Language Choice in Moroccan Poetry

Rebecca M. Bull

Abstract

The multilingual landscape of Morocco, along with its long history of language contact and conflict, informs language choice in every context. Moroccan poets write in many different languages that are used in the region, and their decisions about the ways in which they express themselves are affected by this history. This thesis provides a general overview of Moroccan multilingualism, then examines several individual poets to shed light on the effects of language choice in Moroccan poetry. It examines poets’ language choice and its impacts, as well as the effects of translation and code-switching in poetry. The poetry thus reveals major themes of political activism (in both content and language choice), coexistence or separation of languages in literary spaces, and patterns of inclusion and alienation. These two sides of the study are mutually beneficial: understanding the themes permits a better understanding of the poetry, and a comprehension of the poetry allows for a better comprehension of larger social patterns.

Keywords: multilingualism, Morocco, Maghreb, Tamazight, code-switching, bilingual poetry, translation, diglossia
Table of Contents

1 - Introduction ..................................................................................................................3

1.1 - Historical Moroccan Linguistic Landscape ..............................................................4

1.2 - Current Status of Moroccan Multilingualism ..........................................................5

1.3 - Introduction to Moroccan Poets ................................................................................9

1.3.1 - Poets who write in one language ........................................................................9

1.3.2 - Poets who write in more than one language .......................................................10

1.3.3 - Summary of poets .................................................................................................11

1.4 - Language Coexistence .............................................................................................12

2 - Language Choice in Poetry .........................................................................................16

2.1 - Poetry and activism: Khadija Arouhal ...................................................................17

2.2 - Aversion to French: Leila Abouzeid .......................................................................18

2.3 - A Defined Choice: Mohammed El Amraoui .............................................................19

2.4 - Bilingual conversation: Mohamed Miloud Gharrafi ...............................................20

2.5 - Cross-modal conversations: Najeh Jegham .............................................................21

3 - Code-switching .............................................................................................................24

4 - Conclusion ....................................................................................................................29

References .........................................................................................................................32

Appendices .........................................................................................................................36
1 - Introduction

When the rose perceived the distance
between itself and the earth,
it brought forth its thorns.

From “Anatomy of the Rose” by Soukaina Habiballah

The Moroccan linguistic landscape is a snapshot of historical factors and current interactions, and such a multilingual society provides a rich opportunity for linguistic investigation. In a multilingual society, different languages have different levels of prestige and are used in different contexts – language choice is thus extremely important (Ferguson 1959). The breaking down of those contextual barriers and allowing languages to coexist is an important social pattern, for example in translation and code-switching in both speech and writing (Qualey 2013). There has been work done on language choice in poetry, and code-switching in song (Sarkar and Winer 2006, Davies and Bentahila 2008). However, there are large gaps in the work that has been done: there has been no research into either code-switching or language choice in Moroccan poetry. I therefore examine the effect of Morocco’s linguistic history on the language choices of Moroccan poets, and the ways that different languages can coexist in Moroccan poetry.

---

1 For the full text, see Appendix A.
2 I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Brook Danielle Liliehaugen, for her patient help and encouragement, as well as my other faculty and peer readers. I would also like to thank my Moroccan consultants: Najeh Jegham, Mohammed El Amraoui, Mohamed Miloud Gharrafi, and Khadija Arouhal. Any remaining errors are my own.
1.1 - Historical Moroccan linguistic landscape

Situated at the westernmost point of North Africa, with an identity that encompasses Arab, African, European, and indigenous influences, Morocco has been a multilingual society for most of its history. This has created a climate of language contact: speakers of different languages interact in a given environment, and these interactions influence the populations and the languages themselves. It is often said that language contact means language conflict, and it is true that the ways that various groups interact in a multilingual society is never entirely positive or equitable. There are always power dynamics at work, and governmental or social structures of power are created and maintained through language, often at great cost to speakers of the languages that do not hold power.

The indigenous people of the area are the Amazigh, and they were the sole inhabitants until the Muslim conquest, ending in 705 (Brett 2016: n.p.). In 1912, Morocco became a French protectorate, and throughout the 19th century language conflict intensified. Changes that were implemented during French rule included mandatory French instruction in schools, use of French in public and institutional spheres, and increased prestige for the language in Morocco. Children were taught solely in French in Moroccan schools during the entire colonial period, and French became a marker of education, social power, and opportunity (Daniel and Ball 2009: 127).

In 1956, Morocco gained independence from France, and for the next 44 years pursued a policy called Arabization. This policy aimed to redefine Morocco as an Arab nation, to counter the European identity that had been imposed upon it for so long. The mandatory French instruction in schools was replaced by another monolingual mandate, but in this case it was Standard Arabic.

---

This people and their language are also referred to using the word “Berber”, but many members of this group find the word offensive. I therefore use the word Amazigh (and Tamazight for the language family), since this is a general form of the word the groups use to refer to themselves.
that was the required language of instruction. Despite the efforts to encourage and require the use of Arabic, French continued to be an important language in official contexts and was still viewed as a language of prestige. After the year 2000, Arabization was no longer the official policy in Morocco, and the government began to attempt to implement other linguistic reforms (Daniel and Ball 2009: 128-9).

In addition to French, there was a small Spanish colonial presence in the north of Morocco, most notably around the city of Tangier and along the northern coast. The Spanish protectorate was established under the French protectorate, and Spanish did not have nearly as strong a linguistic or governmental presence in Morocco as a whole as French did.

Throughout the previously discussed period of monolingual mandates, all forms of Tamazight were consistently marginalized; there was no period when Tamazight languages were formally used for education, or in any official context. Although this language family was important to many inhabitants, it did not achieve any kind of official recognition at any point during the colonial period or during Arabization.

1.2 - Current status of Moroccan multilingualism

During the 21st century, the Moroccan government has attempted to work towards a more equitable treatment of the different languages in use in Morocco. French ([fra]⁴) and Standard Arabic ([arb]) continue to be the most widely used languages in official contexts, including in government, media, and education. Government services and important documents continue to be offered only in French, or in French and Standard Arabic (“Morocco: Country Profile” 2017: 5). Primary and secondary school is taught in Standard Arabic (“Morocco: Country Profile”)

⁴ All bracketed three-letter codes are ISO 639-3 language codes from Ethnologue.com (Simons and Fennig 2018).
2017), but learning French as a second language is compulsory from the age of eight ("Education System Morocco" 2015: 5). In addition, French education is still highly valued, and many parents send their children to bilingual private schools to ensure they are competent in French from a young age. Higher education is offered in both languages, often depending on the subject: Moroccan universities generally use French for teaching the sciences and Standard Arabic for the humanities (Kwon 2016: n.p.).

Moroccan Arabic ([ary]), also known as colloquial Arabic (in-context) or Darija, is only used in informal contexts (Daniel and Ball 2009: 125). There is no instruction of the language in schools. Media of a more informal type (for example, television soap operas) is normally in Moroccan Arabic, while more formal media (such as the news) is in Standard Arabic. Moroccan Arabic does not have an official writing system, so it is only written in informal contexts such as social media, when it is most often written using the Latin alphabet.

