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DIPARTIMENTO DI
STORIA, ANTROPOLOGIA, RELIGIONI,
ARTE, SPETTACOLO



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA



ImagiNation.s: Reconfigurations of National Imaginaries in the Cultural Production of Contemporary Maghreb

May 18th, 2023

Université Internationale de Rabat – Lecture Hall A, RBS Ground Floor

Conference Concept Note

In the past few decades, local, national frameworks have been deemed obsolete in cultural studies and not apt to explain a world characterised by global networks of transiting people, goods, knowledge, arts and cultures across geographies. Stuart Hall, Jürgen Habermas, Abdelkebir Khatibi, Arjun Appadurai, and Homi Bhabha – among many other scholars – have argued the trending end of the idea of the nation-state as a hermeneutical framework capable of containing and refashioning the factual existence of an evolving post-national world.

Globalization fundamentally challenges the relevance of the nation-state as a continued political model. Attempting a summary of Appadurai's position, Partha Chatterjee argues that "the combination of electronic mediation and mass migration has created new diasporic public spheres that transcend the boundaries of the nation-state" (Chatterjee 1997). Such views on post-nationalism, however, have been widely criticised for their unreasonable faith in the purportedly imminent end of the nation and for overlooking the downsides of globalization (Rockefeller 2013).

The nation as a paradigm of a new archaeology of knowledge is still useful to understand the conditions in which culture is produced and circulated. Margins, borders, and subaltern subjectivities do still exist, and institutions have never stopped attempting to promote peculiar policies and identities, even when working on a non-territorial basis. Moreover, producers and consumers of culture contribute to re-shape collective identities at large, though by means of individualized effort and taste. This happens unceasingly in culture, regardless of whether it is official or grassroots, mainstream or alternative. National imaginaries are constantly exchanged, shared, criticized, and consumed, and international, transnational, and national levels of production and consumption overlap without erasing each other.

Drawing inspiration from Friedrich Hegel, Slavoj Žižek, and Fredric Jameson, Ian Biddle (2007) argues that the nation can be seen as a *vanishing mediator*; namely, a nation-as-a-process which seems to be disappearing although it is still productive in mediating between old and newly emerged paradigms. Relying on the idea of the modern nation as a constructed narrative, Homi Bhabha advocates a “beyond position”, according to which the world lives in an “age of unpreparedness” and therefore viewing the nation as an unexpected process of un/becoming, whose ultimate delivery comes into being through the imaginary (Bhabha 1991).

Far from Appadurai's claims about the “incapacity of the nation-state to tolerate diversity” (Appadurai 1996), the idea of what a nation is (or should be) has deeply changed through time, proving itself to be elastic and adaptive. The concepts of identification and recognition (Habermas 1991, Honneth 1992, Hall 1996) have increasingly worked their way into a renewed concept of the nation, thanks to social and political struggles aiming to obtain the recognition of minoritized subjectivities and collectivities within broader “imagined communities”. As Stuart Hall (1996) writes, “identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal [...]



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identification is in the end, conditional, lodged in contingency. Once secured, it does not obliterate difference”.

Discussing the post-colonial conditions of the rebirth of the nation in formerly colonised societies and cultures, Abdelkebir Khatibi argues that the newly instructed *Maghreb Pluriel* (Khatibi 1983) is based on the construction of a hybrid cultural space mediated through a *bilangue*: a “third tongue” (*une langue tierce*) that eventually helps build/reconstruct one’s own cultural space as a hybrid position, imparted by the perspective of the Other.

What is the Maghreb today? How does it brand and “sell” itself in global cultural marketplaces? How are national identities and imaginaries dealt with in today’s North Africa? Which image(s) of themselves do North African countries explicitly sponsor or implicitly convey through cultural and artistic productions? How has the idea of the nation in the Maghreb changed through time and by which mechanisms of inclusion, exclusion, reconciliation, minoritization, racialization, etc.?

Here are but a few lines of thought to help potential participants in this conference to locate areas of discursivities, define dialogic configurations, and urge theoretical debate on the idea of the nation-on-trial, prescribing a re-imagined nation building as a process, tracking the conditions that help fabricate a patchwork design of everyday actions, street performances, visual representations, literature, and other artistic practices that constitute cultural production ingredients of the final act of the narrative of a nation.

