has recently emerged as a new literary tide. It is distinguished by the choice of writing in a language foreign to the writers' countries. They are its only generation at present, overmatched if compared to the history of African literature and its frequent representatives. Sub-Saharan literature is wealthy. It is, in fact, being endorsed and advertised by a third generation; others will inevitably emerge. The recency and scarcity of anglophone North African works empower the exclusion from African literature. Pascal Casanova (2004, p. 83) explains this situation:

The world of letters is a relatively unified space characterized by the opposition between the great national literary spaces, which are also the oldest-and, accordingly, the best endowed-and those literary spaces that have more recently appeared and that are poor by comparison.

This anglophone North African space that 'recently appeared' is evidently 'poor,' compared to Sub-Saharan literature. Ahdaf Soueif wrote nine works, only five of which are fiction. Laila Lalami published four fictive works, plus a non-fiction book. As for Hisham Matar, he is credited with two novels, and two non-fiction books. Algeria and Tunisia, in addition, do not yet celebrate significant anglophone works. On the other hand, Sub-Saharan literature, represented by its first and second-generation writers, boasts a list of more than 'three hundred works' (Hill 1988, p. 144). And I am just referring to the African Writers Series here, the first generation of this literature. Counting other publishing houses, other works, and younger writers could quadruple the number.

Despite the various arguments above, I must reiterate an important fact: North Africans rarely associate themselves with the continent. They rarely introduce themselves as African. In addition, the only author who has voiced concerns about her continental identity is Laila Lalami. Ahdaf Soueif, to my knowledge, has not indicated it. The majority of her political

activism is directed towards the Middle-East. Hisham Matar still abstains from any categorisation or affiliation, although readers still attempt to place him in an African context. He was ‘born in New York City to Libyan parents... spent his childhood in Tripoli and Cairo and has lived most of his adult life in London’ (Matar 2020). When his debut novel earned him recognition and attention, harvesting many literary prizes and nominations, many labels were used to describe his identity, among which were ‘British Libyan’ (McBain 2011) and ‘Anglo-Arab.’ Another identity has been imposed on him after the publication of his second novel, *Anatomy of a Disappearance* (2011), which coincided with the uprising against Gaddafi’s regime. Since then, he has been the ‘Libyan novelist, who lives in London’ (McBain 2011). He, in his words, ‘observes it’ (McBain 2011) and it ‘amuses’ him. But he does not mention anywhere that his African identity concerns him, or that his works should be canonised into African literature.

All of the above leads to these inevitable questions: Why should anglophone North African authors be canonised into African literature? Why is anglophone North African literature considered significant?

1.3. INCLUSION

How to put some processes of inclusion at work? Who is the gatekeeper to a canon? Who has the authority to admit anglophone North African authors into the African Canon, and why? In *Canon*, John Guillory (1990) prefaces his analysis of canon formation with an anecdote. He invokes the allegory of a judge and jury who, after a long discussion, would strike the gavel, plead a work canonical and escort it into a certain canon. This is not, of course, how the process of inclusion proceeds, but it is similar: A certain ‘judge’ authorises canonisation. According to Guillory (1993, p. 7), the strategy for inclusion is ‘surprisingly obvious, even simple.’ He explicitly proposes to ‘open’ the canon by adding ‘works of minority authors to

the syllabus of literary study.’ He adds that a particular reader, trusting their taste and judgment, cannot simply deem a work canonical; but certain institutions can. In this regard, to argue for inclusion, I borrow Guillory’s following ideas. Initially, he (1990, p. 223) defines canonisation as ‘the selection of what are conventionally called the ‘classics.’’ In addition, in order to canonise a work, Guillory (1990, p. 237) argues that it has to be inserted into an educational institution that secures the ‘preservation,’ ‘reproduction’ and ‘reintroduction’ of the work to generations of readers. This is how a literary work can garner tenacious prestige. He, in precise words, refers to universities.

Thus, in this context, an appeal for canonisation becomes an appeal for inclusion into the teaching curricula of African universities. To canonise the North African writer, their work(s) ought to be introduced, studied, taught, and preserved in educational institutions. The guiding question is: why should they?

The writers in question, to begin with, have won major literary prizes, which ‘infuse works of literature with cultural value’ (Roberts 2011, p. 17). It merits canonical status. Their works have contributed to the cultural production of North Africa and the culture of their respective countries. They have brought their homelands and their people to the English language. They introduced global readers to the region of North Africa, to the various issues of its inhabitants, and they have garnered many prizes as a result. Prizes, as known, influence sales and circulation in certain markets. James English (2005, p. 21) affirms that ‘it is the prize, above all else, that defines the artist.’ And these particular authors are defined and identified by many international ones. Hisham Matar’s four works, in total, have been accoladed by the prize industry more than twenty-eight times. *In the Country of Men* (2006), his debut novel, won the 2006 Guardian First Book Award, the 2007 Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize and the 2007 Commonwealth Writers’ Prize of Europe and South Asia. Besides, it was shortlisted for the 2006 Man Booker Prize and nominated for the 2008 National Book Critics

Circle Awards. The book also received rave reviews by world-known writers, namely Anne Michaels, Nadeem Aslam and J. M. Coetzee. *The Return* (2017) is arguably Matar's most successful and recognisable work. This memoir has grounded him as a serious literary figure, and he won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for it, the first Libyan—and North African—to do so. Colm Tóibín deemed it 'likely to become a classic' (mentioned in Matar 2016). This is an author whose works have been described as 'brilliant,' 'moving' and 'exquisite' (mentioned in Matar 2016). Ahdaf Soueif, reviewing *Anatomy of a Disappearance* (2011), was 'spellbound' (mentioned in Matar 2011) by it. Peter Carry reviewed Matar's latest work—*A Month in Siena* (2019)— as 'a treasure for the ages' (mentioned in Matar 2019). Hisham Matar even received a favourable review from Michiko Kakutani (2016), a literary critic notorious for giving harsh reviews.

Similarly, Ahdaf Soueif has gained her fair share of attention, adulation and awards. She is a political and cultural commentator, an activist who writes both in English and Arabic. Edward Said was an acquaintance of hers. She has published five works of fiction, some of which are award-winning. *The Map of Love* (1999), her most celebrated work, was nominated for the 1999 Pulitzer Prize. Likewise, Laila Lalami has received rave reviews from fellow authors and literary magazines. *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2006), her debut short story collection, was described by Pulitzer Prize winner Junot Díaz as 'a dream' (mentioned in Lalami 2006). *The New York Times Book Review* (2006) called it 'poetic' (Taylor 2006). Her first novel, *Secret Son*, was published in 2009. Gary Shteyngart, reviewing it, said that 'Lalami has talent to burn' (mentioned in Lalami 2009). This is a novelist whose prose was praised, in the words of the Nigerian Chris Abani, as being 'robust and elegant' (mentioned in Lalami 2009). *The Moor's Account* (2015), her third work, is her most well-received, profusely acclaimed book. It was a finalist for the 2015 Pulitzer Prize, was longlisted for the 2015 Man Booker Prize and has raked many other recognitions. Salman Rushdie called it

‘brilliantly imagined’ (mentioned in Lalami 2015). Ngugi wa Thiong’o said: ‘Lalami gives voice to the silences of history’ (mentioned Lalami 2015). *The New Yorker* hailed it an ‘ambitious historical novel’ (mentioned in Lalami 2015). She also deals with the Moroccan-American experience in *The Other Americans* (2019), her latest novel, which has been acknowledged by several prize institutions more than sixteen times. These accolades serve as marks of distinction and accrue awardees with symbolic capital. In short, harvesting prestigious literary awards and endorsements from mega-writers can easily render anglophone North African authors study-worthy and should score them canonical status in African universities effectively.

What makes *Things Fall Apart* (1958) by Chinua Achebe canonical? This novel appears in African literature persistently; it is well-established, well-exposed and widely taught both in African and non-African universities. This key novel was arguably the first novel that furnished the basic structure of African literature and subsequently inspired and guided other African writers to construct the rest of its foundations. Being a pioneer novel, a first, is the characteristic that has attained it its esteemed canonical status. As reasoned by the Polish historian Piotr Wilczek (2012, p. 1687), canonical works are ‘foundational’ and so are Soueif’s, Matar’s and Lalami’s. These writers are outliers, literary rebels, marked by their language choice, especially Matar and Lalami. As I mentioned in the previous part about exclusion, this North African literature is a minority one, endorsed by authors who challenge the long tradition and convention of either writing in Arabic or/and French. It is a literature about North Africa, written by North Africans, in English. The anglophone works that had preceded them had been largely written by non-North Africans, like Paul Bowles’ *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) and Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992). This is an original operation, and, as Harold Bloom (1994, p. 25) wrote, ‘all strong literary originality becomes canonical.’ It is still emerging, and significant is tracking its inception, its roots, and mapping

its traits, concerns and themes. Why does the trio write in English instead of Arabic or French? Do their works include certain lingual traits similar to the works of well-known Sub-Saharan authors? Are they multicultural writers, or transcultural? Academia and its educational institutions are the venues for answering these questions. Only through university research and teaching can this new literature be dissected systematically, comprehended, charted, codified and displayed by and for students.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels are 'being studied across the continent of Africa' (Adichie 2018). One asks then: What renders her works canonical? In addition to garnering many awards and recognitions (as have our writers), her narratives inspect ideas of postcolonialism, neo-colonialism, immigration, cultural hybridity, otherness, diaspora and exile. These themes, in fact, have become constantly associated with African literature, arguably becoming its dominant and repeatedly-written about themes. Benita Parry (2002, p. 72) explains that 'diaspora has swelled to demarcate the entire postcoloniality and the subject-position of the "hybrid" is routinely expanded.' The publishing industry and the awarding sector both have 'greatly contributed to shaping literary taste by foregrounding narratives that are mainly framed within the diasporic context' (Kiguru 2016, p. 7). The African writer in diaspora, therefore, is privileged with attention and canonisation, and so should anglophone North African writers. Laila Lalami is herself an immigrant, living in the diaspora, in the US. And she contemplates on these experiences in her narratives. *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2006), for example, is a collection of interlinked stories dealing essentially with immigration, diaspora, and certain ailments of Moroccan society. Using several stereotypical Moroccan characters, she attempts to deduce the reasons why immigration to Europe is coveted and obsessively pursued. *Secret Son* (2009) is a criticism of classicism in Morocco, of national identity, starring the young Youssef El Mekki, who is impoverished and estranged in the slums of Casablanca with his single mother. *The Moor's Account* (2015) is her take on

American slavery. It is a historical novel about Mustafa ibn Muhammad ibn Abdussalam al-Zamori, a Moroccan slave stranded and exiled in the New World, enslaved by two Spaniards in sixteenth-century Florida. In this novel, Lalami explores themes of home, alienation, African narratives and repatriation. The award-winning *The Other Americans* (2018) diagnoses contemporary subjects, namely xenophobia, racism, underrepresentation, and otherness in the US.

Ahdaf Soueif splits her time between Cairo and London. Cultural hybridity colours her works. *The Map of Love* (1999) recounts the transcontinental and intercultural love story of Anna Winterbourne and Sharif al-Baroudi. The theme of displacement pervades her short stories, especially in *Aisha* (1983) and *I Think of You* (2007). Referring to Mr Matar, he has lived most of his life in exile and the diaspora, and he has relayed this to his characters. *In the Country of Men* (2006), Suleiman, the protagonist, is forced to flee Ghaddafi's Libya and self-exile to Cairo. The book is a dauntless exposition of Ghaddafi's regime on the mental health of the people, illustrated in Najwa, Suleiman's mother, who soothes her worries about her anti-Ghaddafi, foolhardy husband with drinking and smoking. The title of his second novel is self-explanatory: *Anatomy of a Disappearance* (2011). The work anatomises the life and times of an exiled family living in Cairo. The mother country of the exiled is unnamed, turning the story into a universal story of forced displacement and unwanted mobility. Like his characters, exile and immigration pain the author as well; he writes about these themes personally and candidly in his memoir *The Return* (2017), a heart-breaking commentary on his eventual return to Libya, after more than thirty years of absence, searching for his missing father, who is yet to be found. Additionally, Mr Matar lectures on 'exile literature at Barnard University' (Matar 2020).

Another argument regards diversity. John Guillory (1993, p. 9) advocates that the literary canon should be conceived as a 'hypothetical image of social diversity, a kind of mirror.' The

African canon, as explained, is generally biased towards Sub-Saharan authors by virtue of tradition and patrimony. It is not a 'mirror,' not an inclusive one. It is not representative of the continent's literatures. It is not inclusive. It is not sufficiently diverse, and this is, among others, a colonial value that ought to be dismantled by opening the canon, through diversifying it, especially now that anglophone North African works exist. They merit a deserved position in the cultural weather of the continent because they are simply 'African.' Lalami, Matar and Soueif, additionally, represent certain social groups, which is an initiative eligible for canonicity. Canonical authors, as Guillory (1993, p. 7) explains further, 'stand for particular social groups, dominant or subordinate.' So do our authors. Ahdaf Soueif is politically outspoken, both on the paper and on the Egyptian street. She has partaken in many peaceful protests in Egypt, Palestine and other Middle Eastern countries. She even took a break from fiction writing and devoted herself to political writing. For instance, she documents the 2011 Egyptian Revolution intimately in *Cairo: My City, Our Revolution* (2012).

Laila Lalami's narratives essentially concern the Moroccan society. They are critical studies of both its merits and demerits. Living in the US, she now shifts her attention to the Moroccan diaspora in the US, archiving its underrepresentation in *The Other Americans* (2018). *Conditional Citizens* (2020), a non-fiction book, questions belonging in America, drawing on her migratory choices and experiences from Morocco to the US. Hisham Matar's authorial choices to write about Libya could have sentenced him to death. Disapproving Ghaddafi's regime prompted the Libyan Government to censor his work and forbid 'editors from printing [his] name' (Matar p. 81). Leaning on his experiences of exile and his father's political activism against Ghaddafi, he depicted the plights of those who opposed the late Libyan leader and were forced into hiding, exile and immigration.

All the authors mentioned in this chapter, Sub-Saharan and North African, share many similarities that should include them in the same universe of the African Canon, in terms of concerns, ideologies, authorial choices and certain linguistic practices. I discuss this latter point below. All of them clearly care about the continent; they write about her. Their works should be included in the same literature. The literary proximity of the two Africas should match their geographic proximity and fuse them together. The general term African literature should mean that—African, rather than Sub-Saharan. This colonial separation promotes differences and cripples the circulation and representation of works that are distinctly and clearly African. They should be included under the same term: African literature.