Tamazight languages are used similarly to Moroccan Arabic; they are not used as the language of instruction in schools and are not used in official contexts. There are three main languages in the Tamazight family that are in use in Morocco: Tamazicht ([tzm]), Tashelhit ([shi]), and Tarifit ([rif]). Figure 1 shows the distribution of these three varieties. A recent movement of Amazigh pride has been successful in some of its efforts for increased legitimization of the language. Most visibly, a standardized version, called Standard Moroccan Tamazicht or simply Tamazicht ([zgh]), was named as Morocco’s second official language alongside Standard Arabic ("The World Factbook: MOROCCO" 2018: n.p.). There are also some schools that are beginning to offer classes in Tamazicht (Daniel and Ball 2009: 126).

Spanish ([spa]) continues to play a limited role in the north of Morocco; there are still small regions of Morocco that are disputed between Morocco and Spain, as well as two
autonomous cities. One of these cities is marked in Figure 1 as “Ceuta (SPAIN)”. Spanish is offered as a foreign language in schools, but does not have a large presence in education or other official contexts.

Figure 1: Map of Language Distribution in the Maghreb Region (Simons and Fennig 2018)

English ([eng]) is another language that is in use in Morocco. Similarly to Spanish, it is also offered as a foreign language in schools, which contrasts with the mandatory learning of French. As a “global language” (Crystal 2003), it provides many of the same opportunities that it does in other regions where it is learned as a foreign language. English is the most used language worldwide in work, international relations, and trade, and knowing English is important to furthering a career and also to travel more safely and rewardingly (“L’importance d’une formation en Anglais 2018:
There is a recent movement towards more use of English in higher education; proponents argue, as stated above, that the increasing importance of English on a global scale means that graduates need to be competent in English in order to be competitive (Daoudi 2014).

It is also crucial to examine the relationship between the use of these many languages, and the first language or mother tongue of Moroccans. Figure 2 shows the first language of Moroccans in 2009, based on data from Daniel and Ball:

Figure 2: First Languages in Morocco

It is clear that there are great discrepancies between the languages that have the most prestige and official use in Morocco, and those that are spoken natively by Moroccans. 92.5% of the cited first languages are Moroccan Arabic or one of the languages in the Tamazight family; therefore,

---

5 This and all bracketed translations in the paper are mine.
92.5% of Moroccans’ first language is not used in any official context or used as the official language of instruction in any schools. Contrastively, French is one of the most (if not the most) prestigious language in Morocco, used in many official contexts, and required to be taught to children from a young age; yet it is the native language of only 0.2% of Moroccans.

1.3 - Introduction to Moroccan poets

Moroccan poets are writing in all of the languages discussed in above sections, and their poetry is thus a reflection of the linguistic landscape. I will be focusing on the work of a small set of poets writing in one or more Moroccan languages, in order to analyze their choice of language for their poetry. These poets and their work are summarized below, organized by their language of expression.

1.3.1 - Poets who write in one language

The first group of poets write in Standard Arabic. This is one of the most common languages of expression in Morocco, because writing in Standard Arabic allows poets to engage in conversation with a rich tradition of Standard Arabic poetry and literature in the Arab world, as discussed in “Diglossia” (Ferguson 1959: 330). The first Standard Arabic poet that I examine is Mohammed El Khadiri. One of El Khadiri’s poems, “A Red Lighter in the Heart of M”, is available online on the site *Words Without Borders*. The poem is available in Standard Arabic, translated into English by Chris Clarke, and also in oral form – the original Standard Arabic poem being read out loud by the poet (El Khadiri 2016). Another poet writing in Standard Arabic is Soukaina Habiballah, and one of her poems, “Anatomy of the Rose”, is similarly available in both Standard Arabic and English.

\[6\text{ Wordswithoutborders.org. A list of all Moroccan poetry referenced can be found in Table 1 on page 11, and full texts of any poetry excerpts given can be found in the appendices.}\]
(translated by Kareem Abu-Zeid) on *Words Without Borders* (Habiballah 2016). Finally, Leila Abouzeid also writes in Standard Arabic; she is the first Moroccan female writer to be translated into English (“Lecture by Moroccan Author Leila Abouzeid” 2014).

The fourth poet whose poetry forms part of the corpus I analyzed is Mourad Kadiri, who writes in Moroccan Arabic. An English translation of his poem “The Red Triangle Café” is available on *Words Without Borders*, translated by Kristin Hickman (Kadiri 2016). The original Moroccan Arabic version is not available.

The final Moroccan writer, Khadija Arouhal, is a politician, activist, and poet who writes in Tamazight. An English translation of her poem “They Told You”, by Olivia Baes, is available on *Words Without Borders*, although the original poem is not (Arouhal 2016).

1.3.2 – Poets who write in more than one language

The second group of poets write in more than one language. Three of them write in both Standard Arabic and French. The first is Mohammed El Amraoui, author of *Des moineaux dans la tête*, which is an illustrated collection of poems, each in both Standard Arabic and French. The second poet is Mohamed Miloud Gharrafi, who also writes in Standard Arabic and French and translates his poems. His most important bilingual collection is *Echos lointains*. In addition, I expanded my geographic focus slightly, and I will also discuss Najeh Jegham, a Tunisian poet and calligrapher. He also writes in French and Standard Arabic, and pairs his poems with Arabic calligraphy in his printed collections. Two such collections are *Épars* and *Distances d’aimer*. Finally, Hafsa Bekri-

---

7 Although it will not be discussed in depth here, Tunisia’s linguistic landscape is similar to Morocco’s: Berber languages, often called Shilha, were spoken by the indigenous inhabitants and are still in use today; French was enforced during the French protectorate period; a Tunisian Arabic dialect is the “de facto national working language”; and a policy of Arabization increased Standard Arabic use (Simons and Fennig 2018).
Lamrani is another Moroccan poet who writes in two languages, but in her case, they are English and French.

1.3.3 – Summary of poets

Table 1 summarizes the nine poets I have mentioned above. It gives their names, the languages in which they write poetry, any other languages that they speak (if known), and their specific poems or poetry collections I reference. In addition, full texts of all poetry excerpts I use can be found in the appendices.

Table 1: Moroccan Poets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poet</th>
<th>Language(s) of expression</th>
<th>Additional languages spoken (if known)</th>
<th>Poetry referenced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mohammed El Khadiri</td>
<td>Standard Arabic</td>
<td></td>
<td>“A Red Lighter in the Heart of M.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soukaina Habiballah</td>
<td>Standard Arabic</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Anatomy of the Rose”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mourad Kadiri</td>
<td>Moroccan Arabic</td>
<td></td>
<td>“The Red Triangle Café”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khadija Arouhal</td>
<td>Tamazight</td>
<td>Standard Arabic</td>
<td>“They Told You”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammed El Amraoui</td>
<td>Standard Arabic, French</td>
<td>Moroccan Arabic</td>
<td>Des moineaux dans la tête</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohamed Miloud Gharrafi</td>
<td>Standard Arabic, French</td>
<td>Moroccan Arabic, Tamazight</td>
<td>Echos lointains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Najeh Jegham (Tunisian)</td>
<td>Standard Arabic, French</td>
<td></td>
<td>Epars and Distances d’aimer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leila Abouzaid</td>
<td>Standard Arabic, English</td>
<td>French</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hafsa Bekri-Lamrani</td>
<td>English, French</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.4 - Language Coexistence

In this section I examine existing literature on linguistic prestige in multilingual societies (as explained in the theory of diglossia), poetry in those societies, the effect of historical factors on language choice, and code-switching in rap and song.

