

# Texts and Languages in Movement: Literary Genealogies for a Plural Mediterranean

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Languages tell the story of individual biographies, as well as migrations that all individuals inherit. Thus, the creation that circulates through the Mediterranean is closely linked to the population movements that have shaped its languages and cultural traditions. Through this creation we can approach the Mediterranean area with a perspective open to difference, attentive to its diversity. Thus, from contemporary female authors such as Najat El Hachmi and Alice Zeniter, to the poets and writers who, in the mid-20th century, promoted journals such as *Al-Motamid* or *Ketama*, trans-Mediterranean writings reveal languages and traditions and highlight the erasures, breaks and silences to which history has subjected them.

In the novel *The Art of Losing*, Alice Zeniter unravels the stories of different generations of the Zekkar family. Their narratives are irretrievably linked to the contemporary histories of Algeria and France, as well as to their story – understood as a hegemonic narrative that, as such, is built on the basis of erasures and silencing. At the end of the book, we witness the change of perspective that occurs in one of its main characters, Naïma, after travelling to her father's native Algeria; an alien Algeria, neither told nor written, an Algeria, therefore, incomprehensible to her. After dialoguing, literally and symbolically, with the territory that she, from France, had built from otherness, Naïma understands that: “The Mediterranean

has ceased to be a border to become a bridge” (2017: 499)

The title of the novel can be understood as a celebration of the idea that all displacements are crossed by losses, silences and reconfigurations. In Paris – which retains the traces of colonialism in its streets, its subways, its buildings and the texts that speak of it –, the National Museum of the History of Immigration includes the work *Mother Tongue*, by the French Algerian artist living in London Zineb Sedira. It is an installation with three screens showing each of them a conversation between two women: Sedira's mother and Sedira; Sedira and her daughter; her mother and her daughter. Each woman expresses herself in her “mother

tongue” – *Darija* (spoken Moroccan Arabic), French and English, respectively –, which is not her mother’s language. And while on the first two screens we see that communication is established through words, the last screen takes us to a break, since grandmother and granddaughter cannot communicate linguistically. The descriptive text in the museum stresses that “through the use of languages, this work shows the plurality of the identities that constitute us,” because languages tell the story of individual biographies and also the migrations that we subjects inherit. It adds that “if the artist’s triple language [explained by her Algerian genealogy, having been educated in France and now living in the United Kingdom] accounts for the diversity and richness of her identity, migrations have also created cultural differences that break the speech between grandmother and granddaughter.”

Sedira’s and Zeniter’s works name and embody these breaks and erasures to illuminate them as a creative and learning source. The creation that circulates in the Mediterranean area is closely linked to the population movements that have shaped its languages and cultural traditions. Today we have become accustomed to receiving information about these movements within the Mediterranean in absolute terms, based on figures. Figures that give an account of the migratory logic, crossed by the racism, capitalism and precariousness that also make up this space. Figures that do not explain the individual stories that constitute them, which are also shaped by the symbolic displacements experienced by those who are on the move – their “mother tongues” are transformed, their cultural background modified.

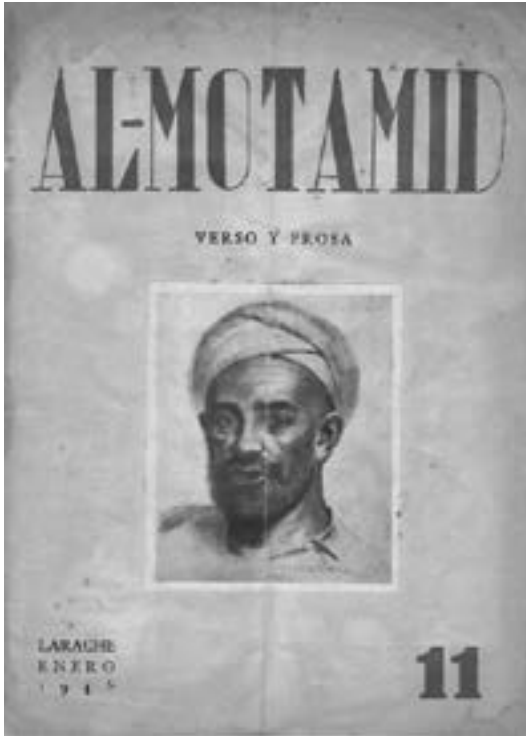
Often, the “Mediterranean” categorisation is structured from that same reductionist viewpoint, which conceals difference and, therefore, prevents problematising the power relations that exist in a territory defined through a sea that is fluid insofar as it allows the enrichment