This chapter concludes with another similarity that both Sub-Saharan and North African authors have in common: the employment of Englishes. Chinua Achebe had advertised the concept of ‘bending’ the English language for many years, inviting his fellow African writers to africanise their English and to varnish it with the colours of the continent. Several African writers have adopted this strategy to distinguish their works and paint them with their own African thumbprints, such as Ngũgĩ, Chimamanda Adichie, Laila Lalami and many others. To evidence this, one should only open a novel about the continent and come across this evident phenomenon. They are authors as translators. This strategy has become a linguistic trend among African writers of English expression, who translate the local cultures of their respective countries into the English language, introducing global readers to the literary traditions and mythologies of the continent. And so do anglophone North African writers as they establish their own Englishes. Hisham Matar (2006, p. 284) confesses the presence of a covert ‘Arab hum’ in his work. Ahdaf Soueif’s characters ‘speak in Arabic in [her] head’ (Attalah 2010), but she writes them in English. As for Laila Lalami, she overtly borrows words and sentences from the Moroccan vernacular.

They are creating their own hybrid Englishes, employing several methods, some fresh, others conventional. Here, to link this chapter to the following one, I must include myself and ask, how do I create my own hybrid English? What are its linguistic and formal features? These are all questions that I attempt to answer in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

LINGUISTIC AND FORMAL HYBRIDITY

2.1. ON IDIOSYNCRASY

I present and explain in this chapter the theories experimented with in the creative component to attain its potential hybridity. This chapter inspects the effects of formal and linguistic hybridity on my anglophone North African text. Initially, to furnish the way for my seven methods of hybridity, I explore how certain African and non-African writers hybridise the forms of their novels by adopting storytelling traditions of other cultures. Next, I investigate the debate related to the medium of African literature, its linguistic innovations, and critically present my position towards both practices. After that, I explain the various idiosyncratic techniques I employ in the creative component to achieve its potential hybridity. My hybridisation experimentations are mainly grounded on a distinctive *defamiliarisation* of the English text. By conducting this scholarly inquiry, I hope to complement other studies on formal and linguistic hybridity and—importantly—to build an idiosyncratic identity for my text. To guide this, I pose one research question: What are the idiosyncratic features and aesthetic qualities that endorse my adaptation of linguistic and formal hybridity?

My literary hybridity constitutes a marriage of both formal and linguistic strategies. They are seven in number. The four linguistic strategies stem from the process of defamiliarising the English language. I draw on the fact that the English language is already hybrid, inhabited by Arabic words which, if used intelligently, should provide the desired effect of linguistic hybridity. As for the form, to hybridise it, I make use of three storytelling traditions typical of Arabic texts and tweak them to suit my own creative practices. In this practice, I shift away from the ‘write back’ tradition of appropriating and subverting Western canonical texts as a

conscious operation of protest and even indignation. I employ the seven idiosyncratic strategies in the creative component to achieve the effects of literary hybridity.

What is formal hybridity? This literary operation occurs at the level of the narrative structure. It demonstrates ‘experimental modes of narration’ (Singh 2009). It is a literary practice often used by postcolonial and transcultural writers as they interbreed Western linguistic forms with African storytelling traditions. The postcolonial/transcultural writer borrows narrative features unique to their native culture (either oral or written) and mingles them with that of English literary traditions. For instance, in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Chinua Achebe mingles a Western linguistic form (the novel) with African oral storytelling traditions (fables, proverbs) to distinguish his work. A recent example is David Diop’s *At Night All Blood Is Black* (2021), whose main character, Alfa Ndiaye, recounts his story in a distinct oral structure. In *The Hakawati* (2009), Rabih Alameddine, a Lebanese writer, borrows the Arabic frame technique (a story within a story) to hybridise his book’s structure. In *The Moor’s Account* (2015), Laila Lalami harnesses features typical of Arabic texts, such as the lack of quotation marks in the dialogue and the *basmala* (beginning the book with the Islamic phrase *In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful*).

Many writers, either African or non-African, have blended different narrative traditions out of admiration, idiosyncrasy, and even anger. To write back, to voice their indignation, postcolonial writers have famously adopted Western forms to craft their works. The forms of the novel and the short story were also borrowed by Arab writers. Leaning on his experience as a translator of Arabic texts, Denys Johnson-Davies (1978, p. 10) notes that only around 1946 ‘Arab literature had suddenly turned toward the west and adopted some of the genres of writing that were peculiar to it, such as the novel.’ In *Une tempête* (1969), Aimé Césaire, one of the founders of the *Négritude* movement, radically refashioned Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* ‘with the implicit intention of wrestling the adopted play away from the negative and

complacent agenda of an institutionally racist imperial theatre' (Crispin 2010, p. 140). In *Season of Migration to the North* (1969), which presents a sort of counternarrative to *Heart of Darkness*, Tayeb Salih's character, Mustafa, conquers back 'by inflicting pain and suffering on British women' (Makdisi 1992, p. 810).

This literary operation has also been adopted by non-African/non-postcolonial writers as well, many of whom have taken narrative structures popular in Arabic literature. Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (1387 and 1400), for example, borrows the frame narrative technique, which is 'a tradition that originated and developed in Arabia' (Slater 1983, p. 237). Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965), one of the most popular science-fiction novels of all time, possesses an 'Islam-inspired framing' (Karjoo-Ravary 2020). The author even harnesses lexicon of Islam taken from Arabic, such as '*Mahdi*,' (2003, p. 103) '*Jihad*,' (p.14) '*ayat*' (p. 209). Paolo Coelho, the Brazilian writer who admires Arabic culture, was influenced by Arabic literature to write *The Alchemist* (1988), an international bestseller. Other writers, however, have denounced any attempts at imitating certain literary traditions, such as the Egyptian Nobel Prize laureate Naguib Mahfouz, whose novels did not come from imitation of 'either the *maqama* or Joyce' but from an 'inner music' (Omri 2008, p. 244).

What about linguistic hybridity? It is 'a common feature of texts that are translated across linguistic and cultural borders' (Klinger 2015, p. 1). It can, as Amardeep Singh (2009) defines it, 'refer to elements from foreign languages that enter into a given language, whether it's the adoption of English words into Asian or African languages, or the advent of Asian or African words into English.' Linguistic hybridity signals an effect created collectively by a set of features in the worldview of the reader. It notifies the reader of a mutation in the familiar composition of the English language, including its lexicon, semantics, morphology, and phonology. It announces the presence of a different 'tempo' and an 'outlandish' rhythm in the English language. By 'outlandish,' I mean foreign, unfamiliar. The reader senses and notes

elements that usually do not belong in English, features that make the reader pause and wonder about their foreignness, their outlandishness. This creates a multivocal impression, and—to borrow Mikhail Bakhtin's terms—'a special type of double-voiced discourse' that delivers 'two voices, two meanings and two expressions' (1981, p. 224). Certain 'out of place' characteristics inform the reader of a change and a creative innovation in the standard anatomy of the language.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, after the emergence of African literature, many debates, many questions, grew around its various aspects, components and elements. A particularly crucial one concerned the languages of African literature. Should the African author employ a postcolonial/colonial language? Should they use a Europhone language? Or should they revert to using their indigenous languages? To answer these questions, two essential schools entered into a debate that would last for decades and would include many authors armed with many arguments. The first school of thought urged the appropriation of the English language, a colonial one. Chinua Achebe (1975, p. 103) famously advertised owning and bending the English language to create 'a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings.' He invited an *africanisation* of the English language, which he does as he enriches most of his works with references to his native Igbo culture. In *The African Speech...English Words*, Gabriel Okara (1963, p. 16), another Nigerian writer, supported Achebe's linguistic subversions and ardently argued that:

Living languages grow like living things, and English is far from a dead language. There are American, West Indian, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand versions of English. All of them add life and vigour to the language while reflecting their own respective cultures. Why shouldn't there be a Nigerian or West African English which we can use to express our own ideas, thinking and philosophy in our own way?

This linguistic choice has, of course, attracted many disagreements from the very onset. Obiajunwa Wali, a politician and literary scholar, was the first to warn that this linguistic trend would be the death of African literature. In *The Death of African Literature*, Wali (1963, p. 14) passionately champions a return to the indigenous languages of the continent and that ‘any true African literature must be written in African languages.’ He (p. 13) accuses anglophone African literature of lacking ‘blood and stamina’ and having ‘no means of self-enrichment’ Wali’s position would be adopted and famously spearheaded by the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, who, pained by qualms, would abandon the English language after seventeen years of using it as the medium of his works. For him, during those seventeen years, writing in English had been ‘a literary act of mental translation’ (wa Thiong’o 2009, p. 18). He would write the African life in English. He would import linguistic and literary features from his native languages, Gikuyu and Kiswahili, into the English language, using Kenyan folklore, orature, speech, imagery and so forth. This double consciousness process turned him into a writer/translator. However, in 1978, imprisoned, after much time spent in contemplation, Ngugi left the English language for Gikuyu, and he felt ‘liberated’ (2009, p. 19). In *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ngũgĩ (1986, p. 8) explains his reasons:

Why, we may ask, should an African writer, or any writer, become so obsessed by taking from his mother-tongue to enrich other tongues? Why should he see it as his particular mission? We never asked ourselves: how can we enrich our languages? How can we “prey” on the rich humanist and democratic heritage in the struggles of other peoples in other times and other places to enrich our own? Why not have Balzac, Tolstoy, Sholokov, Brecht, Lu Hsun, Pablo Neruda, H. C. Henderson, Kim V. Chi Ha, Marx, Lenin, Albert Einstein, Galileo, Aeschylus, Aristotle and Plato in African languages? And why not create literary monuments in our own languages?

True, Ngũgĩ has definitely created literary monuments in his languages, for he still enjoys an esteemed position in world literature. One simply cannot refer to African literature without mentioning his name, or his controversies with languages. Although he has not originally published a word in English since 1986, his works still attract substantial academic interest across the globe, especially in translation and language studies. He now auto-translates his books from the Gikuyu and Kiswahili. Literary prizes, in addition, still include his name. *The Perfect Nine: The Epic Gikuyu and Mumbi* (2020), his latest verse novel, was longlisted for the 2021 International Booker Prize.

Many contemporary African writers, however, still cling to the English language, following Achebe's footsteps and his tendency to bend the English language. A thought-provoking and intriguing example is Ngũgĩ's son, Mũkoma wa Ngũgĩ, who crafts his works in a Kenyan English. He is a third-generation African writer who actually follows the abandoned, creative practices of his father, enriching the English language with a Kenyan tongue. This appears on the pages of his thrillers—*Nairobi Heat* (2009) and *Black Star Nairobi* (2013). In *Unbury Our Dead With Song* (2021), his latest fiction work, he enriches the very first page with names of Kenyan musical instruments, such as 'kora, nyatiti, krar.'

Achebe and his clique (the first school of thought) have clearly and effectively overmatched the prominence of the other school globally. Their trans-linguistic and hybrid literary practices still influence African writers, myself included. They are abundantly and variously manifested on the pages of the contemporary African novel, where the English language is consciously and variously manipulated and hybridised. For example, in *The Fortune Men* (2021), Nadifa Mohamed amply borrows words from Somali, Arabic, Yiddish, Polish and even Welsh. David Diop, the 2021 International Booker Prize winner, borrows words from Wolof, one of the most spoken languages in Senegal, to realise his protagonist's identity. Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian Nobel Prize laureate, still utilises Yoruba words as he

evidently does in his new novel *Chronicles from the Land of the Happiest People on Earth* (2021), his first novel in nearly half a century. Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005) houses many words from the Moroccan vernacular. In *Ghana Must Go* (2013), Taiye Selas, a British-American writer of Nigerian and Ghanaian origin, preambles her novel with a table of pronunciations of Ghanaian and Nigerian words, present within her novel. Hisham Matar borrows words from the Libyan dialect in *In the Country of Men* (2006). In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007), the reader stumbles upon Igbo words, at times translated, such as 'ugu' (p. 96) and 'Gini bu ife a' (p. 336). In *Afterlives* (2020), Abdulrazak Gurnah, the 2021 Nobel Prize winner, hybridises his book's dialogues with Arabic words and Islamic references. In short, the Englishes of African writers, as Gabriel Okara (1963, p. 16) affirmed, are 'living things' and still 'grow.'

Granted, their Englishes have grown. They have grown into new varieties of the English language, or, as Bandia (2014, p. 226) terms them, 'hybrid formations.' Ch'ien (2004, p. 4) names this phenomenon 'the weirding of English.' Chantal Zabus (2007, p. 25) designates those Englishes as 'indigenized.' As for Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2002, p. 8), they simply de-capitalise the 'English' and label them 'englishes,' the intermixed English language varieties that were inherited post-colonially. This represents a phenomenon that disputes Wali's assumptions about the death of African literature. Europhone languages are still exercised as creative vehicles for African literature. Anglophone African literature is far from dead, but alive and thriving, both among readers and academics. Gabriel Okara's statements are correct and were rather prophetic. At present, they are valid and extremely relevant. Languages are living creatures that grow and stand on their own. They morph and evolve. They can be tampered with, subverted and culturally coloured. They can be hybridised—I must stress—with a culturally-marked English.

This cross-linguistic interference has been creating many English language varieties in the African continent since the 1950s. The African continent boasts a range of Englishes now: Nigerian, South African, Somali, Ghanaian and many others, all because of linguistic crossbreeding. Many of those Englishes have been promoted as official languages, many of which have been standardised, codified, preserved in dictionaries and adopted by writers across the continent. Many of them still echo Achebe's pioneering statement of 'I have been given this language, and I intend to use it' (1975, p. 102). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, arguably the most notable African writer working today and her generation's representative, has also 'taken ownership of English' (Azodo 2008). She bends it.

African writers have thus declared owning the English language by bending its anatomy and innovating in its literary traditions. They fiddle with its standard structures. They flex its traditional storytelling forms. As a researcher with a self-reflexive gaze, this leads me to the following questions: As an African writer, how have *I* owned the English language? As an African writer, how do *I* subtly hybridise my English text? What are the idiosyncratic qualities of my linguistic and formal hybridity?

2.2. LINGUISTIC HYBRIDITY

The term linguistic hybridity appears persistently in postcolonial, transcultural, translation and even creative writing studies. A great deal of research has been conducted on the concept by many researchers and scholars (Klinger, 2015, Young, 1994, Kachru, 1992, Bandia, 2014, Bhabha, 1994, Ch'ien, 2004, Zabus, 2007), all of whom have provided their own explanations of and positions towards the term in various methods. For example, Paul Bandia (2014) contextualises the term into translation studies, with a special focus on its appearances on the African writer's postcolonial page. Although Bandia writes convincingly about linguistic

hybridity, I am particularly interested in how Chantal Zabus explains it. In *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel*, Chantal Zabus (2007) coins many significant terms to elucidate how African writers attain the intelligibility of their translinguistic prose.