“Diglossia” by Charles A. Ferguson discusses the general themes of linguistic prestige in a bilingual society. When two languages are placed in opposition to each other in a society, and used by speakers in distinct contexts, one language can be seen as the “high” variety (H), and one as the “low” variety (L). Arabic is one of the examples used in the initial study: various dialects (Egyptian, Moroccan, etc.) are contrasted with Modern Standard Arabic (Ferguson 1959: 327, 340). This binary perception of language contact is limiting, and simplifies the situation in multilingual societies. For example, Moroccan Arabic is mentioned in the article, but Ferguson does not address the other languages that are in use there (Ferguson 1959). However, the theory can be extended – these conclusions about relative prestige of two languages in a bilingual society can be extrapolated to apply to any two languages in a multilingual society. Many scholars have worked on this expansion of Ferguson’s original theory, including Joshua A. Fishman and Steve Nicolle. They discuss the fact that societies can be diglossic even if all or most individual members are not bilingual, the way that languages that are more closely or distantly related can all exhibit diglossia, and the application of diglossia to multilingual societies (described, for example, as triglossia) (Fishman 1967 and Nicolle n.d.). Andrew Freeman also discusses the role of code-switching, challenging Ferguson’s neat model of dialects in complementary distribution by showing the mixing between different registers/dialects (Freeman 1996: n.p.). In more closely examining the multilingual situation in Morocco, we find an added complication in that the labels given to varieties can change depending on context. For example, Ferguson compares colloquial
Arabic (various dialects, including Maghrebi) and Modern Standard Arabic in “Diglossia”: colloquial Arabic is the L variety and Modern Standard Arabic the H variety (Ferguson 1959: 340). In Morocco, Modern Standard Arabic is the H variety when compared to Moroccan Arabic, but its status becomes more complicated when compared to French – it is not an L language by Ferguson’s criteria, but is certainly in a position of lower prestige than French in many contexts. Similarly, Moroccan Arabic, the L language in the original comparison, is the language of higher prestige and becomes a sort of H variety when compared to Tamazight.

One of the main ways that linguistic prestige was assessed in “Diglossia” was through the contexts in which each language was used – where there is inequality between the legitimacy or prestige of different languages, there will be inequality in their representation in different contexts (Ferguson 1959: 328-9). This includes both written and spoken contexts, with various levels of formality and audience, and literary spaces are one important example of this stratification. Literature, and more specifically poetry, is a complicated subject in any multilingual society. There are often striking differences between linguistic representation in different types of literature, or different spaces. For example, some literary contexts are discussed in “Diglossia”. Ferguson states, “In every one of the defining languages there is a sizable body of written literature in H which is held in high esteem by the speech community” (Ferguson 1959: 330). Thus the standard for literature is to use the H variety. The two most relevant more specific categories are poetry and folk literature. Poetry is listed as utilizing the H variety in a diglossic context, contrasted with folk literature which uses the L variety (Ferguson 1959: 329). This is a crucial claim for several reasons. First, it acknowledges the major usage of the L variety in at least one domain of literature. Since literature in H is the standard, the fact that any type of literature is being produced primarily in L shows the complexity of these literary spaces. In addition, Ferguson briefly addresses the
complexity of language choice in poetry, saying: “In all the defining languages some poetry is composed in L, and a small handful of poets compose in both, but the status of the two kinds of poetry is very different, and for the speech community as a whole it is only the poetry in H that is felt to be “real” poetry” (Ferguson 1959: 329). This delegitimization of less-prestigious languages, and the elevation of the H language(s), as reflected in poetry, is an important characteristic of multilingual societies.

In addition to unequal treatment, this situation of specific contexts for specific varieties also maintains barriers between languages. By clearly defining the situations in which each must be used, these systems prevent linguistic varieties from ever coexisting. This is addressed in Lynx M. Qualey’s article “Whose “New African Writing”?”. Qualey discusses the divisions between writers with different languages of expression, and different literary spaces in multilingual African societies (Qualey 2013). This division, and the hope for unification, is discussed in more detail in section 3.

The inequality between languages and its effect on language choice in poetry is informed by Moroccan history. As discussed above, this history of language contact and conflict caused many complicated linguistic relationships. The language choices of poets in these societies are therefore affected by this history, in many specific ways. These factors include many of the themes discussed earlier in the introduction, such as historical interaction and political mandates (whether historical or current). The education of individual poets, and especially their personal experiences with the effects of this legacy, also play a role. The combination of all of these factors is visible in poets’ language of expression, the content of their poems, and the ways that they engage publicly with their work. Each of these factors will be discussed in more detail later, using examples of specific poets to demonstrate larger themes.
The choice of language of expression for Moroccan poets is complicated enough, but some
of them also choose to write in more than one language. This is visible in several collections of
translated poetry, and commentary about the translation will be provided. In addition, there are
some limited examples of code-switching in these bilingual collections, the analysis of which will
contribute to the larger discussion of code-switching. Many studies have been done about code-
switching in speech, and a few have also been done about written code-switching. Previous
research has examined the effect of code-switching in music. For example, Davies and Bentahila
examined code-switching in bilingual pop songs (2008). One important aspect of their research
was their merging of the discussion of translation and code-switching. They state that “both can
be used to achieve similar effects, and that demarcation lines are not always clear” (Davies and
Bentahila 2008: 267). This provides support for the decision to focus on translation and code-
switching simultaneously in the same collections in this thesis. Davies and Bentahila’s conclusions
are summarized thus: “translation and code-switching may be used as affirmations of identity, as
in-group markers, as stylistic devices, as a means of opening up the lyrics to outsiders or of
producing effects such as alienation and exclusion” (Davies and Bentahila 2008: 247).

In addition, Mela Sarkar and Lise Winer analyzed the use of code-switching in Quebecois
rap. They discussed both general language choice and code-switching, as I do here. Similarly to
Davies and Bentahila, they found two apparently contradictory effects: “Switching strategies
perform functions of both ‘globalisation’ and ‘localisation’” (Sarkar and Winer 2006: 173), which
relates to Davies and Bentahila’s two findings of “opening up the lyrics to outsiders” and
“alienation and exclusion” (Davies and Bentahila 2008: 247). Sarkar and Winer also see a root
effect of legitimization of multilingualism, and, by extension, the individual languages used: the
code-switching strategies are “fundamentally linked by a positioning of multilingualism as a natural and desirable condition” (Sarkar and Winer 2006: 247).

2 - Language Choice in Poetry

They told you
That you are your father’s when you’re young!
That you are your spouse’s when you’re married!
That you are your grave’s once you’re senile!
That you are born of the wrong rib!
That your testimony is invalid!
I tell you
My body is my own property!
I will free myself and rebel against darkness and lies!
I will chase the wounds from my life!

