



# The Role of North African Writers in the Development of French Literature



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Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, the former *Afrique du nord française*, now known in French by the Arabic term, *Maghreb*, represent an unusual case within Francophone Africa. The term Maghreb was used in Arabic by Medieval Arab geographers to refer to the region: Morocco was known as *Al-Maghrib al Aqsa* (The Farthest West), Algeria as *al-Maghrib al Awsat* (The Middle/Centre West) and Tunisia as *al-Maghrib al Adna* (The Nearest West). The term was adopted after Independence to clearly mark the region's affiliation to the Arab world. In 1989, a new political and economic union known as the *Union du Maghreb Arabe* (Arab Maghreb Union) was created along the lines of the European Union. This entity included Libya and Mauritania, and the five countries together are referred to as *Le Grand Maghreb* (the Great Maghreb). It was supposed to be the precursor for the creation of a North African Common Market (also referred to as Maghreb Economic Space), but it appears to have done little or nothing to achieve this and has no apparent impact on the everyday life of Maghrebians.

After achieving independence from France, all three countries of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia undertook a policy of Arabization, seeking to eradicate

French from public life and restore Arabic to its role as national language. Despite this, French continues to play an important role in a number of domains, and its status is far from that of a mere 'foreign language', which is the only official role it retains. The relationship between the Maghreb and the French language is complex, the result of a long and fraught shared history, particularly in the case of Algeria.

According to an Algerian linguist, Rabah Sebaa "the situation of the French language in Algeria is unquestionably unique in the world". During the colonial era – 1830–1962 for Algeria, 1881–1956 for Tunisia, and 1912–1956 for Morocco – French was the language of power and prestige, but was limited to the elite. The democratization of education means that more Maghrebians than ever before have learnt French over the last five decades, and vast improvements in mass communications mean that these people are increasingly exposed to French language and culture through a variety of means previously unavailable – Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia were an important part of the French Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and despite having gained independence some fifty years ago (1956 for Morocco and Tunisia, 1962 for Algeria), they continue to be closely linked in a number of ways, and remain important members of the international French-speaking community, albeit reluctantly, especially in the case of Algeria. Each country has pursued policies of Arabization, destined to remove the French language from public life and replace it with Arabic, yet French continues to be an important language in many areas of life. The proximity of the Maghreb to Metropolitan France, the extremely high numbers of Maghrebian nationals living in France, and the volume of trade and business between France and the countries of the Maghreb all contribute to the continued impact of the French language and culture on the Maghreb.

Writing in French by Africans was formerly classified as "colonial literature" and discussed as part of colonial studies for its ethnographical interest, rather than studied for its literary merit. Any texts in French from the colonies and territories that were considered to have merit were subsumed under the classification of French Literature.

On July 5, 1962, following a referendum announced by Marshal De Gaulle in Algiers, after 132 years, the country left France's domination and became independent. Indeed, the attempt to reach it this condition was not non-violent,

contrary to the efforts of the people of India under the leadership of Gandhi, and the Algerian revolutionaries were using all means possible to strike at the French forces in Algeria, including the bombing or Assassinations of French officers and members of the Algerian Bureau of Security, and, similarly the French also called the Algerian oppositions as terrorists, attempted to change the issue of the Algerian independence with taking action against turmoil and terrorism.

However, this struggle was rooted in decades, and the Algerian people had already called for membership in the French parliament and for equal rights with the French citizens. Arabic language teaching along with the French language in Algeria was another demand of the people of this country. But in 1954, the Algerian uprising entered a main stage, continuing the National Liberation Front movement up to eight years and announcing the independence of Algiers which resulted into killing one million people.

The struggles for independence during years of chaos influenced many of the concepts of modern life in France, and influenced literature, in addition to sociological issues. The Algerian war even affected the invention of a concept called "New Novel", and perhaps it could be considered as one of the factors that caused the novels to focus on internal feelings. This effect is also considerable from the field of cinema to the field of literature.

Perhaps Franz Fanon, the revolutionary writer who had a profound impact on the radical movements of the United States and Europe in the 1960s, is one of the first writers to figure out the struggles of Algeria and how it was reflected in the French–Algerian literature during the post–war struggle and post–war era.. Fanon, who was born at Martinique, was able to attract audiences beside Aimé Fernand David Césaire. Fanon, who focused his attempts on "black skins", believed that the violent revolution was the only effective way to end the repression of colonies and a way to free the Third World countries from western domination. He defends the violence for that purifying power, which removes human nature from the harshness, despair, and weakness and returns courage and dignity to him.

By his first book "Black Skin, White Mask" in 1952, Fanon analyzes the effects of colonialism and its destructive effects, which has a profound impact on civil rights, anti–colonial thoughts, and black–skin liberation movements around the world. He criticized colonial policies, which imposed a fabricated entity on black

skin people and forced the victims to acknowledge the white skin people to retain their false distorted identity, which is now also considered in post-colonial literature.

On the other hand, Camus was very famous after the war in 1945 and was appreciated by Sartre and all the libertarian intellectuals of that generation. By writing the book "The Rebel" in 1955, by raising his views on communism ended his connection with Sartre. Camus was never forgiven by his French compatriots since he demanded a ceasefire for the war of Algeria, and two years later, when he proposed a compromise, no one welcomed him. He inevitably remained silent and abandoned on both sides, while Sartre and others took the Algerian revolutionaries side.

Camus, in his last book, 'The First Man', created a person with a strange sense of loneliness. Although Camus's complex personality was ignored by start of Algeria's independence movement, defining him solely as a French author, bet he emphatically emphasized the importance of Algeria's issues.

Camus had a French nationality, but the French colonialists never approved and admitted him because of his poverty. Camus, a prominent figure among the Algerian intellectuals, who was politically influential in popular federation, found himself in a crowd of different races: Arabs, French and African populations. All these led him to write 'The First Man' and to recall a person who is in absolute loneliness. He should only grow up by force, with power and in solitude, to find his own morals and truths, until he finally finds himself in the form of human.

Camus also speaks of exile in the "The Stranger", and it is not an exile to a place, but exile from the intellectual world. Camus could not have been an impartial person in those circumstances. He always had a firm conviction to real resistance against totalitarianism, and issued a public turmoil against the Franco regime in Spain.

Today, having left behind all these topics, literature goes its own way, and North African literature is divided into two sections of French language and Arabic language. Arabic language goes back to the seventh century, when the Arabs expanded to North Africa, and French-speaking literature began by French colonialism.

In fact, the relationship between France and Algeria did not end in 1962, and it seems that from the view of post-colonial historical relations, as compared to colonial experience, it remains to be considerable. Today there are still some key points in postcolonial literature that can be traced back to half century ago.

As North African societies have passed years under the colonial regime, the works of literature that depicted the life in Africa inevitably depicted the situation during the period as colonies. Many great works during this period emerged that centered on the issue of liberation, independence and negritude. 'Things Fall Apart' (1958) by Chinua Achebe is among the first works of African literature that received worldwide praise.

The 1950s was a time when many African societies gained independence, beside the growth of liberation and literacy gradually African literature developed. In that period, African writers wrote in western languages, especially in English, French and Portuguese. In 1957 Albert Camus became "the first writer from African region to win the Nobel Prize".

Although today, the amount of literature in the Arabic language is as much as that in the French language, some famous writers, especially those who were born in France or have immigrated to France, write their works in French language. Because of this reason, the collection of French Literature in 20th and 21st century is highly indebted to the authors who are not originally French, but write in French and are in search for their identity.