She coins several terms to classify the methods African writers use to achieve the comprehensibility of the non-English words present in their books. In fact, the majority of postcolonial and transcultural writers service the following concepts. Relexification, the first term, refers to ‘an imaginative, world-creating step at forging a new literary-aesthetic medium or ‘third code’ out of the alien, dominant (European) lexicon’ (Zabus 1990, p. 350). She also adds that it ‘is also an attempt at appropriating the Other’s language to make it one’s own and bend its otherness or fixity to artistic and ideological exigencies.’ One aspect of relexification is the practice of including non-English words within the English sentence without changing its standard grammar. However, when African-language words cannot be relexified, Zabus (2007, p. 176) proposes the methods of ‘cushioning’ and ‘contextualisation.’ The first means tagging ‘an explanatory word or phrase’ onto the African-language words; the latter suggests providing ‘areas of mediate context’ as a tool of elucidation. The three methods are collectively named ‘indigenization,’ which is ‘the attempt at subverting the linguistic difference or otherness of the European language by indigenizing it’ (Zabus 1990, p. 346).

The aforementioned scholars brilliantly advocate their studies on linguistic hybridity. I, however, contend that they generally centralise their research on the cross-linguistic innovations the postcolonial/translingual writer utilises to create their hybridity. Their pieces of research underscore the African-language lexicon (words, phrases, expressions) and ‘out of place’ features the writer borrows from their indigenous languages. They refer to how those writers combine their first languages with English, forming a new medium, indigenised and generally italicised. I aim, however, to demonstrate that my English text can be hybridised

without looking outside the English language, but rather by looking *within* it. The English language, after all, is *already* a hybrid language. This operation, as I elaborate below, becomes a *meta-hybridisation* of the English language—hybridising the English language with the English language. There is no necessity to seek external elements of hybridity, but simply employ internal elements that are encoded within English. I term this ‘the defamiliarisation of English.’

For the purposes of this research, I write for a certain reader. Initially, I entertained the possibility of writing for two readers: the Anglophone reader (the reader from the Anglophone sphere) and the Arabophone (the reader from the Arab World who reads in English). Now, however, I only write for the Anglophone reader. The Arabophone who reads in English is already at an advantage, being already familiar with the Arabic features of the work, so there is no need for their inclusion here. I target solely the Anglophone reader, to whom the Arabic features of my English prose would seem outlandish. To achieve this, my methods of linguistic hybridity stem from challenging the following statement made by Chantal Zabus: ‘A potential result of eradicating footnotes, cushioning, contextualisation by reference is that the text becomes inaccessible to the non-African reader’ (1990, p. 359). What if the accessibility to the text can be attained without using cushioning, footnotes, or a glossary? What if intelligibility can be guaranteed with fresh methods, without alienating the Anglophone reader? Without the necessity for googling the words?

Chantal Zabus (2007, p. 19) writes that ‘to indigenize a text is to make it a text of one’s own.’ This is exactly what I aim to do—make my text mine, but not through using her methods. To challenge her statement, I do not indigenise my text, but *defamiliarise* it. Let me explain. First and foremost, my linguistic experimentations are translational in nature. They are ‘a literary act of mental translation’ (wa Thiong’o 2009, p. 18). In this view, I rely on deliberate practices of foreignisation, which are, according to Laurence Venuti, a ‘strategic

cultural intervention' (1995, p. 20). My adaptation of linguistic hybridity is that—a *strategic cultural intervention*, expressed and designed carefully with deliberate acts of cultural foreignisation and linguistic defamiliarisation. This method, in terms of language, is unequal. The English component is dominant, the Arabic supplementary. This means that I do not overstuff my prose with my methods of linguistic hybridity, but colour it with them so that they work together to achieve my translinguistic objectives. In figurative terms, the body is English, the clothes Arabic. So how am I going to strategically and culturally intervene in the English language to other/hybridise my text without directly borrowing from Arabic? This is the answer—I aim to defamiliarise the English language.

David Crystal (2019, p. 136) informs us that the English language has always been an 'insatiable borrower.' It always welcomes new words, new expressions, which would be twisted morphologically by the Anglophone tongue, Latinised (and thus indigenised) and then codified in an English dictionary. In *Weird English*, Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ing (2004, p. 4) writes that this hybridisation process 'has been an ongoing phenomenon throughout history' and that English is already a 'hybrid, and its original influences include Latin, French and German.' It has also—I must stress, add and inform—taken many influences from the Arabic language. Perhaps two of the earliest books that record this are *A History of Foreign Words in English* by Mary S. Serjeantson (1935) and *Etymological List of Arabic Words in English* (1933) by Walt Taylor. In his elusive booklet, Taylor (mentioned in Darwish 2015, p. 105) attests that 'the English Language borrowed about a thousand word from Arabic and there are thousands of derivatives from these words.' Of course, since the 1930s, many other words—hundreds in fact—have been borrowed from Arabic and Latinised to suit the nature of the English language. Etymologically, thousands of Arabic words and Arabic cultural references populate the English language now, which—if unearthed and used creatively and selectively within my text—should provide the necessary effects of linguistic hybridity. I refer to this

process as the defamiliarisation of the English language—the othering of English with features that already exist within it.

Before all else, I should mention that I mainly service Arabic words—either Latinised or culture-bound—and expressions rather than phrases or sentences. I should also remark that linguistic hybridity provides a double-voiced discourse. It announces the presence of a different ‘tempo’ and an ‘outlandish’ rhythm. So to endorse this linguistic endeavour, to engineer the hoped for comprehensibility, I conceive several linguistic methods, which can be noted and located in *The Couscous Western*.

2.2.1. Culture-Bound Words

To begin with, I propose to foreignise my text with culture-bound words that suggest or directly refer to Arabic or Islamic culture. Those words, I should assert, exist in major dictionaries of English (Oxford, Cambridge, Merriam Webster’s). The words have been codified in English dictionaries. They are well-documented, explained and exemplified. A basic search could find them and provide evidence of their existence, their roots and even mention their Arabic counterparts. The phonological resemblance of those words, I should also add, is almost the same as that of the Arabic word. Consider, for example, the words *salaam*, *sultan*, and *henna*. Or think about the expressions *inshallah* and *bismillah*. They are similar to their original phonological pronunciations in Arabic. All of them are bound to Arabic and Islamic culture and allude to them. In addition, the etymology of the word can be easily understood by the Anglophone reader. It is a word, although English, still sounds and seems foreign. It appears to be rather misplaced and outlandish. I understand that some of those words may seem ‘exotic’, or ‘non-English,’ but not explicitly ‘Arabic’ to the reader. And this can simply be solved by referring to a dictionary. The reader, for example, may not know that the word *hummus* is an Arabic word, but the dictionary does.

The objective of this method is to create a culturally-foreign discourse as I harness those words carefully and strategically within my prose and within my dialogue. The words can be cultural expressions in general, or religious expressions in particular, namely Islamic ones. The Islamic ones appear in all the stories, essentially because of the characters' religion. The characters are Muslims, and they employ Islamic words, expressions and references.

Here are some culture-bound words that can be located in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED): sherbet, salaam, khalifa, imam, sheikh, sultan, sultana, admiral, hashish, oud, couscous, mecca, mufti, emir, wazir, harem, minaret, zakat, mujahid, burnoose, muezzin, masjid, halal, haram, fatwa, fellah, hadj, djinn, inshallah, cipher, sheitan, souk, ghoul, dinar, madrassa, dirham, shisha, henna. Other words are found in the creative component. I do not attempt to highlight the words with italicisation, for they are already *culturally italicised* in the worldview of the reader. Usually, to highlight the foreignness of the borrowed, non-English word, African writers italicise it. This habit notifies the reader that a word specific to the writer's culture is being used. As for my words, they do not need to be italicised; their etymology exposes their cultural foreignness. The reader at once realises that the word has probably been taken from another language, then Latinised. The words, in addition, will not be cushioned and followed by an elucidative word, phrase, or even a sentence. Those words do not require a footnote, a glossary, or an intext-translation, contrary to how African writers hybridise their pages. It should be known that this method only works for the languages from which English has borrowed (Imagine what a French writer who writes in English could do with the ten thousand French words that inhabit the English language).

To evidence a difference, let me juxtapose the regular methods of other African writers with mine. As a rule, African writers service and conform to the aforementioned terms of Chantal Zabus. The following sentences are from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007): 'Yes! Yes! Okjukwu, *nye anyi egbe!* Give us guns! *Iwe di anyi n'obi!*' (p.

171), meaning ‘there is an anger in our hearts.’ She also writes, ‘He called her *nkem*, my own’ (p. 24). Observe how she accompanies the italicised Igbo sentences with their counterparts in English, translating them. In other instances she contextualises the meaning of the word: ‘Anulika was measuring out cups of *ukwa* and the crusty aroma of roasted breadfruit seeds hung thick in the room’ (p. 119). In other parts of the book, she leaves the words untranslated. In this case, the reader either researches the words (It took me fifteen minutes to find an Igbo/English online dictionary), or keeps reading unconcerned with the meaning. Personally, I keep reading. Other readers may find it didactic and thought-provoking. Many other African writers include non-English words without a translation, without an explanatory method.

Now here is an example of my first method. Observe the following fictitious passage:

Salim el-Khatib has just smoked an ounce of hashish. He’s dizzy, his eyes a bit misty. Yet, as an emir, he traipses across the street, this mecca of Algerians, this haven of halal products. He spots the high minaret of a masjid in the distance, which was constructed by a sultan of passé times. It shines with age, with stories, with pigeons’ feathers. A familiar face, the muezzin’s, salaams him, then vanishes quickly like a djinn, like a ghou. Salim keeps walking, in the mood for a dish of couscous, for this North African delicacy.

Now here is an example from one of my stories. In ‘Colonels Don’t Confess,’ I write:

She could have paid attention to the lazy tram on its quaint track rallying (and always losing) with the cars opposite the highway, or to the masjids and their high-rise minarets in town as her taxi reared the hotel. But she didn’t, not until she had overcome the jet-lag with six hours of sleep. The azan of Isha prayer had aroused her from her untroubled sleep. This strange noise to her, the calling of a man uttering unintelligible words. Of the muezzin.

Although written entirely in English, undisrupted with italicised/unitalicised Arabic words, the discourse of the provided examples displays a foreignness and a different rhythm to the language. We discern that the language is entirely English, but *not really English*. It is unsubverted with non-English words, yet we sense an outlandish effect within its layers, hiding among its sentences. We register this in our worldview. A particular culture clearly inhabits the work, which alters it with odd chimes and coats it with an obvious foreignness.

This method is exercised clearly in the language of another story, ‘Muslims Can’t Live Like Beats.’ Note how I deploy the Islamic words in the following sentences: ‘We were no mullahs.’ ‘It does not suit this respectful majlis.’ ‘He was a sheitan, a dark rebel.’ ‘What are you? A sheik?...Are you going to narrate a hadith next?’ The reader finds themselves immersed in a new cultural space, a hybrid one which services the English language to introduce the lingual qualities of a religion. Although the words are English, a foreign culture accents them. This feature is noticeable and recurrent. It is perhaps the first outlandish property that marks the prose of this story and the collection as a whole.

2.2.2. *De-Latinised-Italicised-Contextualised Words*

The second method, however, requires an italicisation of the words. Many Arabic words inhabit the English language secretly. They hide in the English language, their Arabic roots unacknowledged and unknown. These words were Latinised and normalised centuries ago. They have been used and believed to be English for centuries so their roots are unknown to the Anglophone reader. They do not explicitly and particularly refer to Arabic culture. They are not culture-bound. More significantly, those words do not seem foreign, exotic, different, or non-English. They are believed to be English. Here is a list of surprising examples that can be found in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2000): cotton (p.

1754), coffee (p. 1524), alcohol (p. 250), mummy (p. 4781), sofa (p. 6815), lemon (p. 4146), safari (p. 6321), saffron (p. 6323), mattress (p. 4474), algebra (p. 259), assassin (p. 504), camphor (p. 1167), elixir (p. 2420), fennec (p. 1708), giraffe (p. 3093), jar (p. 3876), kohl (p. 4021), nadir (p. 4817), zenith (p. 8228), and many others. The Anglophone reader is possibly unaware of their cultural roots, which I make visible with respect to the Arabic language and Islamic culture.

I use a method of threes—de-Latinisation, italicisation and contextualisation. I de-Latinise the word, italicise it, then contextualise it. This method divulges the word and its roots. It exposes its Arabic and Islamic nature. It unearths it. However, it must be noted that I do not intend to uncover all the words that have been borrowed from the Arabic language and Islamic culture. The structures of certain Arabic words have been changed by Latinisation, both phonetically and syntactically. Consider, for example, the word ‘admiral.’ According to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2000, p. 174), it has Arabic roots. The reader may not discern that this word comes from the Arabic amir-el-bihar (the prince of seas). The two words are different. It requires research to unearth the roots of this word.

Thus, the words I use must conform to four criteria. The two words (Arabic and English) should enjoy four resemblances—phonetic (the sound of the pronunciation), semantical (the meaning of the word), morphological (the structure of the word) and syntactical (the proper use of the word in a sentence). Examples include: *suffa* (sofa), *cottun* (cotton), *mumya* (mummy) and so forth. The word, as I mentioned above, should be de-Latinised, italicised and contextualised.

How do I de-Latinise an English word of Arabic etymology? Italicising a word is easy. So is contextualising it. But how do I tamper with the word without distorting its morphology?

Surely I am not going to revert it to its original letters and write it in Arabic. By de-italicisation, I refer to two steps. I, firstly, keep the word written in Roman letters. Then I slightly change its morphology to coincide with the pronunciation of its Arabic counterpart. This is done either by omission or addition. I may change a letter, perhaps two, but no radical alterations to the morphology of the word should occur. To illustrate, consider the word ‘alcohol.’ In the stories, it reoccurs as *el-cohol*. Let’s remark on its occurrences in ‘Muslims Can’t Live Like Beats’: ‘The *el-cohol*, cold, soaked all my face. Some of it already dived into my system, turning warm, and I lost my *el-cohol* virginity.’ I simply change a letter and add a hyphen to de-Latinise its pronunciation.