Conference Program

Morning: 9.00 – 12.30

9.0 – 9.30

Opening Session. Welcome Notes

- Abdellatif Bencherifa, Dean of the College of Political Sciences, and Law and Social Sciences, Université Internationale de Rabat, Morocco
- Abdelaziz Benjouad, Vice President for Research & Innovation & Partnerships, Université Internationale de Rabat, Morocco
- Alessandro Saggiaro, TRANSECT Project Supervisor, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

10.00 – 10.30

Coffee Break

10.30

Panel One. The Rhetoric of Nation Building and the Borders of Cultural Production

Moderator: Najib Mokhtari

- “Morocco’s African Roots: International Strategies and Cultural Policies in the Reign of Mohamed VI”
Barbara de Poli, University of Ca’ Foscari, Venezia, Italy
- “Where is the Nation? Reflection on the Idea of *Border* in Morocco: Art, Activism and Knowledge Production”
Sara Borrillo, University of Rome “Tor Vergata”, Italy
Hosni Almoukhli, Gorara Arts et culture, Casablanca, Morocco
- “Patterns of Neo-Tribalism in Post-Independence Maghreb”
Mohamed Chtatou, Mohammed V University, Rabat, Morocco

11.30 Panel Two. The Dis/Location of Cultural Sites of Memory: Between International Circulation and Home-made Tradition

Moderator: Ayoub Rabhi

- “The Dis-Location of Trans-Cultural Identities in Moroccan Postcolonial Literature”

Najib Mokhtari, Université Internationale de Rabat, Morocco

- “Shifting Meanings: Nation Branding, Pluralism and the Maghreb at the International Prize of Arabic Fiction”

Fernanda Fischione, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

- “Building the Nation from Behind Prison Bars: Moroccan Prison Writings in Translation”

Cristina Dozio, Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy

12.30 – 14.00 Lunch Break

Afternoon: 14.00 – 18.30

14.00 Panel Three. Disruptive Writings: The (Un)Becoming of the Nation across the Maghreb

Moderator: Fernanda Fischione

- “Portraying Homosexuality in Contemporary Moroccan Fiction: Between Acceptance and Rejection”

Ana Navarro Gonzáles, Autonomous University of Madrid/
University of Barcelona, Spain

- “Migrant Images and Imaginaries: Tunisia’s Contribution to *Harraga* Literature”

Annamaria Bianco, Aix-Marseille University, France

- “No Illness, but’: Rajab Bū Ḥuwayyish al-Minifī’s Anticolonial Poem in and Beyond Lybia”

Federico Pozzoli, Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy

15.00 Panel Four. Artistic Re-Presentations and the Shaping of New Visual Cultures

Moderator: Amina Boubia

- “Colonial and Post-Colonial Nation-State: Amazigh and Jewish Voices in Contemporary Moroccan Cinema”

Jamal Bahmad, Mohammed V University, Rabat, Morocco

- “Graphic Archeology or the Story of an AlieNation in Hicham Lasri’s Graphic Novel *MaRRoc*”

Youssuf Amine El Alamy, Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco

- “From Mers El Kébir to Mars? Science Fiction and the Stellar Trajectories of Postcolonial Maghrebi Nations (1960-2000)”

Elizabeth Perego, Appalachian State University, North Carolina, USA

16.00 – 16.30 Coffee Break

17.00 Panel Five. Reconstructing (Trans)National Imaginaries through Digital and Pop Culture

Moderator: Jamal Bahmad

- “Music Festivals, *Zellige* and Football: Moroccan Popular Culture, Nation Branding and Soft Power in Morocco”

Amina Boubia, Université Internationale de Rabat, Morocco

- “The Renewed Morocco’s Image after Qatar 2022 World Cup: An Analysis of Novel Cultural Paradigms”

Angelika Palmegiani, University of Naples “l’Orientale”, Italy

- “National Imaginaries in the Time of Lockdown: Digital Culture and the Nation During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Morocco”

Kaoutar Ghilani, EUME Postdoctoral Fellow at the *Forum Transregional Studies* Berlin, Germany.