From “They Told You” by Khadija Arouhal

Given the linguistic status and history of Morocco, it is no wonder that the choice of language in any context is a complicated one. There are many factors, both personal and larger-scale, that influence such a choice, and it has implications that reach beyond that individual poet or context. By examining in more detail five of the poets discussed (Khadija Arouhal, Leila Abouzeid, Mohammed El Amraoui, Mohamed Miloud Gharrafi, and Najeh Jegham), we discover some of the contributing factors and effects of their choice of a language of expression.

---

8 For the full text, see Appendix B.
2.1 - Poetry and activism: Khadija Arouhal

Khadija Arouhal has been vocal about her choice of language in her writing, and she is an advocate for Amazigh rights (Lamlili 2014: n.p.). Lamlili explains the background that she brings to her language choice: Arouhal wrote a poem in Tamazight while in middle school, and added it to a public display of other students’ work. She discovered a few days later that her poem had been taken down. Although she didn’t know why it had been removed, from then on, “elle a pris la décision de ne plus écrire qu'en tifinagh pour réparer ce geste irrevérencieux pour son identité [...] she made the decision to only write in Tifinagh [Tamazight] to repair this irreverent gesture towards her identity” (Lamlili 2014: n.p.).

According to her Facebook page, Arouhal is a poet, media director, and politician (About). Her poetry is “militant and often touches on taboo subjects” (“Contributor: Khadija Arouhal”). One of her poems, “They Told You” rages against the devaluing of women in her culture; most of the lines in the poem end with an exclamation mark, and it draws on cultural, historical, and religious symbols of gender inequality to highlight the injustice (Arouhal 2016). The poem is clearly one facet of her activism, one way of pushing back against the discrimination that she faces from the intersection of her identities.

Importantly, the poem was written in Tamazight, although only an English translation is on the Words Without Borders site. It also specifically discusses the silencing of women’s voices, for example in the first two lines, a continuation of the title: “[They told you] Stick a toothpick of silence in your mouth! / That your word should never bear witness!” (Arouhal 2016). It is clear from the story of Arouhal’s poem in middle school that this silencing does not only happen along gendered lines, but also along linguistic lines; her own expression in her native language was silenced from a young age. Arouhal’s decision to write this and all her other poems in Tamazight
is an intentional pushing back against this silencing, and the language is a crucial way to fight these oppressive systems. When she was a child, her Tamazight poetry was taken off a notice board; now this poetry, along with her story, is available online for the entire world to see.

Finally, her choice of Tamazight as her language of expression is important because of the way that it contributes to the legitimization of the language. Amazigh literature and poetry has existed for many years, both in oral and written form; the Tifinagh writing system that is still in use today (and that Arouhal used to write her poem in middle school) dates back to ancient times. However, many of the old documents were lost, and there has been an important emergence of a new written body of literature since the 20th century, which is an ongoing process (Chafii 2015: 3). Therefore, the legitimization of written literature and poetry in Tamazight is a recent and continuing process, and any poetry written in Tamazight, especially poetry that is shared so widely, is an important contribution to the work of legitimization.

2.2 - Aversion to French: Leila Abouzeid

Leila Abouzeid writes poetry and literature in Standard Arabic and English. She has spoken freely about her decision to write in these two languages, rather than French, which she also speaks. She describes her aversion to French from a young age, from when she was taught in French and Standard Arabic at private school. For her, writing in French requires concessions to France and French people, and a maintaining of their “preconceived images about Moroccans” (Khannous 2010: 176). She criticizes other Moroccan writers for writing in French, and she is well-known for this stance among a literary community that historically has used French as the primary language of expression, and in which many continue to do so (Khannous 2010: 176). Although in many countries English has the same role as the language of the colonizer, for Abouzeid and many other
Moroccans, English is a much more neutral language. It is not required in schools, and is not connected in the same way to the history of oppression, so it is Abouzeid’s preferred way of “communicating with the West” (Khannous 2010: 176).

2.3 - A Defined Choice: Mohammed El Amraoui

Mohammed El Amraoui writes in two of the languages that he speaks (French and Standard Arabic); he also speaks colloquial Arabic. He makes the distinction that he learned his two languages of poetic expression in school, but says, “Ce sont deux langues quotidiennes pour moi [they are two everyday languages for me]” (El Amraoui, 21 September 2018, personal communication).

For El Amraoui, Classical (Standard) Arabic is the “majorité [majority]” choice, almost the default language of expression. He talks about the way that a Moroccan writer who creates literature in Arabic “peut être lu aussi bien en Algérie qu’au Liban ou en Égypte [can be read just as well in Algeria as in Lebanon and Egypt].” As for French, he started writing in it to practice what for him was a difficult language, then learned to “aimer cette langue et sa musicalité [love that language and its musicality]” (El Amraoui, 21 September 2018, personal communication). It is clear that even his second language of expression has a strong emotional attachment for him.

El Amraoui also speaks explicitly to the political and social implications of poetry, especially in the 1980s. He says that Arabic poetry was popular at that time, and that his generational group listened to poetry on tapes; they had access to “Lebanese, Iraqi, Palestinian, and Egyptian” poets. Most importantly, they wrote their own poetry and read it aloud in public. According to El Amraoui, “Écrire de la poésie et le lire en public était un acte subversif [Writing poetry and reading it in public was a subversive act]” (El Amraoui, 21 September 2018, personal communication).
communication). This personal and national history is clearly something that informs El Amraoui when he writes poetry today, and gives poetry written in Arabic more meaning for him.

Interestingly, El Amraoui maintains a distinct mental separation between his two languages of expression, even when they are in the same collection. He says, “J’écris en arabe et en français, ou plus précisément j’écris en arabe OU en français. Pas les deux en même temps [I write in Arabic and French, or more precisely I write in Arabic OR in French. Not both at the same time].” He also says that “Tous les poèmes du recueil Les Moineaux sont écrits à l’origine en arabe et traduits en français [All the poems in the collection [Des] Moineaux [dans la tête] are written originally in Arabic and translated into French]” (El Amraoui, 21 September 2018, personal communication). This division seems to reflect the divisions in the larger literary world, in which languages are kept separate and not permitted to coexist in literary or physical spaces. The fact that El Amraoui maintains this separation is unexpected, since he is creating a collection that does permit the languages to coexist in the same book. Evidently, despite this physical closeness, there is still a clear delineation between languages in his mind.

2.4 - Bilingual conversation: Mohamed Miloud Gharrafi

As discussed above, Mohamed Miloud Gharrafi wrote the bilingual collection of poetry Echos lointains. In our correspondence, he specifically but briefly discussed his goals in presenting these bilingual poems in the format that he does. He writes most of his poems in Arabic and some in French, translates them himself, and presents each poem in both languages. He does this “surtout [pour] faire découvrir [aux] lecteurs francophones une partie de ma poésie [primarily to allow francophone readers to discover a section of my poetry]” (Gharrafi, 4 December 2018, personal communication) – this is clearly an important function of translation in general, and one
of the main strengths of bilingual collections. Importantly, Gharrafi told me: “J’ai fait exprès de ne pas révéler la langue d’origine de chaque poème [I purposely did not reveal the original language of each poem]” (Gharrafi, 14 September 2018, personal communication). In this way, the collection escapes from the constraints usually imposed on such works, in refusing to be defined by translation in only one direction. This fluid interpretation of the borders between the two languages contrasts sharply with El Amraoui’s clear delineation and consistent original language for his poems, showing that even poets who write in the same language(s) can have very different views about those languages’ role.