Note how this operation shows in sentences in *The Seven Dates of Omar Sharif*: ‘It was silly of him assuming someone could be hiding inside a piece of furniture, crushed under his *matrah*, or curled in the closet. The *suffa*’s cushions wouldn’t fit a baby.’ ‘His hair, once dark as Pegasus, is now *cottun*-white, smoothed backwards simply with his hands.’ Note how the words cotton, sofa and mattress become *cottun*, *suffa*, and *matrah*. The roots of the words are not changed beyond recognition. No, they remain recognisable, their semantics discernible. Only few letters are altered to correspond with the Arabic pronunciation. In some instances, the morphology of the word remains the same. The pronunciation of the English word already matches that of the Arabic one, so I do not de-Latinise the word. I just italicise it to accent its Arabic etymology.

I even experiment with French words in ‘Colonels Don’t confess.’ This is done to show the opportunities this method could open for a French writer of English expression, also to demonstrate its applicability in other contexts. Thousands of French words populate the English language. If used, the sense of linguistic hybridity would be explicitly expressed. For example, the word ‘hospital’ is written *hôpital*. As I write in the story, the Colonel, a major

character, ‘resembled a *hôpital* orderly in his white t-shirt and white pants.’ He is a *soldat* rather than a ‘soldier.’ He is a *despote* rather than a ‘despot.’

2.2.3. *Coinages*

The two previous methods can be manipulated to create a third, which is the fashioning of coinages. I have two types of words now: culture-bound words and de-Latinised-italicised-contextualised words. Those words, all understood by the reader, can be serviced to construct and invent other comprehensible words, relying on certain techniques. There are many possibilities here to coin new, intelligible words, which I hyphenate to avoid any confusion or misreading.

I could, initially, blend the words with English ones and fabricate hyphenated compound words, such as the following: hashish-hopper, high-madrassa, hashish-smoking addict, hummus-loving chef, *leimoon*-coloured, masjid-sized, *mumya*-looking, halal-burger, sultan-sized bed and *cottun*-white hair. The next technique incorporates the words with prefixes and suffixes. I blend them. I hybridise them. Discover these examples of prefix-blending: super-souk, non-*el-cohol*, on-masjid prayers, masjid-goer, post-fatwa, masjid-yard, Allah-sent, pre-fatwa, mega-mufti, ex-wazir, ex-muezzin. Notice these examples of suffix re-employment: sheikh-hood, imam-hood, sultan-hood, emir-hood, fellah-able land, *fenek*-like fur, Muslim-like courtesy, burnoose-like clothing, dinar-less, dirham-less, couscous-ria, *suffa*-like seat, chakchouka-ria, kohl-less eyes, henna-able palms, ghoul-phobia, jinn-phobia.

Many of these words can be found on my pages. In the novella *The Seven Dates of Omar Sharif*, I write: ‘The first establishment of the street has a name— Milevum’s Resto, masjid-sized, Omar’s destination.’ ‘He flogged his sultan-sized bed, inspected the backs of doors.’ The words do not require an italicisation. They are perfectly understandable. Other

combinations have generated intriguing words. What is a ‘super-souk?’ In ‘The Last Shot of Ahmed Bey’s Cannon,’ it replaces the word ‘supermarket.’ I include it in two sentences as so: ‘The souper-souk had no farmers in it, no fellahin.’ What’s a ‘beghrir-like’ arm?’ Beghrir is the word for pancakes in North Africa. They are as doughy and fluffy as any other pancakes. In ‘Colonels Don’t Confess,’ I employ the word ‘beghrir-like’ to describe the saggy arms of the Colonel. In the same story, I describe a place as ‘Allah-forsaken’ instead of ‘God-forsaken.’

Manipulating the morphology of the words with prefixes and suffixes has also created intriguing words. This technique is perhaps less challenging. Prefixes and suffixes are like generic plastic bricks; they can be united with many words. When including them in the creative part, I aimed, however, to design significant words, which would foreignise the prose distinctly and culturally. Have you ever been, for example, to a couscous-ria? Certainly, dear reader, you have been to a pizzeria, a pizza restaurant, but perhaps not to a couscous-ria, a couscous restaurant. How about a chakchouka-ria? Or a tajine-ria? There are several of those restaurants in *The Seven Dates of Omar Sharif*. Here is an example: ‘Omar’s nearing Crescent Street, a mecca of Arabian food. It’s populated with Middle-Eastern and North African restaurants—couscous-rias, chakchouka-rias, tajine-rias...’ In the world of the stories, the characters do not pay with dollars, pounds, euros, or pennies. They pay with dinars and dirhams, two currencies adopted in North Africa and the Middle-East. Thus, when the characters have no money, they are not penniless, but dirham-less and dinar-less.

2.2.4. *The Acculturation of Popular English Expressions*

Now let's finish this section with the fourth and final method. It introduces the acculturation of common Anglophone expressions and popular culture references. By this, I refer to the deliberate tampering with common expressions in the English language using the above-mentioned methods. I aim to varnish certain Anglophone idioms with my culture, with my words, with my methods. This method is perhaps the most apparent cultural intervention, for it, in a sense, becomes a cultural colonisation of the English language.

Popular culture references—from films, music, books, and songs—populate the English language. So do idioms and cultural expressions, which, if used strategically and electively, can foster my adaptation of linguistic hybridity. This method is a cultural manipulation, a linguistic subversion. How am I going to do it? I illustrate with a few examples that can be found in the stories. Pay attention to the following common expressions: Speak of the devil/Play the devil's advocate/The devil is in the details. Now observe how I subvert them with my fourth method: Speak of the sheitan/Play the sheitan's game/The sheitan is in the details. To illustrate further, here are other examples from pop culture:

- Original: You had me at hello (*Jerry Maguire*).
- Acculturated: You had me at salaam.
- Original: Say hello to my little friend (*Scarface*).
- Acculturated: Say salaam to my little friend.
- Original: I am the king of the world (*Titanic*)!
- Acculturated: I am the khalifa of the world!

This method also includes the variation of idioms. I supply here a few samples: An apple a day keeps the doctor away/An apple a day keeps the hakim away. Fit as a fiddle/Fit as an oud. He wears many hats/He wears many turbans. Boy, you got the devil in you; you need Jesus,

our Lord and Saviour/Boy, you got the sheitan in you; you need Allah, our Lord and Saviour. As genuine as a three-dollar bill/As genuine as a three-dinar bill. Others can be noted in the creative component.

As another cultural intervention, I turn Biblical expressions into Qur'anic ones. Most of my characters are Muslims, and I colour their dialogue with a Muslim language, which further foreignises the prose. Many examples of this method appear on the pages of the creative work. Observe how I acculturate the following Biblical expression. The expression 'you need Jesus, Our Lord and Saviour' certainly refers to the Christian faith. A Muslim Sheriff in the story 'The Couscous Western' utters a different version of the expression. He says: 'Son, you've got the shaitan in you...you need Allah, our Lord and Saviour. Prepare to get squeezed.' The same cultural influence is exercised in 'Your Son Is with Pollen and Dust.' The term the 'Good Book' refers to the Bible. In the story, I manipulate the word to allude to the Holy Quran. I write: 'Only an imam, masked and turbaned, carried on the ceremony on his own, softly reading verses from The Good Book.' As known, Muslims use the word 'Allah' instead of 'God.' This word choice manifests in various sections of the stories. It manipulates the culture of the English language. The question 'what in God's name are you talking about?' is influenced in 'Muslims Can't Live Like Beats' to become 'what in Allah's name are you talking about?'

To exercise this method further, I culturally influence the canonical features of a particular literary genre—the Western. Classical Westerns—books and films—are identified by many conventional properties. We encounter hatted cowboys armed with revolvers. They ride impressive horses. We enjoy reading and watching the characters swinging the doors of saloons, sitting at the bar, getting drunk, and ultimately initiating a fight. Those are a few examples that identify the Western. 'The Couscous Western' rebels against those conventions. From the very beginning, the reader notes that the cowboys of the story are

culturally unconventional. They do not ride horses; they ride ‘scrawny, long-eared camels.’ Yamama Blue, the protagonist, does not ride a pony, but a miniature camel named ‘Moushmoush.’ The cowboys replace their Stetson hats with ‘handknitted turbans, other times with cheches.’ They feast on couscous and dates. They do not drink alcohol, but ‘buttermilk, not perched on stools, but squatted on palm-leaf mats.’ They are not violent. They do not carry ‘revolvers. Or knives. Or sharp forks.’ They carry ‘hugs.’ All these new features coat the Western story with a new culture.

These four methods represent my own idiosyncratic adaptation of linguistic hybridity. Their features are explained, exemplified, and implemented in the creative component. I do not stop here. I seek other ways to characterise my aesthetics. To distinguish further my creative thumbprint, I also experiment with idiosyncratic narrative structures to establish formal hybridity in the stories.

2.3. FORMAL HYBRIDITY

As I quoted him previously, Naguib Mahfouz characterises his writing process as musical. It possesses special notes and personal tunes. It is an intriguing way to describe his own idiosyncratic way of establishing unique forms in his novels. It is musical, selectively considered, carefully composed. What about my inner music, I ask here? How do I compose it? What are my experimental modes of narration? My inner music happens to be related to borrowing literary features typical of Arabic texts. I transfer three classical ones in particular into my anglophone prose.

2.3.1. *Neo-Frame Story Technique*

The first literary feature is perhaps the most traditional and recognisable one in Arabic literature. *The Thousand Nights and One Night* (also known as *The Arabian Nights*) remains an essential book in world literature, a beloved classic. Its interwoven stories have enchanted readers worldwide, introducing memorable characters: Aladdin, Ali baba, Sinbad and of course Scheherazade. Besides, notably, its unique narrative structure continues to attract the attention of researchers, narratologists and fiction writers. The book employs the frame narrative technique, also called the frame tradition, the tradition of frames, the frame story technique and the frame tale. In basic terms, the frame narrative is ‘a story told within a frame, or a story constituting a frame for another story, or a series of other stories’ (Siddiqui and Srivastava 2018, p. 183). We, in other words, have a main narrative that sets the stage for a second narrative, often longer and more important than the first.

The tradition of the frame narrative still occupies contemporary literature. It has been reincarnated and twisted by many authors. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Mohsin Hamid’s protagonist, Changez, narrates his traumatic experiences to a suspicious American stranger using frames, jumping between Pakistan and the United States. In Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992), the burned, nameless patient frames his fascinating adventures to entertain and inform his good nurse. As mentioned before, Rabih Alameddine’s *The Hawakati* (2008) relies heavily on the technique. When the character, Osama al-Kharrat, returns to Beirut to attend his father’s last breaths, he and his relatives weave stories to assuage the pain of the sad event. Arab writers still keep this tradition alive. Consider, for example, *The Eye of Hamourabi* (2020) by the Algerian writer Abdulatif Ould Abdullah. The novel was shortlisted for the 2020 International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF). Being cross-examined in a military encampment, facing imprisonment and perhaps death, Wahid tells stories to his jailers, in a Scheherazade-like manner, to save himself. Other writers retold *The*

Arabian Nights, such as Hanan al-Shaykh's *One Thousand and One Nights: A Retelling* (2014).

I depend on certain features of the technique, which is my first experimental mode of formal hybridity. To serve the objectives of my work, I tweak the previous definition as I aim to manipulate my frames by interlocking them. I experiment with framing by creating inset stories (a story within a story told by a different character) within the first frame (A), which regularly meet and eventually overlap. Let's say the first frame is A, the second B. Using the traditional frame technique, the writer usually opens the story with frame A (usually an introductory one), then tells the story (or stories) in frame B. The writer finishes the story by returning to frame A, or ends it in frame B. My technique subverts this by interlocking frame A with its inset stories (or story) and creating frame B, where the two storylines morph into a single story. This is the neo-frame story technique.

This technique serves literary meaning, as implied in the story 'The Couscous Western.' It shows the psychological state of Maissa, the main character, who develops a double consciousness after the death of her father. She splits into two different characters. The first one—polite and quiet—narrates the first frame. The second character inhabits the inset stories, where Maissa masquerades as a feisty, edgy cowgirl. As the first frame starts overlapping and morphing with the inset stories to create frame B, so does the double consciousness of Maissa. In frame B, she reverts to being herself, just one person, displaying a single consciousness.

2.3.2. *Neo-Maqama*

In Naguib Mahfouz's quote above, he refers to the *maqama*, another tradition specific to Arabic literature, and here I explain it and borrow it as my second method of formal hybridity. Terminologically, the Arabic word *maqama* means 'a council' or 'an assembly.' It stands for

a literary tradition created during the Abbasid Caliphate (750—1517). It was named, promoted and popularised by Badi el-Zaman el-Hamadhani (969—1008), a man of letters and a scholar. What is the *maqama* then? What are its features? And how do I use it idiosyncratically?

Essentially, the *maqama* is a form of rhymed prose. It is, as Shawqi Daif (1973, p. 9) defines it, a ‘story-like, bombastic, narrative speech’ (my translation). It is a prose genre, a narrative art delivered to a group of people, to an assembly, usually while having a meal. It is short and usually finished before the meal of the group. The tradition of the *maqama* enjoys a number of characteristics. In terms of language, the *maqama* is marked with syntactical embellishments. Its author services ‘language within the framework of the ancient stylistic tradition of *saj*, usually translated as ‘rhyming prose’ (Allen 1992, p. 180). To attain this, its writers employ particular literary techniques such as alliteration and assonance. The *maqama* usually features two main characters: the narrator and the hero. Badi el-Zaman el-Hamadhani famously created the duo Isa ibn Hisham and Abu el-Fath el-Askandari to deliver his *maqamat*. Usually, the hero of the *maqama* is ‘picaresque’ (Allen 1992, p. 180), meaning dishonest, appealing and at times appears in other stories. As for the narrator, they can be taciturn, a passive listener to the loquacious hero. Other secondary characters appear in the *maqama*.

The *maqama* can be humorous and sarcastic. But it is important to know that ‘the chief objective of the *maqama* is didactic’ (Daif 1973, p. 8, my translation). It is very religious. Yes, the *maqama* calls for social/personal reforms. It is a social commentary, a narrative form with a moral and an allegory designed to enlighten the listening assembly. In addition, in his book *The Maqama*, Shawqi Daif (1973, p. 9) asserts explicitly that the *maqama* is ‘not a story,’ but—as I explained previously—a ‘story-like, bombastic, narrative speech.’ I intervene here and offer my own refashioning of the *maqama*. Mine, to begin with, is long. Finishing it

would probably require several meals. My *maqama*, I should add, possesses the form and ingredients of a short story. Thus, my *maqama* becomes the neo-*maqama*. But I do retain several features of the traditional *maqama*, namely its literary traits and moral objectives. I aim to diversify the syntax of my sentences, embellish them, and use rhymed prose (*saj*). I also intend to wield its religious aspect and comment on certain social phenomena that may require change. The new features are exercised in the story ‘Muslims Can’t Live Like Beats.’