18.00

Closing Statement

- Najib Mokhtari
- Fernanda Fischione



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Paper Abstracts

Panel One

Barbara De Poli, Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Morocco's African Roots: International Strategies and Cultural Policies in the Reign of Muhammad VI

Since the 1980s, Morocco has gone through a phase of identity reconfiguration which found its latest definition in the constitutional reform of 2011. In the preamble of the text, the Arab-Islamic matrix, on which the Alawite dynasty had founded the national identity at the dawn of independence, has left room for a plural character of the Kingdom, as: "Son unité, forgée par la convergence de ses composantes Arabo-Islamique, amazighe et saharo-hassanie, s'est nourrie et enrichie de ses affluents africain, andalou, hébraïque et méditerranéen". If the struggles of the Amazigh movements have played a central role in this process, it nonetheless hinges on decisive international geopolitical transformations: it is no coincidence, for example, that the revitalisation of Morocco's 'Jewishness' experienced a formidable boost after the Abraham Accords, and especially after the normalization of diplomatic relations with Israel. In this paper I will pay particular attention to the cultural policies of Morocco (visual and performing arts - e.g. music, literature, cinema and theatre, painting - up to fashion and football, but also the access of African students to the Moroccan education system) activated by the government to convey a new message about Africa and the country's Africanness, as a useful tool for redefining its geopolitical standing on the continent over the last twenty years.

Of course, the Sahara matter remains pivotal in the regional strategic scenario, nevertheless, since the 2000s, in the wake of global geopolitical reconfigurations, new

crucial issues have arisen, such as access to resources, the search for new markets, African migration to Europe, jihadism, which have contributed to shifting the economic-political, but also cultural and ideological axis of the country - previously more unbalanced towards Europe, the United States and the Middle East - further south. In this sense, Africanist cultural policies aim, on the one hand, to legitimize Morocco as a regional leader in the eyes of the other nations of the continent, and on the other, to normalize internally the idea of the Alawite Kingdom as an African country. If also in this case the models of 'invented traditions' and 'imagined communities' perfectly function, they interrogate the historical depth of Morocco's identity in the public sphere (in a Habermasian sense), as well as the functionality of the different tools deployed by the government to redesign the collective sensitivity in the face of new interests.

Sara Borrillo, University of Roma "Tor Vergata" (online) and Hosni al-Muklis, Gorara Arts et culture, Casablanca

Where is the Nation? Reflexion on the Idea of "Border" in Morocco: Art, Activism and Knowledge Production

The photo of Paris invaded by Moroccans celebrating Morocco's qualification for the semi-finals of the World Cup in Qatar, makes us reflect about the idea of border, about where the perimeter of the idea of nation begins and where it ends, and how a border can be crossed on a symbolic level in a very powerful way beyond mere territorial borders. Moreover, here we are dealing with the idea of a post-colonial nation taking back the space and its *revenge* on the colonial capital. The great media prominence given to the Moroccan performance and of global football in general has revived the role the nation has in shaping the imaginary of belonging and identity. What do we cheer for? In a game that involves a 1-on-1 contraposition, why do we hope to outdo the other? What is the core concept that unites an "imaged community" together with

the language we speak from birth? Besides language, how is this identity constructed? The concept of nation is still central to our everyday reasoning, which places us in relation to other nations and other supposed national identities. At the same time, it would be worth asking whether the idea of nation is still sufficient to define our identity, which is increasingly plural and characterised by intersectional, multiple and therefore post-national memberships. Yet in some contexts, the competition that we have seen at the macro level unfold in the global football game, spills over at the micro level into racism towards minorities or people of origins which are different from the one supposed to be the majority and therefore the hegemonic one. And this occurs in the wake of a “war between poor people”, in which class conflict is exacerbated within the most marginalised sectors, leaving the matrices of economic and political power relations between the elite and the popular classes mainly intact. In this contribution, the researcher Sara Borrillo of the University of Rome Tor Vergata and the activist and artist Hosni al Moukhlis from the Gorara arts et culture group in Casablanca will reflect together on the role that art and knowledge production can play in promoting a more inclusive idea of nation, specifically in Morocco, in the broader context of the post-2011 Middle East and North Africa. The case study from which the reflection will originate will be the bottom-up work that Hosni and his group carry out in Morocco, with particular reference to the piece of theatre of the oppressed *Le Conte de Nez* (The nose tale). *Le Conte de Nez* is a performance of “theatre forum”, which is played in the public space and where the public is involved in discussing the sense of belonging to the nation and to the community. It is aimed at reshaping the idea of nation and that of border and at producing a new inclusive and plural idea of nation in a free and collective way. Central categories of reasoning will be 1) that of frontier, understood as a symbolic border of inclusion-exclusion, which entitles some subjects to the recognition of certain rights and excludes others; and 2) recognition, conceived as the crucial element of human citizenship beyond any idea of border.