of cultural exchanges while being an excluding border. Given this realisation, literary creation gives us keys to approach the Mediterranean space with a viewpoint open to difference, attentive to its diversity and to the complexity of the current and historical exchanges and dialogues that shape it. Multilingual exchanges and dialogues that also include the marks of orality, sometimes also understood in subordination to writing.

We have a multitude of archives of trans-Mediterranean writings – writings that cross linguistic, geographical and literary borders – that reveal Mediterranean languages and cultural traditions. Novels, short stories, essays, poems and plays that are windows on these dialogues and also on the frictions and tensions that sustain them, and that are framed in a historical genealogy of *longue durée* and in the more recent colonial history.

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The first work by the now widely awarded Najat El Hachmi saw the light was published in 2004. In *Jo també sóc catalana* [I Am Catalan Too] we read that the author aspires to “be able to stop talking about immigration one day, not have to think about the labels any more, not have to explain for the umpteenth time where I come from or, at least, that this fact does not have the specific significance that it has” (2004: 12). In this autobiographical essay, the author analyses the views of otherness from which she was perceived in Catalonia when she, as a child, arrived with her family in Vic from a village in the Moroccan Rif. The categorisation of “immigrant” went through her process of identity construction and has also played a role in the reception of her work.



*Al-Motamid* review, issue 11, published in January 1948 in Larache (Biblioteca Nacional de España).

Thus, for example, on the back cover of the aforementioned essay we are told that the text is written “[in] impeccable Catalan rich in nuances,” an appreciation that is surprising if we take into account that the author’s schooling was in Catalan. One wonders if this statement would have appeared on the back cover of a work written by someone whose name contained other phonemes.

El Hachmi’s literary work incorporates multiple voices: the literary voices of female writers with whom El Hachmi dialogues, from different literary traditions, and also the voices of different generations of women who have traversed the Mediterranean universe. The protagonist of *Mare de llet i mel* [Mother of Milk and Honey] is an illiterate Riffian woman who crossed to the northern

shore with her daughter to look for a husband who had abandoned them. Fatima’s story comes to us in the form of a written text and in Catalan, but it is a Catalan underpinned by Riffian (the Berber language spoken in the Rif), which is the language with which Fatima communicates with her daughter; a Riffian that is syncretic because it also has traces of *Darija* and expressions in classical Arabic. We read, therefore, a Catalan that, in short, translates the complexity of Fatima’s subjective experience and features the aforementioned exchanges and dialogues.

In this respect, El Hachmi can be located in a Mediterranean literary genealogy that is born out of hybridism and therefore manages to highlight erasures, breaks and silences we referred to at the start of this text. El Hachmi’s literary production is related to the production that emerged from the pens of writers who give us an overflowing Mediterranean, in which the edges are blurred and challenged. Assia Djebar’s works are a categorical response to colonialism and the relations of power and subordination on which it is based, and yet they were originally written in French, the language of “the coloniser.” The Algerian writer twists the French to break it and allow it to make way for the *Taqaybil* (Berber language spoken in Kabylia) of the women who fought in the Franco-Algerian war and who could not tell of their experiences in writing.