What does the title of this story mean? This novelette is didactic. It is a religious narrative that calls for social reforms. The narrator of the story explicitly instructs the assembly that ‘Muslims can’t live like the Beat Generation. Period. So, don’t. Burn your copies. I’ll explain.’ He does explain, but rather allegorically and ambiguously. The story comments on a social phenomenon, experienced by Muslims living in non-Muslim countries, which is rebelling against particular principles of Islam. The writers of the Beat Generation were hedonists. They drank, clubbed, partied, and engaged in pre-marital sexual intercourse. Islam prohibits all of those practices, hence the title. ‘Muslims Cannot Live Like the Beat Generation’ means Muslims cannot behave hedonistically. This is the moral of the story. Remember, this story targets a Muslim audience. For a Muslim, indulging in those temptations leads to serious consequences as shown in the story.

The duality of the neo-*maqama*’s form assists its moralistic objectives. It has effects on the meaning of the story. The storyteller juxtaposes their past self with the present one and explains how they have become better people. The opening frame happens in the ‘good’ present, the second in the ‘bad’ past. The storyteller narrates a series of past incidents that have changed their life and sharpened their character. As the council listens in the present time, the narrator recalls particular incidents and situations that have taught them a moral, such as the importance of humility, patience, and virtue. It is as if the storyteller is saying: ‘I used to be bad, but, after undergoing certain experiences, I have become a good person.’ This

is directly admitted by the narrator as he discloses his past misdeeds and pleasantly shares his present good deeds.

2.3.3. *Neo-Hakawatis*

The Arabic word *hakawati* means ‘storyteller.’ On the first of June 2009, a picture of one of the last *hakawatis* was taken in Damascus. In the picture (taken by Gapper), the *hakawati*, an old man named Abu Shady, sits in a high place in the café, where he works, where he recites his fables and stories to entertain the customers. His clothes are traditional: baggy trousers, a white chemise, and a red tarbush over his head. Abu Shady holds a cane with his right hand, which he swings alarmingly to keep the attention of his listeners and viewers. With his left hand he firmly grabs a book, from which he fishes his stories. His audience listens attentively as he carries out this dramatic act of storytelling. Abu Shady is a storyteller, a reciter and a performer of stories of valour, honour and sacrifice. Abu Shady is a *hakawati*. In a documentary entitled *The Last Hakawati* (2021), we meet a married Palestinian couple, Radi and Mounira, both in their sixties, touring the occupied territories in their minivan. They are both *hakawatis*, nomadic ones, as they carry their theatre with them. They tell stories to both children and adults in refugee camps. There, under the eyes of children and adults alike, they install their mini-theatre, its stage, lights, speakers and its curtains. Afterwards, Radi would use a loudspeaker to invite an audience to the show, to narrate dramatically a series of stories about identity, land, belonging, exile and home.

Both examples belong to the dramatic art form called the *hakawatis*, a literary oral tradition, once popular in the Arab World but now unfortunately vanishing. It is an acting performance that aims to entertain and inform. It is the play form of Arabic literature. It is an oral narration. As a rule, the *hakawati* relies in a limited extent on a script and commits the rest of the show to their performative skills, using different sounds, various accents, hand

gestures and so on. The *hakawati* always addresses the audience and usually starts with ‘gentlemen.’ For instance, Tayeb Salih (1969, p. 1), the Sudanese writer, opens his *Season of Migration to the North* in a *hakawati*-like manner, writing ‘*it was, gentleman, after a long absence....*’ Rabi Alameddine (2008, p. 1) opens his novel *The Hakawati* by writing ‘*Listen. Allow me to be your god. Let me take you on a journey beyond imagining. Let me tell you a story.*’

According to Aziz (1996, p. 12), the *hakawati* is a ‘poet, actor, comedian, historian, and storyteller.’ This storytelling tradition is an oral, dramatic transmission of stories, and I adopt and adapt its features as my third method of formal hybridity. My adaptation of the *hakawati* is dichotomous. It is both written and performed. On my pages, I aim to interfere occasionally in the narratives and address both my characters and the reader. I encroach on the narrative with an intrusive point of view. I may open the story by directly addressing the reader, using words such as ‘*my friends, ladies and gentlemen, my good people.*’ Or I may seize the reader’s attention with other addressing forms, namely referring to the following expressions: *Listen, pay attention, open your eyes to my words, give me your attention, I am speaking here, and are you still paying attention?* As for the reader, during particular scenes, I intrusively comment on their behaviours. I could, for example, pose as a plural first-person point of view (*we*), or simply use an *I*. I could comment on a character’s behaviour, an incident, or a reaction carried out by the character. I could mock the character, shame it, implicate it, contradict it, advise it, warn it, instruct it and even sympathise with it. Perhaps I should not, because the character I target with this creative method is an esteemed professor of French literature, the hopeless protagonist of ‘The Last Shot of Ahmed Bey’s Cannon.’ This story

won the 2020 Toyin Falola Prize, an international prize for African literature.² It has been published in an anthology titled *In the Sands of Time* (2021).³

The other part of my neo-*hakawatis* is that it is rather performative. Although it is displayed better when performed dramatically and orally, I attempt to capture it on the page by manipulating the language in a certain way to establish a theatrical sense in the reader's mind. I introduce this at the beginning of the stories. I, the author of the work, explicitly announce my presence and interference with meta-fictional instances. It often occurs at the beginning of the stories, where all *hakawatis* expose their direct involvement in their stories, but it does not linger. It is an introductory, intrusive frame. Think of it as a dramatic frame that sets the tone of the story.

The language and the narrative voice of the frame cooperate to establish a theatrical element. In the worldview of the reader, the language is written in a distinct way. It is distinctly lively. It contains a voice. It communicates a mood. It is read with a cheerful tone. How would the reader read 'let's lie!' in the story *The Seven Dates of Omar Sharif*? This opening line is loud. This sentence gushes with energy. It is read with excitement. The exclamation mark stresses this, so does its short structure. Further, I enliven the frame with linguistic manipulation. Short, fast sentences follow, like musical beats, read smoothly and quickly. In the same story, I write: 'It's about time. I have the skills. It can be done.' They chime with each other. They cascade on the tongue of the reader. I do not remain in this frame. I distance myself when the narrative begins, after requesting that the reader gets 'a cup of chai' before delving into the story. Then the reader is on their own.

² <https://tfp.lunaris.com.ng/prize/2020-prize/#~:text=Fayssal%20Bensalah%20has%20become%20the,Shot%20of%20Ahmed%20Bey's%20Cannon%E2%80%9D>.

³ <https://panafricanuniversitypress.com/product/in-the-sands-of-time/>

My authorial involvement can seem sudden and instructive, and it influences the language, rendering it dramatic. I can unfold a particular story with swift sentences that supply it with a fast narrative voice that sets the weather of the story. I could slightly accost the reader. I could confront them gently as I do in 'Your Son Is with Pollen and Dust.' I write: 'Only Moussa called him the turtle man. Don't call him the turtle man. Call him Nasir.' When I wrote those lines, I imagined myself pointing a finger at someone and saying them. In the story, Nasir, the protagonist, is fast, and so are the sentences of the opening frame, which introduce the rider and expose information about his occupation. The tone is directive. I deliver it theatrically, as if I were standing on stage addressing an audience, or behind a podium instructing a group of people. My authorial interference, however, dwindles as the story progresses, instead turning myself into an objective narrator. Again, I leave the reader alone with the story.

In summary, four translinguistic methods and three formal techniques represent my adaptation of literary hybridity. They are its features. They are the methods that endorse my creative thumbprint on the page. The four linguistic methods announce the presence of a different 'tempo' and an 'outlandish' rhythm in the prose of *The Couscous Western*. They stem from the process of defamiliarising the English language. Its characteristics, either highlighted by italics or cultural influences, inform the reader of a change and a creative innovation in the standard anatomy of the language. After reading *The Couscous Western*, the reader certainly senses this linguistic and structural manipulation. It establishes a multivocal impression. It builds a duality. It fashions a new English, and it exists on *my page*. The three formal methods also foster this impression by notifying of a mutation in the narrative structures of the stories, demonstrating experimental modes of narration. Two different storytelling traditions represented by two different languages/cultures overlap and interbreed to produce hybrid narratives.

The methods vouch for me as a North African/African writer. I aim to join my fellow African writers' experimentations with the English language by harnessing my methods practically on the page. This should assist my plan to self-categorise and self-identify not only as an African writer, but also as a North African writer, belonging to an emerging anglophone literature sprouting from North Africa, at present highlighted by Ahdaf Soueif, Hisham Matar and Laila Lalami. And here, I wonder, how do my fellow North African writers hybridise their prose with linguistic and literary features? What are their manifestations on the pages?

CHAPTER THREE

LAILA LALAMI AND HISHAM MATAR

TWO CASE STUDIES

As a North African writer who writes in English, discovering the anglophone works of Laila Lalami and Hisham Matar has been an absolute joy, a daily encouragement. Those writers have managed to root themselves in the global literary sphere through writing in English rather than in Arabic or French, breaking away from a literary tradition that has dominated the region for decades. I consider this creative initiative ground-breaking. It not only encourages ambitious writers such as myself to write in English, but it also enriches African literature with a new literary wave, presently in bloom. Thereby, this chapter examines four North African novels written by Hisham Matar and Laila Lalami. The ones written by Hisham Matar are *In the Country of Men* (2007) and *Anatomy of a Disappearance* (2011). Laila Lalami's are *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005) and *The Moor's Account* (2015). I investigate the four selected works from particular angles to unearth and identify their linguistic and formal hybridity features.

My rationale for selecting these two authors hinges on three considerations. Firstly, both authors grew up wholly or partially in the region of North Africa, and their works reflect the region's different cultures. Secondly, the authors' countries of origin were not entirely colonised by English-speaking countries. Thirdly, to them, English is an adopted language rather than a postcolonial/colonial one. This latter reason is the rationale for excluding other diaspora writers such as Ahdaf Soueif. The third reason concerns several of Matar's and Lalami's literary innovations, which are arguably translingual and formal.

The selection of these two case studies serves one objective that supports and relates to the previous chapters. I argue that the authors generally employ conventional linguistic methods to hybridise their prose. Evidencing the familiarity of their literary innovations distinguishes and fosters the originality of my idiosyncratic methods of formal and linguistic hybridity, explained in Chapter Two. To this end, two research questions are presented here: How do Hisham Matar and Laila Lalami hybridise their prose? How do they aim to achieve intelligibility in their works?

The four novels mentioned above contain features of literary hybridity (formal and linguistic), which I identify and critique. Significantly, the majority of those features are linguistic rather than formal. They are the authorial choices of Laila Lalami and Hisham Matar. *Ergo*, the focus of this chapter will be mainly placed on the translinguistic features both authors employ in their works, which are similar but unidentical.

Hisham Matar, for example, essentially harnesses linguistic methods—not formal ones—to paint his texts with his cultural identity, as discussed in this chapter. Both his novels *In the Country of Men* (2007) and *Anatomy of a Disappearance* (2011) display similar methods of linguistic hybridity that heavily rely on foreignising the cultural settings of the novels. In the case of Laila Lalami, her novels contain a combination of both linguistic and formal methods of hybridity. This is the reason why the space allocated to discussing her works is longer than Matar's. I inspect *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005) for its methods of linguistic hybridity, which take many intriguing shapes. In *The Moor's Account* (2015), Laila Lalami pursues a radical path, selecting fresh literary methods of hybridity—formal ones. She borrows several formal Arabic literary traditions, which I shall identify and evaluate.

3.1. Linguistic Hybridity in Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other*

Dangerous Pursuits

Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits (2005), Lalami's debut work, can be described as both a linked collection of short stories and an experimental novel. This novel is about *el-harga*, a North African slang term meaning illegal immigration. It is divided into three interlinked sections—'the Trip', 'Before' and 'After.' Therein, the author chronicles the circumstances that force four characters (Murad, Halima, Aziz and Fatin) to flee Morocco towards Spain in search of a better life. It also discusses the repercussions of their decisions. In 'The Trip,' the author recounts the perilous crossing in an inflatable boat and introduces the four protagonists. Structured as a series of flashbacks, in 'Before,' the social backgrounds of the characters are explored. Murad is a hustler on the streets of Tangier, defrauding Paul Bowles fans by taking them on unofficial tours. Halima, living in the slums of Casablanca, suffers from a drunken, abusive husband. Aziz desperately needs a job to provide for his devoted wife. The fourth character, Fatin, appears through the eyes of her friend's parents' perspective. She is a student, lower-class, religious. The four emigrate towards Spain presumably to secure jobs and a better future. In 'After,' four chapters unveil the lives of the characters after the trip and its effects on them. The book is loaded with Moroccan cultural references and social practices.

Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* offers an intriguing case study. Its prose contains particular trans-linguistic innovations and processes, which clearly surface on the pages. I expose, identify, exemplify and critique them here in this section. In the book, the author exercises the innovative employment of loanwords both from the Modern Standard Arabic and the Moroccan vernacular, the insertion of slang interjections in the dialogues, and the literal translation of Moroccan cultural expressions (calque).

In *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, the author transfers words both from the Standard Arabic and the Moroccan vernacular and intriguingly leaves them unitalicised, untranslated and thus unintelligible. It is the earliest translinguistic feature the reader encounters because it disrupts comprehensibility. The reader pauses and wonders: ‘Is this an English word?’ This method tends to appear repeatedly in the book. It is calculated and deliberate. One example can be noted when the author (2005, p. 22) writes: ‘In his office at the Moroccan Ministry of Education, he opened up the day’s *Al-Alam* and asked the chaouch to bring him a glass of mint tea.’ Clearly, the non-English word is ‘chaouch,’ a North African colloquial word that refers to a serviceman. Notice how the author re-deploys it within her sentence without any attempts at domestication, or familiarisation (Venuti 1995). The word remains foreign, untranslated, its potential meaning retained. There is no italicisation to highlight its foreignness and notify the reader beforehand of its displacement, of its out-of-placeness. Only after a process of semantic expansion—to bring him a glass of mint tea—that we deduce its meaning.