Gharrafi is also cognizant of the impact of his upbringing on his language of expression in poetry. When asked why he chooses to write in the languages that he does, he responded “J’écris plus en arabe qu’en français… Ce n’est pas un choix. J’écrivais en arabe parce que c’est la langue dans laquelle j’ai accédé à la poésie [I write more in Arabic than in French… It’s not a choice. I wrote in Arabic because that is the language in which I gained access to poetry].” He explains his relationship to Tamazight similarly: “Je parle couramment le berbère, mais je n’ai jamais écrit dans cette langue. Certainement parce que je n’ai pas bercé dans la poésie berbère [I speak Berber [Tamazight] fluently, but I have never written in that language. Certainly because I was not raised in Berber poetry]” (Gharrafi, 4 December 2018, personal communication). Thus even in the case of a poet who believes in blurring the borders between languages, there are still clear differences in his relationship with the various languages that he speaks.

2.5 - Cross-modal conversations: Najeh Jegham

Najeh Jegham, a Tunisian poet, is the author of the two collections Épars and Distances d’aimer. Épars is entirely in French, but that is not his only language of expression. Like Mohamed Miloud
Gharrafi, he writes in Standard Arabic and French, as demonstrated in *Distances d’aimer*. However, Gharrafi’s collection is not of translated poems, but instead the first half of the book is written in French, and the second half in Arabic (the poems in each half are independent). In this way it more closely resembles our intuitive conception of bilingualism and exhibits a type of holistic code-switching. The book is set up so that the two languages move towards the center, as if they are converging. Even such simple details as the page numbers contribute to this impression, since they count up from both ends of the book, with exactly the same number of pages; the center border section is the same page range in both the Arabic and French section (Jegham 2003: 50-63). The book thus feels like a joining together of the two languages, allowing them to come closer while still maintaining some degree of separation.

Another way that Jegham explores poetry in different languages in this book is through quotations from other poems. These excerpts are present in both halves of the book, scattered throughout the pages. They remind the reader of the long and illustrious tradition of poetry in both Standard Arabic and French, as discussed in “Diglossia” (Ferguson 1959: 330). This reminder is more effective because the poetry referenced is from masters of the craft in both traditions. This includes Saint-John Perse (Jegham 2003: 6, 18 (French)), a French diplomat who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1960 (“Saint-John Perse”), and Abdul Wahab Al-Bayati (Jegham 2003: 35 (Arabic)), a revolutionary and famous Iraqi poet (“Abdul Wahab Al-Bayati”). Even though the collection breaks convention in many ways, it also becomes part of two rich literary traditions, and Jegham points the reader to that history through the addition of the short quotations.

The most interesting thing about this collection is the calligraphy that forms the border between the two languages at the center of the book. It is primarily Arabic calligraphy, but also incorporates French words, in an unusual mixing of writing systems and art styles (Jegham 50-
There is a clear feeling of experimentation, of a conversation between the two languages. According to the biography on the back cover, "Pour lui, écrire, traduire, calligraphier sont des façons de lire et de donner à lire, dans la multiplication et le croisement des langues et des formes [For him, writing, translating, making calligraphy are ways of reading and allowing others to read, in the multiplication and the crossing of languages and forms]" (Jegham 2003). His comments and the visual effect of the calligraphy suggest that he views calligraphy as a way to bridge the gap between languages, to allow them to exist in the same space and create art together. In his book the calligraphy blurs the line between writing systems, and also guides the reader from one language to another as they read the book. This coexistence through calligraphy is a fascinating answer to the problem of linguistic divides in literature.

---

9 For examples of this calligraphy, see Appendix C.
3 - Code-Switching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Si je voulais dormir je déplierais les lignes de ta dernière lettre</td>
<td>[If I wanted to sleep I would unfold the lines of your last letter]</td>
<td>إذا ما أردت النعاس فرشت سطور رسالتك الأخيرة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloire à celui qui a étreint l’amour sous la mitraille</td>
<td>Glory to the one who clasped love under gunfire</td>
<td>فطوبى لمن عانق العشق تحت الدمار</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloire à celui qui a dit que la paix est une herbe qui pousse dans le cœur de l’amée</td>
<td>Glory to the one who said that peace is a plant that sprouts in the heart of the beloved</td>
<td>طوبى لمن قال أن السلام نباتقلب الحبيبة</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From “Poème d’amour en état de guerre [Love poem in a state of war]” by Mohammed El Amraoui

Code-switching describes the use of two or more languages in the same utterance. It is usually applied to the type of verbal switching that characterizes conversation in most if not all multilingual societies. However, it can also be applied to poetry as well; in particular, there are many easily discoverable poems that exhibit Spanish-English code-switching. This conversation between languages has traditionally been devalued as a marker of lack of linguistic skill or carelessness (as discussed in Weinreich 1953), but it is increasingly legitimized, and its features and effects have been studied in many contexts (as in Myers-Scotton 1989 and 1995). Clearly many different languages of expression are being used by Moroccan poets and writers, some of whom use more than one language, either separately or in translation of the same material.

---

10 For the full text, see Appendix D.
However, in my research I was not able to find examples of true code-switching in Moroccan poetry. First, I will examine the reasons for this lack, and then I will discuss the few partial examples of code-switching that I found.

We know that Moroccan speech exhibits code-switching just like other multilingual societies, and we know that there is poetry being produced in at least five languages in use there. Because I was able to find bilingual collections of poetry in Arabic and French, I hoped that I would also find code-switching poetry between these two languages, but I did not. Is this poetry being written, and it is simply not being published? Or is it being published, but not online or not in a format that is accessible to people outside the community? If the code-switching is between a language or languages that I do not speak, it is possible I was just looking in the wrong places. More research, preferably in person in Morocco, would need to be conducted to determine whether this is the case.

However, perhaps this type of poetry is not being created. Why would that be? Mohammed El Amraoui told me that although there are many poets who write in either Arabic or French, there are not very many who write in both (El Amraoui, 13 September 2018, personal communication). Even bilingually translated poems are therefore difficult to find, let alone poems where two languages mix together in one piece. This could be explained at least partially by the differences between Arabic and French; English and Spanish (used in the examples of code-switching poetry I have seen) come from more similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds and use the same alphabet, while French and Arabic are not even written in the same direction. However, the differences may be more specific to the region and the interactions between languages there, as opposed to being simply between the languages themselves. As Lynx M. Qualey writes, “In North Africa, language battles have also kept writers apart: Francophone apart from the Arabophone;
writers who work in Modern Standard Arabic apart from authors who write in colloquial Arabics; Tamazight writers apart from everyone” (Qualey 2013: n.p.).