Malika Mokeddem’s French incorporates the phraseology of the Algerian desert, the borderless space where she was born. The desert is also a landscape of reference in the plays of the Moroccan Ahmed Ghazali, who explores crossings and travels. And Salem Zenia, journalist and writer from Kabylia exiled in Catalonia, writes about the crossing of identity components. Zenia’s work always circulates in *Taqaybil*, and even when her collections of poems are translated, they are published in a bilingual edition; they therefore contain the

language that was long stigmatised in the poet's native country. In her stories, set against the backdrop of tangled contemporary Lebanon, Mazen Maarouf uses sarcastic language to twist the identity categorisations that Amin Maalouf defined as murderous.

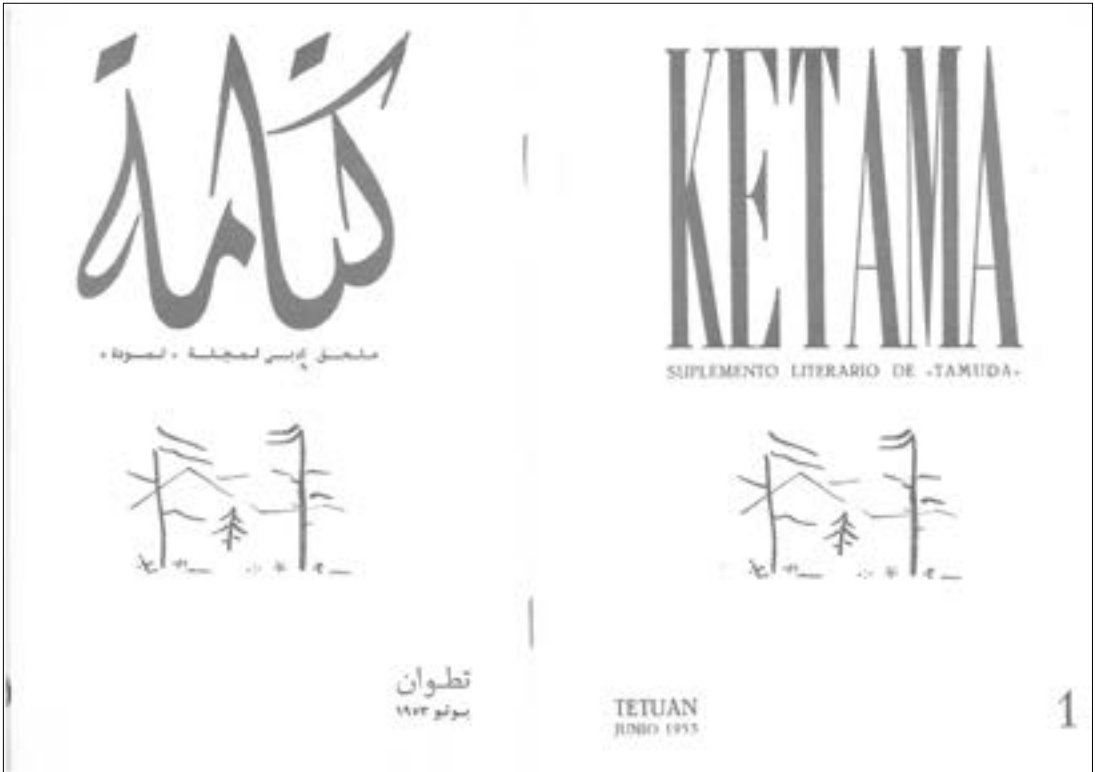
These are just some of the voices that have always artistically enriched the Mediterranean and tell stories of it and travel through it, pointing out its complexity and heterogeneity. In the literary field, these voices problematise belonging and rigid labels, re-signifying the limits of concepts such as nation and even language. They give us an idea of writing as a territory from which to build multiple belongings. And they do so by entering into dialogue with other texts, with other cultural productions that open the door to exchanges of all kinds of codes. In this respect, translation is fundamental to building such exchange networks.