Elsewhere in the book, other non-English words lack semantic contextualisation. Observe this example: ‘What do you think I should do, then, a lalla?’ (Lalami 2005, p. 48). What does ‘a lalla’ mean? Lalami does not explain it. It means ‘O Lady,’ but Lalami leaves it again untranslated, without a contextual meaning, without its counterpart in English and without an explanatory phrase. She abstains from using the practices of cushioning and relexification coined by Chantal Zabus (2007). Here is another example: ‘It’s all just hard work and ghurba and loneliness’ (p. 47). The standard Arabic word ‘ghurba’ refers to alienation. The same method is used here. Although Lalami chooses to keep them ambiguous, I must underline the fact that those words are perfectly translatable. They are not culture-bound words whose translations do not exist in English. Their counterparts in English exist. Both methods are

applied to other words in the book such as ‘niyyah’ (p. 60), ‘rghaif’ (p. 59) and others. The book—I should note— does not include footnotes and does not include a glossary of terms.

This method appears recurrently and commonly in African literature. It has been used and overused by many African writers. For instance, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, borrows words from the Igbo language and preserves them untranslated. So does Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), using non-English words such as ‘iba, inyanga’ (p. 65 and p. 38). So do many other African writers of Europhone expression. This method, in fact, is a major feature of Europhone African literature. Several critical questions arise here. Why is Lalami uninterested in achieving immediate intelligibility? And, I wonder and ask, who is Laila Lalami’s reader? The Moroccan who reads in English, or the Anglophone reader? The answer to the first question relates, of course, to the identity of her text. The book was her debut, and, as all aspiring, newly-published writers do, she sought to paint it with her own cultural thumbprint and with her idiosyncratic signature (as I myself do). This is how she announced her emergence as a writer of English expression. The excessive inclusion of the Moroccan lifestyle in the book supports this idea. The book, to illustrate, gushes with the colourful names of Moroccan food: ‘harira,’ ‘beghrir,’ ‘shebbakiya,’ (p.40) ‘marzipan’ and ‘briwat’ (p. 35). It also refers to the dress code of the country, mentioning ‘hijab’ (p. 41) and ‘burnous’ (p. 22). Other cultural practices in her book encompass speech manners, collective celebrations and how Moroccan institutions work.

As for the reader, the answer is rather elusive. They could be both the Moroccan who reads in English and the Anglophone reader, or neither of them. Even Laila Lalami, when asked about her reader, offered a vague response. In an interview conducted by *African Writing*, Lalami (2021) says: ‘I was writing for the reader who is interested in my characters and in the world I have created for them.’ The chief reader is certainly not the North African/Arab who

reads in English. Many of the words in *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005) are too localised, non-standard and specific to Morocco. Although I come from the region, I did not comprehend many of them, especially the untranslated interjection words in the book's dialogues, which is another translinguistic method of the author. The author refrains from using a linguistic strategy to achieve comprehensibility and eradicate ambiguity, certainly because the particular words are untranslatable. Put differently, these words have no equivalents in English. What do, for example, the unitalicised words 'Baraka!' (p. 43) mean and 'Safi!' (p. 34) mean? After researching them, I have discovered that they both can mean 'Enough!' They strictly belong to Moroccan slang. What about the exclamatory expression 'la wah, la wah'? It appears this way on Lalami's page: 'La wah, la wah. I can't do it for that little' (p. 111). While a Google search provided no results, a Moroccan friend has explained to me the implied meaning of the phrase: The interjection indicates protest, surprise, shock, or anger. The phrase can therefore be translated into: *come on! no way! or forget about it!*

Lalami harnesses other interjections in the book that are not exclusive to Morocco, but commonly used in North Africa. An illustrative example is when Lalami utilises the Arabic expression 'Ya' to signal surprise. This is how it appears on her page: 'Ya, what a donkey' (p. 84). The 'Si' is another example, which is an abbreviation of the word 'Siyed,' meaning 'master.' It is a word of respect, even an endearment. On page thirty-one, Lalami writes: 'You won't believe who called this morning. Si Tawfiq.' Laila Lalami, in addition, promotes the previous method further and borrows entire sentences from the Arabic and Spanish languages. Observe the following exchange: 'Soy Murad. El amigo de Rahal' (p. 13). 'Espérame por la caña de azúcar.' She, again, leaves them unexplained, untranslated. She does not expand the meaning in the context, or provide hints. The reader either starts a guessing game, consults a dictionary or keeps reading unconcerned with the meaning. This method is no stranger to African literature. Open any African novel randomly, and you will encounter it. Concerning

her Arabic borrowings, Lalami applies a slightly different method. She translates and writes them in Roman letters. For instance, the author translates and de-Latinises the greeting expression good morning and writes it as so: 'sbah el-khir' (p. 74).

This process leads me to her fourth and final method, which is calque, or the application of literal translations. She employs the same technique followed by many of her fellow African writers: literally translating cultural proverbs, idioms and expressions. This method is subtle and less ambiguous than the other ones. But it can be easily detected and perceived, perhaps by both the North African and the Anglophone readers. Whereas for the former, the sentences and expressions are familiar, for the latter, they are peculiar and out of place. This method mostly appears in the book's dialogues. Consider this sentence: 'And you have a direct phone line with God' (p. 36). As a North African, I could easily understand Lalami's meaning here. It is a literal translation of the Arabic sentence: 'وأنت عندك خط هاتف مباشر مع الله.' It carries religious connotations in North Africa. It is wielded to ridicule unallowed comments about the unseen and religious matters that only God knows. If a person, to offer an example, claimed to foresee the future, the weather or other unpredictable matters, they would be interrupted with that specific sentence. Even the sentence—*he'll become like a ring on your finger*—(p. 57) has been calqued from the Arabic sentence: 'سيصبح مثل الخاتم في إصبعك.' It is specifically and secretly notorious among housewives whose husbands reject their mundane wishes. It alludes to how they can be turned meek and dutiful by using ploys and schemes. I end with the sentence 'God is beautiful, and He loves beauty' (p. 44). It is very much religious. In fact, it is a popular saying of the Prophet Mohammed. It is a direct translation of 'إن الله جميل يحب الجمال.' It can be employed to vouch for a dandy and eloquent person who gives great care to their appearance and hygiene. It has become an idiom, a statement that inhabits the everyday conversations of North Africans.

In sum, this investigation reveals that Laila Lalami utilises conventional, often random forms of linguistic hybridity. She abstains from abiding by Chantal Zabus' concepts of attaining intelligibility and context, and she exercises her own, which do not offer clear instances of intelligibility. She applies the same translinguistic signature in *Secret Son* (2009), her second novel. How about the signature of her fellow North African writers? How about, I ask specifically, Hisham Matar's works?

3.2. Hisham Matar's *In The Country of Men* and *Anatomy of a Disappearance*

In an interview, Hisham Matar (2006, p. 248) acknowledges that he employs 'the tempo and texture of one's roots in the language.' He refers to his Arabic roots. Although he does not write in Arabic, when asked about his reasons for writing in English instead, he insists that his prose possesses 'an Arab hum.' What does he mean by *his prose has an Arab hum*? What is this hum? And what are its *humming* features?

Hisham Matar published *In the Country of Men* in 2006, his debut work. It depicts the political landscape of Libya in the late 1970s. It is communicated to us through the daily life of Suleiman, the nine-year-old protagonist, whose father constantly disappears, ostensibly on business trips. Faraj el Dewani, the father, is politically outspoken against Ghaddafi's regime, which he defies and threatens. His covert activities are kept a secret from his family. But as they attract police harassment, constant surveillance and even house searches, his family realises the true meaning of the father's absences. The situation takes a toll on Najwa, Suleiman's mother, who lives in fear and eventually seeks comfort and oblivion in drinking, becoming an alcoholic. This uncertain situation also affects the young protagonist. He attempts to understand the elements of this with his unripe mind. Failing, to seek the help of

adults, he befriends his neighbours and his father's best friend, Moosa. The book details how political oppression maims families and damages their children.

The theme of absence also prevails in Hisham Matar's second novel *Anatomy of a Disappearance* (2011). Exiled with his father in Cairo, a fourteen-year-old named Nuri still feels alienated after his mother's death. Nothing, it seems, would distract him from the lingering pain of loss, until he observes the attractive Mona, an older woman. As he watches her, he grows smitten, slowly falling in love with her. The scene of her in a swimsuit by the pool immediately roots her into his heart at once. But she falls in love with his father instead, an authoritative man named Kamal Pasha el-Alfi, almost her age. Kamal is also a political dissident who has been exiled from his homeland for his political views. In Switzerland, now married, his father and Mona, now his stepmother, enjoy themselves, happily married. Nuri, however, sulks and pouts; their happiness is enviable. He feels marginalised and neglected. These unhealthy feelings consume him so much that he wishes for his father's disappearance. Then, almost magically, it actually occurs; his homeland's regime kidnaps his father. Nuri and Mona, together, attempt to anatomise this sudden disappearance and locate the man they both love.

Both novels arguably share similar linguistic attempts at hybridity. One, in particular, populates both novels heavily—which is the selection of a fascinating cultural setting for the novels. Hisham Matar shepherds the reader into an unfamiliar territory, a new (even less known) culture. The author foreignises his novels by taking the reader into uncharted territory—Libya. Matar introduces his Libyan culture, its colours, its customs, its language, its mores and its literature.

I find this authorial choice particularly fascinating. It leads to the posing of two questions. Who is the author's reader? For whom is he foreignising his novel? He is certainly not

targeting me, the North African/Arab reader. To me, the culture of the books is perfectly non-foreign. Its culture speaks to me. I recognise and relate to it. The world of the story, thus, targets the non-North African reader, to whom the Libyan culture is uncharted, unfamiliar and less known. Having read the books, I now comprehend the reason Hisham Matar describes his prose as featuring ‘a hum.’ His literary methods, as a hum, are subtle. And they speak to the non-North African reader especially. They appear both within the text and the context.

Concerning the language of the two texts, few translinguistic characteristics appear on their pages. They resemble Laila Lalami’s and other African writers’. Matar’s hum, apparently, does not echo prominently among the sentences, with which the author does not immensely tamper, or obviously innovate. A restricted number of Arabic words scatter randomly here and there in both novels, and that is it. Their occurrences on the page are inconsistent, arguably unmethodical and certainly not new to African literature. The author does not abide by a discernible pattern, a careful methodology or helpful translations. I offer here some examples. On the second page of *In the Country of Men* (2006), the author borrows an interjection from the Libyan vernacular: ‘*ya satir!*’ (O Protector!). He italicises it, highlighting it, then he leaves it untranslated. On another page, the endearment term ‘habibi’(p. 11) —meaning dear, lover or beloved—appears unitalicised and untranslated. What does the word ‘Mokhabarat’ mean? Matar writes: ‘And if the restaurant had a table of Revolutionary Committee men, or Mokhabarat, people we called Antennae, he chanted...’ (p.19). Although the author attempts to contextualise the meaning of the word, it still remains vague. The Arabic word refers to intelligence agents, spies, not Revolutionary Committee men. I know this because I am an Arabic speaker. Would a non-Arabic speaker understand the words? Similar words can be found in *Anatomy of a Disappearance*: habibi, (2011, p. 141) Baba, (p. 77) and Pasha (p. 65). This latter word is used more than twenty times, untranslated, unexplained. Other Arabic/slang words can be noted on the pages.

Occasionally, Hisham Matar varnishes his dialogues with calque. Reading them, I could clearly hear the Arabic behind the English of those cultural expressions. In North Africa, when someone speaks about God without respect, or with levity, they would be reprimanded by the following sentence: 'تتحدث عنه وكأنه صديق لك.' It means in English: 'You talk about Him as if he were a friend of yours!' In *Anatomy of a Disappearance*, the author borrows the same expression to reproach a character. Nuri's mother, critiquing the mountains of Nordland, says: 'Here God decided to be a sculptor; everywhere else He holds back' (Matar 2011, p. 6). Kamal, Nuri's father, reproaches her at once: 'You talk about Him as if He's a friend of yours.' Other instances appear on the pages as the author paraphrases particular Islamic sayings and incorporates them into his dialogue. For example, Bahloul, a homeless man in *In the Country of Men*, when begging for money, employs a popular Islamic saying: 'A kind word is a seed you'll find as a tree in the hereafter' (2006, p. 116). This is the saying in Arabic: 'الكلمة الطيبة هي بذرة تجدها كشجرة في الآخرة.'

Where is the rest of the *hum* then? It is contextual and cultural. It is in the worldview of the Anglophone reader, where they hear it, where they realise it. Hisham Matar relies heavily on this to achieve the literary hybridity of his novels. He foreignises the cultural contexts of his works with certain strategies, focusing on the Arabic names of characters, Libyan places, historical figures of Libya, quotations from Arabic poems and books, social practices and so forth. The author spices his English text with cultural features of Libya. He introduces a new world to the reader. No wonder, *In the Country of Men*, Hisham Matar repeatedly mentions and references *A Thousand and One Nights*, a book famous for introducing the West to the mysterious, less known East. As a North African, I do not feel alienated by this prose. I am rather familiar with the culture. The non-Arab who reads in English, however, may find themselves in uncharted territory, enveloped with an unexplored space. How would they, for example, respond to the Arabic names of the characters? Here are a number of them: Kareem,

Ustath Rashid, Najwa, Auntie Salma, Um Masoud, Nassar, Moosa and many others. Or how would they react to the names of Libyan places, such as the ‘Martyrs’ Square?’ (Matar 2006, p. 3).

The author deepens his process of foreignisation by quoting from the popular literature of Libya—poems, books and even The Holy Quran. Entire stanzas from Arabic poems are quoted and recited by a certain character. Hisham Matar constantly quotes two poems in particular. The first one is entitled Sidi Mahrez. He writes: ‘Why this emptiness after joy? Why this ending after glory?’ (Matar 2006, p. 26). The second one is written by Salah Abd al-Sabur, a poet Matar references to serve the themes of his work. Matar also alludes to Nizar al-Qbbani, a romantic poet popular in the Arab World, still read today, still loved and remembered. Certain parts of the books are clearly didactic and directly informative. The author teaches Libyan history, which is mainly communicated by a particular character. Ustath Rashid recites Arab poems to his students and informs them of the illustrious history of Libya with nostalgia, lamentation and pain. The book contains quotes from The Holy Quran, delivered by a friendly imam named Sheik Mustafa.

The Libyan characteristics of Matar’s *In the Country of Men* and *Anatomy of a Disappearance* operate collectively to achieve its hybrid nature. This certainly intrigues me, both as a writer and a researcher. Although their unfamiliar spaces manifest a different context, distinguished with names, customs, literatures and many other traits, the books are largely found in the Anglophone sphere, where many people remain unfamiliar with or uninterested in the culture of Libya. Yet the books have been published, publicised and shortlisted for major literary prizes.