There is also the consideration of the literary traditions that poets become part of when they write in one language or another. As discussed above by Abouzeid, Francophone poetry plays into European traditions and is seen as almost an act of betrayal by poets who feel strongly about disconnecting from colonial legacy. Arabophone poetry connects to a long tradition of classical poetry in the Middle East and elsewhere, with strict rules and an impressive and beautiful history. English poetry is seen by some as a liberation from colonialism; by others as just a connection to a different Western tradition. Tamazight poetry is inherently a rebellion, an identity that is embraced by poets like Arouhal. With these strong emotions and historical baggage attached to language choice, is it any wonder that it is hard for different languages to coexist in Moroccan poetry? However, Qualey also offers the assurance that “Languages don’t always need to exist in separate literary spaces. A proliferation of languages can be cross-translated, and held together both in physical spaces and literary works” (Qualey 2013: n.p.). This claim is supported by the bilingual works of El Amraoui, Gharrafi, and others.

Despite this lack of true code-switching in the poetry that I found, there are some isolated examples that hint at this linguistic relationship. In some ways, these limited examples exhibit the same effects that have been observed in other instances of code-switching, and also of translation in general. As discussed above, according to Davies and Bentahila, code-switching and translation in popular songs “may be used as affirmations of identity, as in-group markers, as stylistic devices, as a means of opening up the lyrics to outsiders or of producing effects such as alienation and exclusion” (Davies and Bentahila 2008: 247). These effects are also seen in speech, poetry, rap, and other media.
In El Amraoui’s collection *Des moineaux dans la tête*, there are a few examples of Arabic words that were preserved in the French translation of the poems. In one poem, entitled “Aziz Lougraida en 2 x 60 vers”, there are two Arabic words in the French translation: “gnaoui” and “daqqa”: “sur le rythme du *gnaoui* / ou de la *daqqa* de Marrakech” (El Amraoui 71, emphasis in original).11 These words both describe North African musical styles; they would most likely not be familiar to a non-North African reader. Although they are set apart from the text through italics, marking their different language of origin, they are not explained in footnotes or elsewhere. It is clear that this example of code-switching, in conjunction with the translation, exhibits the effects discussed by Davies and Bentahila. The two contradictory effects of “opening up the lyrics to outsiders” and “producing effects such as alienation and exclusion” are both at play here (Davies and Bentahila 2008: 247). In translating the poems and presenting them in both languages side-by-side, El Amraoui has opened his poetry up to be enjoyed potentially by monolingual speakers of either Arabic or French. However, if non-Arabic speaking or non-North African people read this poem, they will be caught by these unfamiliar words. Since they are unexplained, readers have to either seek out definitions themselves, or only loosely understand the meaning from context. This produces a clear effect of alienation, a reminder that the reader is trespassing on the edges of a culture and language that is not their own.

Another example of limited code-switching in the collection is found in the poem “Mohamed Ambri en 60 vers.”12 The poem is based around the word *anbar* (عنبر), meaning *amber*, *ambergris*, or *warehouse*, and the nominal form of the titular character’s surname. The word is not translated (merely transliterated), and as it is slowly spelled out, neither are the letters; their names are written out in French as in Arabic: *ayn*, *nun*, *bāʾ*, *rāʾ*, and *ayn* and *bāʾ* again (El Amraoui 57-

11 For the full text, see Appendix E.
12 For the full text, see Appendix F.
63). These letters would not be familiar to monolingual French speakers, and would not necessarily correspond to their understanding of the components of the word anbar. The choice to use Arabic letter names to spell a transliterated word is also not consistent between different poems; in the work previously discussed, the Arabic letter چ is written as m in the French translation, as opposed to being transliterated, perhaps as mîm (73). Therefore it is a deliberate choice in this particular poem, and again, it produces an exclusionary effect; a word that is already unfamiliar to them, whose definition they must seek out, is also unfamiliar in its component parts; the most basic aspects of reading in a language they are familiar with are being deconstructed.

An example that even more closely approaches true code-switching is found in the poem “Rose de gazelle” in the collection Echos lointains by Mohamed Miloud Gharrafi. There is a full line of Arabic text in the French version of the poem: its first line is “Dân dani dàn dani dâynî...” (Gharrafi 26, emphasis in original). 13 There are two reasons why this does not constitute true code-switching: it is variations on a name or nonsense syllable, not true words; and it is separated out (at the beginning of the poem) and does not persist throughout. Despite these reasons, this is in some ways a more compelling example than the isolated words found in El Amraoui’s poems. We see the same effects here as in the excerpts discussed above. If these syllables come from a song, the song may be familiar to Arabic-speaking readers, and even if they are just nonsense, the rhythm and phonetic patterns will be familiar. To a reader from outside this culture, however, the opening line will be entirely unfamiliar. This line thus sets a tone for the poem, of either exclusion or inclusion. The emotional effect of inclusion also persists throughout the poem, as the speaker discusses a loved one singing that syllabic chant, because this may evoke an emotional response if the reader has similar memories. Due to the emotions involved, the effect of exclusion is also

---

13 For the full text, see Appendix G.
stronger; an outside reader must deal with something deeper than just a lack of familiarity about a place or an alphabet. Therefore, even if there had been a footnoted explanation for this line, it could not have gone far towards mitigating the effect of exclusion, or towards being a substitute for the inclusive effect.

4 - Conclusion

Ne transporte pas ta patrie dans la valise. Tout explosif ne voyage pas dans le train.

[Do not carry the homeland in your suitcase. No explosive can travel in the train.]

From “Explosif [Explosive]” by Mohamed Miloud Gharrafi

This examination of poets provides evidence for different types of language interaction. One of the clearest patterns is the conscious political activism of poets through their work and language choice. Three of the poets examined, Leila Abouzeid, Khadija Arouhal, and Mohammed El Amraoui, explicitly discussed this activism. Poetry, for them, and more specifically poetry in certain languages, is a way of fighting back, a way of reclaiming culture, a “acte subversif [subversive act]” (El Amraoui, 21 September 2018, personal communication). This provides clear support for the idea that history and politics inform artists’ language choice, and that this influence is not only subconscious but in fact a deliberate choice by the artists themselves.

---

14 For the original, see Appendix H.
Another pattern seen in the examination of the poets is the separation or coexistence of languages, explored primarily through Mohammed El Amraoui and Mohamed Miloud Gharrafi. It is clear from earlier discussion that these two poets are similar on the surface, but they have a different outlook on the way that different languages are in conversation in Morocco. As mentioned above, all of El Amraoui’s poems are written in Standard Arabic and translated into French, while Gharrafi makes a deliberate effort not to reveal the language of origin of his poems. This is a contribution to the ideas discussed in “Whose ‘New African Writing’”, about the difficulty of permitting different languages to be present in the same space. El Amraoui seems to be contributing to the valorization of separation between languages; even though he has created a space where both French and Arabic are present, his opinions about the collection show that he does not see them existing there completely simultaneously, or in exactly the same space. The end result is a maintaining of this literary separation between languages, that is often valued in many multilingual cultures. Gharrafi, on the other hand, seems to make a deliberate effort against this separation, holding both languages in mutual translation and influence, but even his version of coexistence maintains that border.

The complexity of these language interactions is therefore one possible reason for the lack of code-switching and true coexistence of languages found in Moroccan poetry. However, the limited examples of code-switching that are visible in the bilingual poetry of Mohammed El Amraoui and Mohamed Miloud Gharrafi do show the same effects that have been documented in other forms of artistic code-switching. These established patterns of inclusion and alienation add yet another layer to the complicated linguistic tableau.