In *The Tongue of Adam*, the Moroccan Abdelfattah Kilito emphasises the importance of language as “necessary for life”: “The absence of language is like death; life, survival, is in the language” (1996: 12). The language of which Kilito speaks is crossed by ambiguity – which is original, hence the biblical reference of the text; therefore, communication and exchange should be viewed as complex exercises. In *Lan tatakalama lughati* [Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language] Kilito continues to address the tensions between life and death, and the (im)possibility of communication, based on a reflection on translation. Through Arabic, on the one hand, and some European languages, on the other, Kilito explores the nuances of bilingualism and cross-cultural intersections. His text navigates that ambiguity we pointed out before, and to which the Arabic title of his work refers – as Wail S. Hassan, the English translator of his work points out, the title is deliberately ambiguous and can be understood as both a declarative and imperative sentence, as a statement or as commandment.

Translation is, without doubt, an essential communicative practice in our diverse societies. Understood as a literary practice, as an exercise in creation, and located in the Mediterranean space, it is also a valuable tool for understanding the aforementioned exchange networks. Focusing on translation from this viewpoint will enable us to revisit the construction of imaginaries and the linguistic and literary crossings that operated on both shores of the Mediterranean during the last century. We will thus shed light on the literary production and practices that were articulated in and through two literary journals founded in the final period of the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco (1912-1956).

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“It is overwhelming to recognise our previous ignorance of current Arabic literature,” proclaimed Trina Mercader (Alicante 1919-Granada 1984), founder and editor-in-chief of the literary journal *Al-Motamid*, in 1951. “We believe that the cause of this can be found in the lack of greater concern for the dissemination of these works in Spanish, which do not appear in our bookstores” (*Al-Motamid*: 23). Mercader concluded that those who made the journals, “champions of Spanish-Moroccan poetry”, praised and “emotionally” took on the work of translating contemporary Arabic literature into Spanish; as indeed they did. What the Alicante-born poet did not mention is that colonialism structured publishing practices, collaborative relationships, and knowledge – or the ignorance she was overwhelmed to acknowledge – of Arabic literature.



*Ketama*, first issue, published in June 1953 in Tétouan (Fundación Jorge Guillén).

The following pages attempt to rescue two little-known and studied literary journals from oblivion: the aforementioned *Al-Motamid* (1947-1956) and *Ketama* (1953-1959). This little-known historical archive speaks of inequalities and bridges, with the same complexity that emerges from the works of the aforementioned Mediterranean writers. The literary community of *Al-Motamid* and *Ketama* had a global dimension that was anchored in Mediterranean – Spanish, Moroccan, Middle Eastern – and American cities, through several generations of Middle Eastern diasporas and also Republican exiles.

*Al-Motamid. Verso y Prosa* was founded by the poet Trina Mercader in Larache in 1947. In 1953, the journal's headquarters moved to Tétouan, the capital of the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco, where it ceased to be published in 1956, when Morocco became an independent nation. The journal was named after the poet and ruler of Andalusian Seville Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abbād al-Mu‘tamid (1040-1095).

This choice will not surprise those who are aware of the prominent place that al-Andalus occupied in Spanish colonial discourse in Morocco. As early as the 19th century, Africanism, which saw Morocco as a new imperial oppor-

tunity (after the loss of most of the American colonies), made the “common history” of the Spanish and Moroccans, and notably al-Andalus, and the geographic proximity between both countries the central axis of the Spanish colonial legitimisation of Morocco (de Madariaga, 1988; Morales Lezcano, 2006). In the Protectorate, while France alluded to the “civilising mission” to justify its colonial rule, the Spanish authorities celebrated the “Hispano-Moroccan brotherhood” based on common history and, notably, on al-Andalus (Mateo Dieste, 2003).

*The firm interest in contemporary Arabic poetry of these two colonial journals in the early 1950s was significant*

Six years after *Al-Motamid* appeared, the poet Jacinto López Gorjé (Alicante 1925-Madrid 2008) founded the journal *Ketama* in Tétouan. The name referred to the hamlet and area of the Rif where López Gorjé had worked as a teacher in the early 1950s. *Ketama* continued to be published until 1959. Unlike *Al-Motamid*, it was bilingual from the start.