3.3. Formal Hybridity in Laila Lalami's *The Moor's Account*

The Moor's Account (2015) was a finalist for the 2015 Pulitzer Prize. The novel is narrated by the first black explorer of America, a Moroccan slave named Mustafa ibn Muhammad ibn Abdussalam al-Zamori, dubbed by his Spanish captors as simply 'Estebanico.' This historical novel fictionalises the protagonist's journey from Morocco (Barbary in the book) to Spain and then to La Florida in the New World. In the process, it reports particular chronicles of the 1527 Narváez Expedition—which sailed from Spain to the New World in search of new lands and gold. The book is his account and testimony as he discloses the tragedies—starvation and diseases—that reduce the number of the Expedition from around six hundred members to four: Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Alonso del Castillo, Andrés Dorantes and the Moorish Estebanico. The four venture through the New World, exploring it, losing themselves in it and living among its indigenous tribes. Sometime later, they are found by a group of Spanish slavers and taken to Mexico City, where their testimony is recorded and where Mustafa, the Moor, tells his account.

In a recent tweet, Lalami (2021) celebrated the seventh anniversary of the book's publication and recounted its thorny journey to secure publication. Although she had already established herself as an author with many faithful readers, fourteen publishers had rejected *The Moor's Account* (2015). Thankfully, the book found a publisher, and it has managed to charm many readers (myself included) with its experimental structure. To assemble the book, the author relies heavily on classical features of Arabic texts. She intermingles them with Western storytelling traditions. For this section, I organise them into two categories—macro and micro features. Whereas the macro features concern the entire structure of the book, the micro ones refer to its nuanced characteristics typical of Arabic texts.

The Moor's Account is a novelistic travelogue, to begin with. The author novelises the structure of a travelling book. It is a fictitious account of a real character. This represents the first formally salient technique the author masters to hybridise the book. Its entire structure mirrors the form of a sixteenth-century Arabic travel writing book. This genre holds a special position in Arabic literature. It is many centuries old and deeply rooted in Arabic culture. Many Arab scholars, poets and writers have toured the world, recording truths about nations, peoples, locations and cultures for centuries. Hundreds of books endorse this genre in Arabic culture, but conceivably the most popular one—still read and appreciated today in the Arab World—is *A Masterpiece to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Travelling* (1325–1332) by Ibn Battuta, whom at the age of twenty-one left his hometown Tangier in the fourteenth century to explore the world. The book and its writer are so popular in North Africa and the Middle East that wanderlust-lovers and ardent travellers are teasingly nicknamed Ibn Battuta. In the West, this particular book—also read and even studied—has a different title: *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*. Actually, to write *The Moor's Account*, Lalami (2015, p. 429), in her own words, ‘has relied on many sources...in particular *The travels of Ibn Battuta*.’

I mention Ibn Battuta's book in this section on occasion to signify its similarities with *The Moor's Account*, further evidencing the formal borrowings Laila Lalami has undertaken. This resemblance appears on the very first page of Lalami's novel. The author certainly imitates the format of *The Travels of Ibn Battuta's* opening paragraph to write *The Moor's Account*. As a rule, Arabic travelogues—and several other Arabic books—start with the *basmala*, which refers to beginning the book with the Islamic phrase *in the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful*. The expression is essentially Qur'anic. Almost all the suras in The Holy Quran begin with this particular phrase. This Qur'anic introduction has been adopted conventionally to open books. Open any book written in Arabic and you will likely

discover this. In *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, the author introduces his book by writing: ‘In the name of the compassionate and merciful God. Praise be ascribed to God the Lord of worlds; and the blessing of God be upon our Lord Mohammed, and upon all his posterity and companions’ (1958). In *The Moor’s Account*, Laila Lalami appropriates the opening to introduce hers. She writes: ‘In the name of God, most compassionate, most merciful. Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds, and prayers and blessings be on our prophet Muhammad and upon all his progeny and companions.’ They are, as you can note, almost identical. This opening format is strictly specific to Arabic literature. Non-Arabic travelogues employ different formal openings. Observe, for example, how Marco Polo opens *The Travels of Marco Polo* (1997): ‘Ye emperors, kings, Dukes, Marquises, Earls, and Knights, and all other people desirous of knowing the diversities of the races of mankind....’

The Moor’s Account features novelistic elements, Western storytelling traditions. It contains the conventional features of the novel: characters, carefully-constructed scenes, rising conflicts, plots, sub-plots and so forth. Estebanico, the protagonist, recounts his experiences in a novelistic manner. They are carefully selected and coherently narrated. In a travelogue, the reporter documents their daily experiences and perhaps compelling incidents. They feature a traveller, who experiences new lands, judges unfamiliar customs, introduces alien peoples and interprets their surroundings subjectively. The traveller reports. They inform. Estebanico, however, narrates. He tells his story with suspense, with cliff-hangers, with intriguing dialogues. He recounts adventurous incidents, such as being attacked by ‘a group of Apalachee men’ (Lalami 2015, p. 119) and drifting in a raft and chased by a rebellious storm. The author, in other words, highly dramatises the story, filling the gaps of the real one with fiction, with imagination. The book, therefore, reads like an adventure story. It is entertaining and captivating, and Laila Lalami infuses it with novelistic traits.

Formal micro features can be noted in the book. They manifest the Arabic and Islamic culture of Estebanico, with which he occasionally hybridises the structures of his sentences. In the very first paragraph of *The Moor's Account*, to introduce himself, the narrator follows the Arabic format of doing it. He mentions his name and those of his father and grandfather. Observe it: 'Mustafa ibn Muhammad ibn Abdussalam al-Zamori' (p. 1). The Arabic word *ibn* means *son*. He introduces himself as Mustafa, son of Mohammed, son of Abdussalam. In his travelogue, Ibn Battuta does the same when introducing sultans, rulers and the companions of his journey. To record the time of his story, Estebanico relies on the Hegira calendar (the Islamic one) rather than on the Georgian one. He writes: 'It was the year 934 of the Hegira, the fifth year of my bondage....' (p. 1). The narrator also tends to tweak his English sentences with Islamic expressions, which is another formal trait Lalami constantly exercises in her book. The protagonist's speech is astonishingly religious. This trend prevails in Arabic travelogues as it plainly does in Ibn Battuta's book, whose pages burst with Islamic language. So do the paragraphs of *The Moor's Account*, which are stuffed with them. Estebanico, for example, describes himself as a 'servant of God' (p. 6).

To elaborate on his speeches, the protagonist often quotes the sayings of Prophet Mohammed. When making future promises, he uses 'God's willing' (p. 70), also written as *inshallah*. To end his account, he adopts a religious ending commonly used by imams: 'To God belong the east and the west; whichever way you turn, there is the face of God. God is great' (p. 428). The absence of quotation marks introduces another formal feature present in the book. According to Lalami, sixteenth-century Arab writers did not apply quotation marks in their dialogues. Talking about this in an interview led by Michael Noll, she (2015) explains: 'I also removed quotation marks because the conceit of the novel is that it is a manuscript written by an Arab traveller, and Arabic manuscripts of that era did not use quotation marks.'

I must deduce that in *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* and *Secret Son*, Laila Lalami, as I have discussed, exercises overused linguistic methods. They have populated the African novel since the emergence of African literature in the 1950s. She, however, deploys them idiosyncratically as she carefully selected certain proverbs and expressions well-suited for her books' themes. I must confess that the structure of *The Moor's Account* is rather impressive. No wonder this book is her most celebrated and read novel. She controls its formal features masterfully and manages to sieve the lies of history and narrates it anew from the perspective of the first black North African explorer in the New World.

CHAPTER FOUR
CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON WRITING
THE COUSCOUS WESTERN

Why do you write in English? I have been asked this question many times by writers and non-writers. I understand the evident roots of this question. People who ask me this question would arguably find it irregular or odd that an Algerian writer crafts anglophone works rather than Arabic or French ones, which are—as known—the dominant literatures of the country and the region of North Africa. In Algeria, besides, the English language is still not widely spoken and read (Chemami 2011). In lieu of an answer, I used to equivocate and offer vague and romanticised responses, such as I do it because I love the English language, or because I love telling stories in English, or simply say, because I can. The truth is, I had no well-defined answer for one simple reason—I did not think I needed one. I did not believe I needed to explain why I write in English. I still do not.

Why do I write in English? I find this question unnecessary and outdated, especially when asked in this day and age. It has become common knowledge that the English language is the lingua franca of the world. It has, in the well-known words of Salman Rushdie (1991 p. 63), ‘ceased to be the sole possession of the English some time ago.’ It stands as a global language read and understood by millions of people who do not spring from the Anglosphere, or the post-colonial sphere where English is employed in speech and writing. Those two spheres do not and cannot ‘claim sole ownership’ (Crystal 2003, p. 140) of the English language anymore. It has become a universal language. It has become owned by the world, and the world is simply owning it, using it as the day-to-day tool of expression.

The sphere in which the English language currently thrives is the global sphere, and employing it as the language of literary expression shows clear objectives. A book written in English enjoys the privilege of entering and inhabiting many cultural spaces and, thus, attracting many readers. It could attain global attention and readership. It facilitates access to the global market and its varied types of capital: economic, cultural, symbolic. It gives certain writers the opportunity to inform the world about their societies, as several African writers do, who write in English ‘to inform the world about Africa’ and dispel ‘the false myths and wrong impressions given to the outside world by early European scholars’ (Bandia 2014, p. 14). If I deemed it necessary to answer the question of my language choice, I would say that I write in English for the same reasons. This global language offers visibility in the literary world. It is every writer’s dream to be read and appreciated globally. It could score me an international podium that could be harnessed to open cultural discussions, brew intriguing debates and even make social changes. One change in particular still occupies my imagination: to reinstate the continental identity of my fellow North African writers and myself. English is a loud language, and people listen when you use it. They pay attention. And I intend to use it to bring special attention to the separation of North African literature from African literature and argue in favour of their advantageous unity. Besides, this lingual choice could highlight Algerian literature, promote it and its talented writers.

Thus, the case of a writer who does not come from the previously-mentioned spheres and writes in English is no longer considered an irregularity, or an oddity. It is becoming increasingly common and unsurprising. It should not raise eyebrows anymore. This case has been normalised by many writers springing from non-English-speaking spaces, from—to mention a few examples—South America, Asia, North Africa, and the Middle-East. Concerning the two latter spaces, I have discovered many writers from Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, Iran, Kuwait, Bahrain and Lebanon, all of whom write in English. This situation, in

other words, is not unique. Everybody is doing it, and we know their reasons. A unique case, however, concerns the many ways the English language is being varnished with idiosyncrasy and coloured with personal touches. I specifically mean the Englishes that only exist on the writer's page, and not the Englishes used in speech and writing in a community or communities. So instead of asking 'why do you write in English,' we should be asking 'how do you write in English.'

Many Englishes are personal, only thriving in the world of the creative work. The previous questions should be directed towards this phenomenon, investigating its roots, characteristics and—more importantly—the process of constructing it. How are those Englishes designed? What are the challenges encountered while crafting them? Those are the questions that should be posed and addressed. Those are the questions that I have posed and addressed while writing parts of the creative component. How do the idiosyncratic features of my English appear on the page? And how can they be applied effectively in *The Couscous Western*?

I liken the process of hybridising my prose to the crossbreeding of a tree, or the transplantation of an organ. The process of hybridising my work has been similar to the creation of a new fruit through crossbreeding two elements. First you need the body of a particular tree. This is, remember, the main element. You cut into it to reveal its green skin. Then you bring several cuttings from a different tree—which are supplementary—and you graft them to the rootstock of the first and then bandage them. The elements, both the original and the new, both the main and the subsidiary, fuse together to create a new creation, one that produces fruits.

I have designed *The Couscous Western* in a similar fashion. I required two chief elements—the written body of the creative work and a number of linguistic and formal methods with which to cut into it and reshape it. But the process of achieving this was not as

easy as slicing the branch of a tree, or as uncomplicated as bandaging it. The work had undergone many stages and several drafts before I found and fashioned my seven cuttings.

From the very outset, before writing the first sentence of the creative work, I understood that the operation of tampering with the anatomy of the English language was prevalent in certain literatures, even customary. Postcolonial writers harnessed it to write back against the former coloniser, deliberately adulterating their prose with cultural words to manifest indignation and defiance. Transcultural and transnational writers still employ it because they inhabit and multi-belong in many cultural spaces. It is a deliberate invasion, a form of cultural counter-colonisation that certainly hides various agendas: personal, national, ideological. In addition, the similarities of those writers' methods are apparent and trendy. Generally, the writers enlist the three methods Chantal Zabus (2007) codified—relexification, cushioning and contextualisation. I am not only referring to African writers, but also to Latin Americans, Asians and so forth. And initially, so did I; I employed the same, overused methods.

To hybridise the language of my work, I used to harness the same methods non-Anglophone writers have used for decades. In fact, I hybridised the first draft of *The Couscous Western* with the aforementioned methods. I would recruit Chantal Zabus' terms, cushioning the Arabic words and contextualising the cultural ones. I also employed relexification. I would take an Arabic word, insert it into my English prose and then italicise it, without changing the sentence's standard grammar. Here are two examples that no longer exist on my page: 'Hakim kept his *euyun* on the road. He could gift the *diraja* to a novice driver.' I even experimented with not italicising the words at all. I was following Laila Lalami's and Hisham Matar's methods. I was copying what my fellow African writers have been doing for decades. I was, in other terms, replicating overused methods, which are not idiosyncratic but collective and conventional. Many stories later, however, I decided to design

other methods, ones that endorsed my idiosyncratic signature. I needed new organs, fresh cuttings—my own.

I set an operation in motion. I removed all the non-English words and replaced them with their English counterparts. I ensured that the entire body of the creative component was free of non-English words, both the italicised and the non-italicised ones. The stories were entirely written in standard English. This was the body of the tree, bearing no incisions, no literary interventions. Then, after a great deal of research and meditation, I fashioned and classified my seven organs. At last, I had my two chief elements—the body of the creative work and the seven methods. This stage was still theoretical, unapplied. The following step was, of course, to apply the methods. This has been a challenging process, especially when attempting an application of the four linguistic methods, especially when trying to defamiliarise my English prose.

4.1. Limitations of the Defamiliarisation of English

I must reiterate here that the hybrid component of a literary work has always been subsidiary. It supplements the dominant English part. The hybrid disruption appears sporadically and irregularly. It just needs to inform of a different tempo in the worldview of the reader. It also needs to provide an outlandish rhythm in the English text. The hybrid features, remember, cannot be expected to manifest in every sentence and in every paragraph. For this reason, the insertion of the four linguistic methods in the stories was guided by three major factors—textual, contextual and authorial.