Whatever specific choices they make, and whichever ways they contribute to larger conversations about language choice, poetry, and activism, these poets are an integral part of the
context in which they are working. Their choices are informed by historical and current factors, and the decisions they make now, and the poetry they create, will influence other poets in both the present and the future. The conclusions drawn here reflect on the importance of analyzing every aspect of a piece of art: the context in which it was made, the stylistic choices, the actual content of the art, and finally the societal implications at each of these levels. By analyzing the context of Moroccan poetry, we learn more about the poems; in turn, learning more about the poems helps shed light on historical and current societal patterns.
REFERENCES


AROUHAL, KHADIJA. About. Facebook.


“Lecture by Moroccan Author Leila Abouzeid.” 2014. *American Language Center & Arabic Language Institute in Fez*.


NICOLLE, STEVE. Sociolinguistics, Unit 3: Multilingualism and Diglossia. *Academia.edu*.


Appendix A: “Anatomy of the Rose” by Soukaina Habiballah

Anatomy of the Rose

When the rose perceived the distance between itself and the earth, it brought forth its thorns.

When the rose realized that a single leg couldn’t take it anywhere, that it was voiceless and mostly had no echo, it thought of fragrance.

The blooming petals: a navel.
The stem: a rope that binds it to the earth’s deep womb.

That rose will be born someday in a lover’s hand or between the shores of a book.

© Soukaina Habiballah. By arrangement with the author. Translation © 2016 by Kareem Abu-Zeid. All rights reserved.

Appendix B: “They Told You” by Khadija Arouhal

They Told You

Poetry by Khadija Arouhal

Translated from French by Olivia Baes

Stick a toothpick of silence in your mouth!
That your word should never bear witness!
That your song should never be the echo of fire
While a fire is being prepared for you in the afterlife!

They told you
That your feet should be nailed to the household!
That you should never reach a market or a beach!

They told you
That you are your father’s when you’re young!
That you are your spouse’s when you’re married!
That you are your grave’s once you're senile!
That you are born of the wrong rib!
That your testimony is invalid!

I tell you
My body is my own property!
I will free myself and rebel against darkness and lies!
I will chase the wounds from my life!
I tell you
How is it that you think you are great,
that you are a poet and singer,
that you are polygamous?

What is it that makes us different, you and I,
So different that you claim strength, supremacy, and power?

You and I, we’re the same!

Wake up from your lies, my brother!
Do not try to bind my footsteps!
If you see Evil in me, know it is only in your mind
If you say that it is God who told you so

I answer that you are wrong: God is the Lord of Kindness.

© Khadija Arouhal. Translation © 2016 by Olivia Baes. All rights reserved.


Appendix C: Mixed Arabic and French calligraphy by Najeh Jegham
Appendix D: “Poème d’amour en état de guerre” by Mohammed El Amraoui

POÈME D’AMOUR EN ÉTAT DE GUERRE

Je hume dans tes seins
l’odeur de la terre
la terre que mes pas ont quitée
Je hume l’oreiller de tes rêves
quand tu dors avant moi
et quand tu dors après moi
Je hume la brise de ton souffle
quand l’air devient funeste
car leurs maisons, détruites
les gens habitent leurs rêves
Et moi
depuis quarante ans
je n’habite
que le vent de ton parfum
Je n’ai d’autre maison
d’autre toit
que ton cœur
car l’amant
quand les guerres le chassent
que les exils le poursuivent
se jette dans les bras de l’amoureuse
Et si je voulais monter au pays
je laisserai mon poème grimper
à tes nattes

Si je voulais voyager
je chevaucherais tes sandales
sous la pluie, sous les arbres
e nuestamment sous la lumière de la lune
Si je voulais dormir
je déplierais les lignes de ta dernière lettre
Gloire à celui qui a éteint l’amour
sous la mitraille
Gloire à celui qui a dit
que la paix
est une herbe
qui pousse
dans le cœur
de l’amoureuse
Appendix E: “Aziz Lougraïda en 2 x 60 vers” by Mohammed El Amraoui

Aziz Lougraïda en 2 x 60 vers

Me voici imaginant la scène :

Tu couches avec tes pas l'étouff d'hui
à la Place où s'efface
l'affaissement de l'étre
là où tu unifiais tous
les secrets de la ville
là où se rencontraient les antonymes :
vacarme et proverbes
magie et science

Je te vois criant ta folie
randou qui transpirait ta raison
en chaque fois que tu te sens étouffé
par les formes rigides des choses
tu ouvres le cœur
pour lui raconter tes rêves
et reproduire ce qui s'y passe

Je te vois marcher le matin dans les ruelles
recueillant les scènes :
voici un homme gros
au milieu de pieds et de fumées,
vendu du henné et d'étranges herbes

Et voir une autre qui, en colère et pressé,
conduit un âne chargé de tanti de marchandises
et crie :
« Attention à toi, homme au corps large ! »

Voici une femme qui,
assis
au milieu de pieds et de fumées,
vendu du henné et d'étranges herbes

Et voir une autre qui, en colère et pressé,
conduit un âne chargé de tanti de marchandises
et crie :
« Attention à toi, homme au corps large ! »

Te vois égayant
le quotidien et le cosmique
Le gai, tu le sais,
est une qualité comme chez les hommes
de la Ville Rouge

Égayé tu es comme les plantes
(une plante égayée,
dit le dictionnaire des Arabes,
est une plante qui viennent de s'épanouir
les fleurs ou les fruits)

Tu marches nonchalament,
u du tour inquiétude
tu embrasses le dire
en tout lieu et en chaque élément :

Voici un enfant qui vend des cigarettes en détail
ou attend des chaussures à cirer

Te vois égayant
le quotidien et le cosmique
Le gai, tu le sais,
est une qualité comme chez les hommes
de la Ville Rouge

Égayé tu es comme les plantes
(une plante égayée,
dit le dictionnaire des Arabes,
est une plante qui viennent de s'épanouir
les fleurs ou les fruits)

Tu marches nonchalament,
u du tour inquiétude
tu embrasses le dire
en tout lieu et en chaque élément :

Voici un enfant qui vend des cigarettes en détail
ou attend des chaussures à cirer
Tu marches,
et ton visage souriant telle une aube
qui apparaît derrière la colline, à travers la fenêtre
et annonce sans hésitation :
« Au début,
Dieu est apparu souriant sur la face du ciel »

Tu marches, et tes cheveux sont des boucles auxquels grimpent l’intuition
et les symboles mathématiques

Leur noircir est une encre
que chante la blancheur de l’âme
et dont le nom est écrit par un calame
dans une calligraphie marocaine
lequel contient dans sa flour
soixante versets du livre de la vie

Te voici maintenant dansant
comme le Bacchus de Nietzsche
tu donnes aux questions politiques
et aux soucis philosophiques
le goût de l’humour

Te voici dansant
mouvement et immobilité
se pressent dans l’espace
comme si des grappes de raisins
pendaient de tes mains
enivrant le présent
sur le rythme du gnawa
ou de la dajjâa de Marrakech

Te voici encore
mélangeant l’arabe classique
à l’argile du dialectal
érigeant dans nos oreilles
une sculpture unique et originale