A year after *Al-Motamid* began its life, Mercader commissioned an article from ‘Abd Allah Guennoun (Fez 1908-Tangier 1989). Guennoun is considered one of the pioneers in the study of Moroccan literary history. His work *El genio marroquí en la literatura árabe* [The Moroccan Genius in Arabic Literature] (1938) was partially translated into Spanish by the Centre for Moroccan Studies in Tétouan one year after it was published in Arabic. In the first article he wrote for *Al-Motamid* (no. 12), Guennoun highlighted the spirit of renewal that had characterised Middle Eastern Arabic poetry since the early 1900s. He also suggested that the journal should translate the works of the Tunisian poet Abu al-Qasim al-Shabbi and that of the Egyptian Ahmad Shauqui, known as the “prince of poets”, that of ‘Abbas

Mahmud al-‘Aqqad, ‘Ali Mahmud Taha, the Syrian romantic poet Anuar al-‘Attar, as well as the Lebanese writer who emigrated to the United States Mija’il Nu’ayma (*Al-Motamid*, no. 12 and 20). The journal followed the advice of the Moroccan intellectual, and published some of these authors translated into Spanish. Later, *Ketama* also included them in its pages.

Another of the Arab contributors whose influence was significant in the interest in contemporary Arabic literature that can be seen in *Al-Motamid*’s existence was Jamil / Benedicto Chuaqui (Homs 1895-Santiago 1970). Chuaqui was a Syrian poet and writer who settled in Chile and translated the work of Arab authors such as Gibran Khalil Gibran into Spanish. He contributed to *Al-Motamid* in the 1950s. In his articles, he highlighted the work of Arab authors such as Mayy Ziade, the female Syrian Lebanese poet who went into exile in Egypt at the beginning of the 20th century, and translated fragments of different poets such as Ilias Fayad, a romantic admirer of Abbasid poetry (*Al-Motamid*, no. 25). Perhaps one of Chuaqui’s greatest achievements was to bring about the introduction of a new section in the *Al-Motamid* journal, under the title “Anthology of the great contemporary Arab poets”. Sometimes the poems Chuaqui translated appeared in the original Arabic, but not always, which shows that the main objective of the section was to make contemporary Arabic poetry known to Spanish-speaking readers. This, in fact, became one of the objectives of *Al-Motamid* and, shortly after, of *Ketama*, whose central pages would appear a section entitled “Contemporary Arabic Poetry (Anthology)” from the end of 1955.

The firm interest in contemporary Arabic poetry of these two colonial journals in the early 1950s was significant insofar as it modulated and corrected the perspectives that some of the Spanish contributors had expressed in the first issues of *Al-Motamid*.

Paternalistic opinions were frequently found in essays on Moroccan literature published by the journal (*Al-Motamid*, no. 13, 20 and 24, for example). In these articles, some written by the later founder and editor-in-chief of *Ketama*, Jacinto López Gorjé, it was assumed that Moroccan literature lacked the innovation that characterised modern Spanish literature. Thus, *Al-Motamid* said: “[Our journal] has been the only tool that carries and brings from Spain to Morocco the concern – poem, criticism, controversy – of its current moment” (*Al-Motamid*: 18). The Spanish ignorance of Arabic literature that Mercader attributed to the lack of translations into Spanish, as can be seen in the quote above, involved a great deal of colonial paternalism; however, this changed with the translation work – and, it must be said, education – carried out by Moroccan and Arab contributors.

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The changes in *Al-Motamid* and its heir *Ketama* also came about by strengthening bilingualism. Although Mercader’s journal had featured essays and literature in Arabic before Tétouan became the headquarters of *Al-Motamid*, the move to the capital strengthened bilingualism. Until 1953, *Al-Motamid* did not have a cover illustrated in Arabic, and from its establishment in Tétouan it began to have a cover and contents in Spanish and Arabic. From 1953, the principle on which the contents and pages of *Al-Motamid* and *Ketama* were arranged became linguistic; the Arab section from right to left and the Spanish section, from left to right. All this raised the status of Arabic.