The positioning of a particular word depends on its convenient existence in the context and its logical presence in the text. The features of the methods must appear in the text rightly and appropriately. They must also serve the context. This explains why I had written the entire work first then cut into it with the methods. As for the authorial factor, I, the author, decide

where and when to intervene and when and where to abstain. I authorise the interference depending on my personal relationship with the language of the stories, my style of writing, and depending on the objectives of the work.

Those factors, I discovered, not only guided the application of the four methods, but also limited them. In theory, my term of defamiliarisation reveals a long list of words that are either distinctly or secretly Arabic. The theory promises an abundance of them, hundreds of them, but the application not so many. Only a limited number of words can be unearthed from English, and only a limited number can be involved in my prose. The presence of the words in the stories required logical reasons to exist, to vouch for their inclusion. So the number of the words decreased. Similarly, the secret Arabic words that inhabit the English language were limited in number. Not all of them conformed to the selection criteria, mentioned in Chapter Two. I could not, in other words, de-Latinise, italicise and contextualise all of them. The Arabic roots and meanings of the excluded words have been changed beyond recognition. So I could not insert them and employ them in my prose.

So the same rules of the first method had to be applied. The de-Latinised-italicised-contextualised words must have a reason to be in the prose. Again, I had to be selective. I unearthed and collected the words that may serve the work. I must confess that the result was dispiriting. The list did not/does not comprise a great number of words. It was restrained by the four criteria I had set. Only a limited number of words conform to the four resemblances that identify this method. Now here is the question: Why must the words abide by the four resemblances? The answer points to the reader. My methods, remember, promise easy intelligibility. I aim to achieve it without alienating the reader, without disengaging them from the page, without googling the word. Would the reader, for example, guess that the word ‘earth’ comes from the Arabic *ard*? Certainly not, they would have to google the word.

Fashioning coinages, however, was enjoyable. I highly relished blending the culture-bound words and the de-Latinised-italicised-contextualised ones with others to generate the third method. I hyphenated the words to avoid any confusion or misreading. Those words, all understood by the reader, can be serviced to fashion and invent other comprehensible words, relying on two essential techniques. Firstly, I fabricated compound words by joining the culture-bound words and the de-Latinised-italicised-contextualised words with regular English words. This operation was very much similar to interlocking plastic bricks, or Legos, to design certain constructions. I had a long and diverse list of culture-bound and de-Latinised-italicised-contextualised words. It contains around a hundred words. Those were my bricks, spread out on the table, and I started joining them with hundreds of English words to generate others. Similar to playing Legos, some words did not match and refused to connect. They simply could not harmonise. Other words did match, but did not suit the context. This, again, limited my options. Other words, fortunately, both matched and fitted the work, producing exciting words such as ‘sultan-sized’ and ‘masjid-sized.’ The words, notice, imply religious meanings, which was another concern encountered while hybridising *The Couscous Western*.

The four linguistic methods possess an unequivocal Islamic identity. It is ubiquitous on my pages. It is apparent. This could be misconstrued by the Anglophone reader, who may confuse hybridisation for Islamisation and who may think that I am ‘converting the English language into Islam.’ Although I enjoy the sound of that phrase, this is not the case. Arabic possesses an Islamic identity because it is the language of Islam and the Holy Quran and both are inseparable. In the Arab and Muslim worlds, the daily conversations are replete with Islamic words and expressions. They are embedded in our language. In addition, the sayings of Prophet Mohammed teach Muslims to speak in a certain way, which is undoubtedly religious. One cannot, for example, say *I’ll see you tomorrow* without adding *inshallah*. To

illustrate further, to show appreciation, a Muslim may not usually say *thank you*, but say *may Allah bless you*.

Still, I was worried that the words were not enough to establish the necessary effects of hybridity, which encouraged me to think about other methods of hybridity—formal ones. I wished to experiment with new modes of narration by borrowing literary features typical of Arabic texts. But which ones? This decision was adventurous, admittedly because my knowledge of contemporary North African/Arabic/Algerian literature was limited. I had not read an Arabic novel for years. I knew of the prominent writers of North Africa and the Middle-East. I knew who was winning the awards, who was flaming debates and brewing controversies. But, I confess, my knowledge of their storytelling methods was limited. So how am I going to solve this, I asked myself? The answer led me to the past, referring me to classical Arabic storytelling traditions that I had studied in high school. I determined to transfer three classical features in particular into my anglophone prose—the frame story technique, the *maqama* and the *hakawati*. I hybridise *The Couscous Western* with new adaptations of the three formal methods.

Although the three formal techniques enrich and distinguish my prose, I will retain one in particular to advance my literary career. I am especially interested in the performative side of the neo-*hakawatis*. I believe this dramatic technique will become a unique feature of my work. A *hakawati* is an actor, energetic and theatrical. A *hakawati* is flamboyant. They ‘act out’ the story, bringing it to life by using different accents, voices and gestures. I call them ‘canes,’ tools harnessed to grab and imprison the listeners’ attention. I aim to harness them in my readings. I will not only write the story, but I will also perform it when delivering a reading. I will become my characters, materialise their traits, hopes and anxieties. I will speak in their voices. I will also flesh out the narrative voices of the stories, which are designed on the page in a particular way, which could be tonal, lingual and even musical. Many of my

paragraphs—especially the opening ones—conceal musical features, and they should not remain unsung. It should be voiced by its author and even by its reader. This literary choice will certainly serve my writer’s brand. It will be entertaining and memorable. I have attended and e-attended many readings, most of which made me yawn and almost fall asleep (except Gary Shteyngart’s). The majority of them were delivered in a rigid, lifeless manner, as though the writers were doing it reluctantly. My readings will be different. My readings will be alive and lively, because I am a *hakawati*.

4.2. Implications of the Defamiliarisation of English

To defamiliarise a language is to undress it. The concept of defamiliarisation implies rummaging through a particular language to learn about the foreign components that hide among its layers. It entails finding the alien words that have been incorporated into its system and uncover them, disclosing their foreignness, either overt or covert. This is an internal operation that strictly happens within the English language. There is no need to import words from another language to achieve hybridity. To defamiliarise a language is also to reveal its already-hybrid nature. The English language has borrowed thousands of words from other languages rapaciously. Those words have either been taken first-hand from the source or second-hand from other languages. Notably, this information should disprove the argument of those who seek to keep the English language ‘pure’ and ‘unpolluted’ with foreign words. The English language is already ‘polluted’ with non-English words. It has been for centuries.

Further, to defamiliarise a language is to expose its various appropriations and misappropriations. Defamiliarising a language requires a meticulous investigation from the writer interested in this concept. I have fathomed this while hybridising *The Couscous Western*, especially when peering for the Arabic words that inhabit English secretly. I had been using some of those words for years, without realising they were of Arabic origins. A

simple example is the word ‘coffee.’ This word did not sound or seem Arabic to me, let alone to the Anglophone speaker. Additionally, I have learned that the morphology of many Arabic words has been altered beyond identification, often deliberately. Yes, they have been modified on purpose for several reasons, such as the inability of the Anglophone speaker to pronounce the word in Arabic. Thus, the words have been twisted to ensure easy pronunciation. This process, in many cases, has negative connotations and results. So much is lost in Latinisation. So much is misunderstood in Latinisation.

When the word is modified, it loses its cultural properties. It loses its identity. When a word is Latinised, it is appropriated and coated with another culture. Consider the Arabic names of poets and scholars that have been Latinised. This, to me, represents a cultural loss. The cultural origins of those figures have been distorted and obscured after Latinising their names. Some are even attributed to Anglo culture and believed to be English or Greek. For example, Rumi is one of the most famous poets in the world. According to an article published by the BBC, he is ‘the best-selling poet in the US’ (Ciabattari 2014). He is read and loved by millions, including celebrities. His verses are even tattooed on their bodies (Brad Pitt has tattooed one of Rumi’s poems on his arm). But, I wonder, how many of them know that he was a scholar of the Holy Quran? How many of them know that his real name is Jalal al-Din Muhammed Rumi? How many of them know that he was a Muslim? I offer another example. Who is Averroes? The reader of this word would likely think that Averroes was a Greek philosopher, or a European Scholar. He was not. The word is a Latinisation of this name: Abu el-Walid Muhammed Ibn Ahmad Ibn Rushd. He was a Muslim scholar, active and popular in Islamic Spain. Latinising his name has erased his identity entirely.

True, so much is lost in Latinisation, but still so much is gained in defamiliarisation. So much is discovered and re-discovered in defamiliarisation. Defamiliarisation represents a return to the origins of a word. It communicates much information about its history, the

culture attached to it and even the story of its insertion into the English language. For instance, researching the roots of the words ‘moccasin’ and ‘skunk’ can take the researcher to the New World, when the European settlers started making contact with the Native Americans, taking their words and subsequently writing them ‘in their letters’ (Crystal 2013). Defamiliarisation, in a sense, exposes the English language by revealing that some of its features are not really its property, but merely classified, unacknowledged borrowings, taken from various sources.

In conclusion, to defamiliarise English is to make it idiosyncratic. It becomes the writer’s personal feature of identification, a unique mark of distinction. Applying the concept distinguishes the prose of the writer and renders it different, informing of a unique process. The result is an idiosyncratic English that only exists on the writer’s page as it does on mine. And it can exist on other writers’ pages. This concept is not particular to Arabic. It is important to stress that my term ‘defamiliarisation’ can be applied to other contexts, languages and literary landscapes. The English language, as known now, has borrowed from several European languages. French and German writers of English expression can exercise the term in their English texts, should they be interested in linguistic hybridity. A French writer can easily hybridise their texts by unearthing the thousands of French words that inhabit the English language. To achieve the same hybrid effect, a German writer of English expression can easily employ the five hundred thousand German words that dwell in the English language. There would be no need to seek external methods of hybridity.

CONCLUSION

Successful writers, I keep discovering, have a brand. It identifies them. Successful writers have a case to make. It heartens them to write. They write to open discussions about particular contemporary matters, which require attention, which could hopefully lead to change. Recurrent themes and ideas keep circulating in their books, short stories, essays and talks. Their language, besides, is distinct. It possesses personal touches. For example, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's brand includes discussing the remnants of colonialism in Africa, racial stereotypes in America and changes in the Nigerian society. In Hisham Matar's books, he explores themes of language and exile, of disappearances and appearances. Laila Lalami's recent books document the experience of the Moroccan immigrant in the US. Indeed, successful writers have brands, and this research with its two components—creative and critical—has accentuated, cultivated and enriched mine. I now realise its aspects. I now have a brand.

The findings of the first critical chapter still astonish me. It still astonishes me that the mere prefix 'North' manages to split the entire continent of Africa into two. I have realised that revising the term 'African literature' to include anglophone North African writers remains a challenging task. Several powerful forces keep the traditional definition of what constitutes African literature set in stone. These forces include the publishing industry, the institutions of literary prizes, magazines and, surprisingly, African writers themselves. Yes, Africans enliven the separation. Interestingly, North Africans rarely associate themselves with the continent; Sub-Saharan Africans do not consider North Africans African.

Those exclusionary notions affect African literature. It generally refers to black, Sub-Saharan writers. This conservative proclivity has generated a cultural organisation that conventionally expects creative works in English from Sub-Saharan writers and leaves North

African writers—who apparently do not conform to certain values of inclusion—excluded from the literary heritage of the continent. Therefore, as a North African writer, I am likely to be pre-excluded from this literature and my African identity is marginalised. This chapter have supplied me with many talking points to include in my brand. It has also equipped me with earnest arguments to discuss and these issues critically.

Chapter Two fosters the identity of my brand. It details the features of my idiosyncratic English, which is an element of my writing style. African literature offers many examples of linguistically and formally hybrid texts, written by postcolonial, transcultural and transnational authors. The research reveals that this creative choice generally revolves around the same conventional methods, mentioned in Chapter Two. The authors keep employing the same overused methods of hybridity, and, to achieve intelligibility, they follow Chantal Zabus' relexification, cushioning and contextualisation. Many writers, Africans and non-Africans, still harness them in their works to this moment. North African writers who write in English also follow this literary trend. I explain this in Chapter Three. The findings of this latter chapter expose the literary hybridity present in four works written by Laila Lalami and Hisham Matar. I discovered that both authors hybridise their prose in similar ways—either knowingly or unknowingly—rarely relying on Chantal Zabus' three practices. This discovery distinguishes and fosters the originality of my idiosyncratic methods of formal and linguistic hybridity.

Indeed, I have decided that my brand cannot include conventional features of hybridity. I seek originality, the achievement of a personal identity for my language. I endeavour to coat it with idiosyncratic manifestations, with a distinctive thumbprint and literary practices that strictly indicate me. I do not, therefore, adhere to Chantal Zabus' method of indigenisation. Instead, I tweak her term to establish mine—defamiliarisation, the act of hybridising the English text with elements that already exist within it. I demonstrate that my English texts can

be hybridised without looking outside the English language, but rather by looking within it. After all, the English language is already a hybrid language. So are all languages to some extent, which can be defamiliarised, which can be foreignised with elements that already exist within them. Important then is remembering that this concept can be harnessed to uncover the foreign elements encoded in other languages.

This operation of defamiliarisation becomes a meta-hybridisation of the English language. I exercise it in *The Couscous Western*. I strategically and culturally intervene in the creative component's language and form to italicise it culturally. I foreignise it with seven methods, four of which are linguistic, the rest formal. The seven methods layer my work effectively with a double-voiced, outlandish discourse as can be observed and read in the six novelettes.

The Couscous Western houses six stories, all written to serve collective objectives, all fashioned to endorse me as an emerging writer. The manuscript proves my existence as a writer of English expression. It is crafted in English. It breaks a literary stereotype that claims Algerian writers only produce books in Arabic and/or French. Publishing in English, although it may prove challenging, will undoubtedly open a discussion about an emerging third literature in North Africa. This English-language literature is already thriving, and being represented indirectly by such writers as Laila Lalami, Ahdaf Soueif and Hisham Matar. In and through my works, I endeavour to join my fellow writers in this literary movement and become one of its essential members.

I must admit that I still have concerns about *The Couscous Western*. The six stories introduce an Algerian setting that may not appeal to the Anglophone reader. What if, I sometimes wonder, the targeted reader is not interested in this world? What if, I sometimes worry, the reader is insular? This remains a preoccupation. But still I am hopeful that *The Couscous Western* will eventually be savoured and appreciated by readers. Publishing it will

pave the way for a new literary tide in Algeria. It will certainly lead to a change in the cultural sphere of the country. Publishing it will also create a literary visibility for Algerian writers who write in English, not only in African literature but also in World literature. To the best of my knowledge, no Algerian writer has yet published a prominent book originally written in English. The position continues to exist unoccupied, and it will be mine. I am ready to claim it. It will be mine.

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