Reste donc comme tu es
un sens pour ton nom
entouré par des noms dans un triangle
dont les points d’angle sont rehaussés
d’un m d’une intense symbolique :
à la base
un m comme une naissance étrange, primitive,
sans précédent, escortée de vierges et de prophètes ;
en face, un autre m
portant une autre prophétie pour sauver l'humanité
mais qui n'est, au final, par métonymie,
que l'image d'une attente à la métaphore excessive ;
aux sommets, un m gardien
de l'originalité des deux autres m
Myriem, Mehdi, Mireille ...
Mireille, un nom fourni par les vers d'un poète
qui a dans son nom le souffle du mistral...
Reste donc comme tu es
un sens pour ton nom
et sois fée
pour ces années apparaies au grand jour
dans un léger nuage qui a pris place
dans la cadence du poème
ou dans les traits et les couleurs
qui forment une toile
peinte dans une spontanéité hantée
par l'harmonie des parties
Sois fée pour elles
et nous mènerons la danse

Sois nuit pour elles
et nous serons les rêves
qui peupleront ton sommeil

Sois oiseau
et nous serons pour toi un ciel
ou un arbre pour ton nid

Reste donc comme tu es
un sens pour ton nom
Nous l'honorons
nous le graverons soixante fois
dans le marbre du cœur

EL AMRAOUI, MOHAMMED. 2016. Des moineaux dans la tête. Lyon, France: Jacques André
Éditeur. 64-75.
Appendix F: “Mohamed Ambri en 60 vers” by Mohammed El Amraoui

Nous avons certes le même prénom
mais le tien est accompagné
d’une brise parfumée
Et ses lettres
sont soixante dans les rides de la vie
dans les couloirs de la politique et des débats
et au service du savoir
Soixante letrres dont la racine est quatre
Son carré est un espace pour examiner la physique,
ce par quoi s’établir la physique
et le mot qui la surplombe –
Le mot est une question dont la réponse ne peut être que
dans la physique même.

Ahar –
Le yeux est un œil qui voit ce que l’œil ne voit pas
ou une source d’où soufr
ce qui va venir après soixante
le miel contient un calme caché
que seuls peuvent tenir les savants
Le miel contient les lignes qu’ils transcendent

Le ra’ regarde encore au-delà de la mer
et dit :
« Là-bas est ma ville blanche
submergée par l’absence
et ici, sur mon navire,
je m’occupe de mon lendemain
Mon lendemain est maintenant vents universels
qui n’appartiennent à aucune direction
sauf à celle que mon cœur choisit »
ce sont soixante ans
composés dans un poème inachevé
et dont la cadence galope telle une gazelle
qui n’a pas peur des chemins qui se donnent à elle
Soixante ans
où chaque an est une lettre
et où les vers sont parcelles à des maisons
carrées ouvertes aux amis
et le mètre est une mer, cercle qui les entoure
dont les vagues écrivent son nom
sur un rocher vertueux, ambré et solide
dans une calligraphie odorante
qui séduit l’air
et fait danser les sens

Aba Sofiane
si tu es l’amour pur
nous seront pour toi la poitrine qui le hume.
Si tu es le aïn qui nous observe
derrière le ba'
(De ba' qu'ouvre sa porte
un portail qui lie vision et pensée)
nous saurons être le sein du pluriel
Autour de toi, nous nous rassemblerons
pour célébrer ta mémoire
depuis le jeune âge
jusqu'à l'absence des cheveux sur le crâne
depuis les premiers exercices difficiles
dans l'apprentissage de la liberté et la clandestinité,
le examen de la conscience et la première dialectique
jusqu'à ta présence parmi nous, libre
comme au moment de ta naissance.

EL AMRAOUI, MOHAMMED. 2016. *Des moineaux dans la tête*. Lyon, France: Jacques André
Éditeur. 56-7, 60-63.
Appendix G: “Rose de gazelle” by Mohamed Miloud Gharrafi

**Rose de gazelle**

*Đàn dàn đàn dányt...*

Je reconnais ta voix. Je reconnais la dernière note dans les chants qui me donnent de la nostalgie et m'arrêtent à mon exil, jeté sur les passions comme toi, poursuivant une partie de mon chemin et abandonnant une autre. Est-ce *Oran*? *Berkan*? Ou *Ahfir* - à mi-chemin entre les deux- qui érige le rythme à Barbès les samedi soir pour le cacher sous le bras le jour et le désirer? Ou est-ce le parfum de genièvre, le rouge du henné dans le *bendir* bien avant les mains, le triste cri de la flûte comme un écho lointain de mon enfance et quelques vieux effets personnels de mon grand-père qui m'emporent vers toi?

Ô combien j'ai pleuré sur le trottoir! Le trottoir d'un café où les hommes dissimulaient leurs gémissements dans les chants et la danse des épaules avant de pleurer sur le trottoir comme moi tard dans la nuit. Ô combien j'ai vu de pieds soulever la poussière autour de toi! Certains n'étaient que pure illusion et d'autres se déchaussaient et se contentaient de leurs fissures pour que s'équilibrent la nuit, le rythme, les souvenirs douloureux, le pays et le reste du salaire misérable.

As-tu suffisamment chanté pour que les vivants oublient leur part de douleur intense et les
exilés leurs vomissements dans les vagues déchaînées et d’autres les embrassades des leurs dans les aéroports avec des valises cachant quelques affaires qui annulent les frontières : épices, amulettes de grand-mère, gâteaux de la maman, du thym, du tabac et des plantes sèches.

A Paris, dans une chambre qui ne se suffisait pas à elle-même, mon grand-père mettait dans le gramophone tous les soirs, avant et après la prière, un disque pour se remémorer les souvenirs des siens dans les tristes refrains. Il lisait dans ton chant béduin l’écrit de sa vie et y trouvait toujours une trace, des youyous ou un mal de tête sous ton urgence : de quoi mesurer la distance qui le séparait de sa retraite.

Dans la même chambre ou presque, je remémoré à mon tour les souvenirs des miens par le biais de tes chants où trouvent largement leurs places le disque, la cassette et le CD de ton dernier cri. Je vois la ville entière qui, trop étroite pour contenir tes pas et l’éloquence de tes souffles à ton âge finissant, annule de ses fêtes les youyous.

A cet instant, quelque chose souffle majestueusement sur notre ville.

C’est peut-être le parfum de la rose que tu as laissée seule dans les mains de ceux qui se rendaient à ta soirée.

C’est peut-être ton bien-aimé qui vient soudainement de passer et disparaître, seul et tout de blanc vêtu.

Ou c’est peut-être un écho de ta voix chantant dans le vide que tu laisses : mon bien-aimé et moi fûtons seuls, dans la montagne, nos adieux. Rien entre vous et moi ne vient effacer le signe qui nous unit dans l’absence. Je vous ai aimés et ai bu à la soif de la passion et de sentiments difficiles. J’ai chanté seulement ce qu’il fallait pour exister et pour que la nuit ne dure pas plus longtemps.

Appendix H: “Explosif” by Mohamed Miloud Gharrafi

Explosif

Ne transporte pas
ta patrie
dans la valise.
Tout explosif
ne voyage pas dans le train.