Moreover, while the Arabic section prior to 1953 did not differ very much from the Spanish one, as it became consolidated, it acquired its own personality, agenda and cultural identity; and news appeared of extracts taken from Arab magazines and newspapers, as well as articles on literary and political issues of great resonance in the Arab region, which did not have their corresponding article in Spanish.

Arabic-Spanish bilingualism was also gaining ground in other cultural spheres of the Protectorate. Arabic was the language of theatre performances, Riffian and *Darija* were heard on the radio, a literary prize was established with a category for works in Arabic and another for those in Spanish. The increasingly important role of Arabic in the Protectorate cannot, of course, be unlinked from the efforts that the Spanish colonial authorities were making to distance themselves from French language policy and to become champions of Moroccan Arabicity. In the aftermath of the approval, in 1930, of the so-called “Berber dahir” by the French authorities, which led to the politicisation of “Arab” and “Berber” identities and gave rise to mass protests that consolidated the Moroccan anti-colonial movement (Wyrzten, 2016: 136-178), the Franco regime relied on the discursive framework of the “Hispanic Arab” culture and Spanish colonial policy emerged as a champion of Moroccan nationalism and pan-Arab and pan-Islamic consciousness, as opposed to the French *divide et impera* (Calderwood, 2018: 167-207).

In this context – discursive universe and colonial practices –, bilingualism and the leaning of journals towards contemporary Arabic literature became the norm. Nevertheless, the initiatives and changes had been taking place, to a great extent, thanks to the contributions of Guennoun and Chuaqui and to the predisposition of those who wrote and translated texts for *Al-Motamid* and *Ketama*, Spaniards and Moroccans. Interest in contemporary Arabic

poetry and dedication to its translation into Spanish continued to expand, especially in *Ketama*, through two other key actors: the Tétouan poet and writer Mohamed al-Sabbagh (Tétouan 1929-Rabat 2013) and the Arabist and translator Leonor Martínez Martín (Barcelona 1930-2015).

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Between 1955 and 1959, Martínez Martín selected and translated into Spanish poetic fragments by Arab authors that appeared in the centre double page of *Ketama* (pp. 6-10). Among others, the Arabist selected the poetry of the renowned Lebanese symbolist poet Sa'īd 'Aql, the well-known poet and editor Albert Adib, and the poet of the Mahjar (Arab diaspora in the Americas) Ilya Abu Madi. In addition, *Al-Motamid* and *Ketama* were developing networks with Arab journals from Beirut, Tunisia, Buenos Aires, New York and São Paulo, as well as with Spanish, Italian and French journals. They corresponded with authors such as the Nobel Prize winner Vicente Aleixandre (who was in Tétouan in 1955), the Lebanese writer living in New York Mijail Nu'ayma, the great Palestinian poet Fadwa Tuqan or the Nobel Prize winner Juan Ramón Jiménez, who sent unpublished poems from exile. Especially noteworthy is the role of Mohamed al-Sabbagh, who led the Arabic section of *Al-Motamid*, first, and that of *Ketama*, later, in establishing networks with points in the Middle East and the Mahjar ('Abbas, 1972). By the mid-1950s, these two journals, based in the capital of a protectorate that had its days numbered, were maintaining correspondence and literary and

intellectual exchanges with authors and literary associations from a not inconsiderable number of cities in Spain, the Maghreb and the Middle East, the two hemispheres of the American continent and Europe. The journals also published stories, news and essays either translated or only in one of the languages. They gave voice to Moroccan poetry. *Ketama* (no. 13-14) published a poem by Carles Riba in the original Catalan and its translation into Spanish and Arabic. And the last issue of *Ketama* (no. 13-14) paid tribute to the Italian Nobel Prize winner Salvatore Quasimodo, and two of his poems, in Italian, Spanish and Arabic, illustrated its centre pages.

Much of the translation work that characterised the two journals was the result of the collaboration between al-Sabbagh and Mercader, al-Sabbagh and Martínez Martín, al-Sabbagh and López Gorjé. Al-Sabbagh and Martínez Martín translated the work of Nu'ayma *Hams al-Jufūn* (The Whisper of the Eyelids) and also, together with López Gorjé, that of al-Sabbagh himself, which was published in various Spanish journals. However, Moroccans such as Idris Diuri, 'Abd al-Latif al-Khatib, Amina al-Luh, the Lebanese living in Tétouan Najib Abu Malham and al-Sabbagh himself made the most notable contribution to the translation work of these colonial journals. Command of Spanish and Arabic (and more so of the classical Arabic of poetry) was almost exclusive to Moroccans; therefore, linguistic skills and the significance of "common" and "minor" translation were marked by the status of coloniality. At the same time, the colonised managed to make Arabic literature the centre of interest for both journals, which in turn brought it to Spanish-speaking readers, especially in Spain and Latin America. This acted as an antidote to the ignorance that Mercader was so overwhelmed to recognise and to the imperial idea that Arabic literature was not modern enough.

## In conclusion

The literary caravan reflected by the aforementioned examples not only attests to the circulation of all kinds of texts, developed in different languages, which has structured the Mediterranean area for centuries, but also helps us to understand how these textual journeys have always contributed to feeding literary genealogies that cannot be categorised on the basis of rigid parameters. The literary archive of the journals *Al-Motamid* and *Ketama* allows us, among other things, to stress the logics of the centre-periphery in which we tend to place all colonial experience, logics that erase the frictions, negotiations and transformations that also made the history of our cultural and literary baggage. The shift towards Arabic poetry and the bilingualism of these two colonial journals also enable us to verify the influence that “the colonised”, Moroccans and Arabs from the Middle East and the American diasporas, had over the Spanish “colonisers” who founded and directed the journals. With this we do not intend to deny the power relations that structured colonial society and culture, which inherited and continue to shape the Mediterranean character and the world.

In fact, the current publishing industry is governed, for the most part, by dynamics that do not reflect the nuances of exchanges between the two shores of the Mediterranean and, as heirs to colonial logics, hide the intellectual contributions of the Mediterranean and global south. The categorisations that qualify the texts rooted in the Mediterranean area still tend to be reductive. They indicate the place of birth of the writer or the language in which the said text originally circulated, without taking into account that, as we noted, these parameters do not reflect the Mediterranean plurality. Moreover, the choice of what is translated – and the languages from which it is translated – is also affected by reductionist

logics. In the north, Eurocentrism continues to prevail; there is still little value attached to translating from Arabic, or to multiplying voices that do not fit the imaginary on the other side, still highly Orientalist and close to machismo and other -isms, producing fallacious and biased archetypes of what it is to be an Arab or Muslim woman.

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Among other things, all of this contributes to the fact that the exchange that outlines a diverse and complexly intricate Mediterranean is not yet asserted. Santiago Alba Rico (2020) borrows a linguistic example from Calvet to reflect on the ambivalence that supports our Mediterranean character, and to which Kilito appealed through language(s): “Calvet gives a beautiful example of these linguistic trips – sometimes back and forth – of words that are finally Mediterranean. Is it not obvious that *albaricoque* (apricot) comes from Arabic? Well no. The noun is originally Latin (*praecoquum*); from Latin we get the Arabic *albarquq*, which through al-Andalus leads to our *albaricoque*, which becomes the French *abricot*. Long before capitalist globalisation filled our languages with English words, trade in the Mediterranean had Mediterraneanised our vernacular languages, giving them that centuries-old form that today is somewhat eroded by the consumerist and technological *koyné*.”

The literary examples that we have collected in this article, and the collaborative processes of creation and circulation we have analysed, point to the importance of constructing a multifaceted view of Mediterranean literary production – a view that is historical and contextualised. Only from a perspective that allows

multiple readings will we be able to understand the Mediterraneanisation noted by Alba Rico, as well as thinking about the linguistic, cultural and social framework that structures this territory through circularity and embracing the loss of the watertight labels that are still in operation today; for example, the loss of our “mother tongues” to invoke the ambivalence that diversity is capable of naming.

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