Mohamed Chtatou, Mohammed V University, Rabat

Patterns of Neo-Tribalism in Post-Independence Maghreb

For many people of the Greater Maghreb, the passage from colonial supremacy to national emancipation did not materialize as full independence but merely the passage from European colonialism to national colonialism expressed in the form of neo-tribalism. As such national autocracies, military or religious took over power and subverted freedom through co-optation schemes in every field advocating corruption, abuse of power, and embezzlement of public funds. Thus, democracy was squashed harshly and nipped in the bud, in the name of the nation-building ideal, and the lay citizen felt emasculated in the name of some lame nationalism. After the rise of the autocracies in the Maghreb, the political narrative changed, and ethnic minorities (the Amazigh people), political opposition, secular forces, and women seeking equity were all considered enemies of the nation and were muzzled, put in prison or killed in cold blood. Then the Arab Spring occurred raising hope for freedom and democracy but, alas, autocracies allied themselves with theocracies and the hope for change fizzled out dramatically. This paper will strive to show how flagrant neo-tribalism has become so tentacular within society either through co-optation or oppression creating a new breed of people obedient and obsequious and setting up new values for society. Neo-tribalism based on blind allegiance killed freedom, democracy, creativity, and free speech creating a culture of subservience in the region.

Panel Two

Najib Mokhtari, Rabat International University

The Dis.location of Transcultural Identities in Moroccan Literature

This paper aims to poke on the limits of Moroccan postcolonial literary productions where trendy concepts such as 'modernity', 'ambivalence', and 'hybridity' have been overused to piece together fragments of theories hardly answerable to drafting a cultural framework of literary identity, reading practices, study programs and marketing guidelines. Most Francophone Moroccan writers have made use of foreign language codes of expression and appropriated Western literary modes of production, which dictated for them a beyond position through which they could review their tradition/past, rewrite their histories, reappropriate their cultures and redefine their identities. All too often, writers of this kind of literature, are said to have deliberately reconstructed thought processes and shaped mind assumptions of the common citizen to ensure a thorough awareness of the harsh impact of incessant social, cultural and linguistic praxes extending a neo-colonial continuation, and eventually suggesting a repeat of inherent powers that strive to draft ambivalent forms of modernity, within a culturally traditional society. This paper will then proceed with a comparative study of selected extracts from the above-mentioned concepts from Fatema Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass* and Abdelkebir Khatibi's *Love in Two Languages*, with a focal purpose to validate the convergence of the findings within the interpretation of different readings which, at the junction of this study, would appear not in clear contradiction in their intents to foreground a 'double critique' towards the decolonized subjects. Though most post/colonial writers had emphatically performed distinctive individual, direct and determined styles and approaches to writing, their literature's goal was to produce a new cultural sense and sensibility among the Moroccan postcolonial literature, in general. This paper, therefore, aspires to highlight these



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writers' aspirations which can be viewed as being the bias that describes their postcolonial literary production using, modernity, ambivalence, and hybridity, yet maintaining one common concern, which is the awakening of a national consensus on their reconstructed past, as it engages with its newly born hybrid identities.

Fernanda Fischione, Sapienza University of Rome

Shifting Meanings: Nation Branding, Pluralism and the Maghreb at the International Prize of Arabic Fiction

Anne-Marie McManus argues that the International Prize of Arabic Fiction (IPAF), albeit responsible for the 'deterritorialisation' and globalisation of the Arabic novel, "does not in fact release us from the epistemology and ethics [...] of nationalism in the novel" (McManus 2016: 226). As McManus (2016: 219) points out, it is necessary to implement "a resituation of national frames, institutionally and hermeneutically, within the nodal relation the IPAF represents". This would not entail the resurfacing of the nation as the sole hermeneutical paradigm for reading novels but would re-balance the opposite tendency of the advocates of the World literature paradigm to forget that the novel emerges as "nation-thinking" (Mufti 2010: 466). At the same time, however, the national specificity of the IPAF novels does not hinder their readability worldwide. As Anna Ziajka Stanton (2021) highlights, it is the very internationality/cosmopolitanism characterising these novels that ensures that they are legible, making them stand halfway between the local and the global. The global and local reception of the novels long- and shortlisted by the IPAF judges, however, are mediated by their transnational circulation and the resignification they go through as soon as they get co-opted by the Abu Dhabi soft-politics system. Once they enter the competition for the IPAF, such novels stop serving their purpose of domestic nation building and start serving Abu Dhabi's nation-branding purposes. Despite the criticism the IPAF has been facing throughout the years (al-Riḥānī 2012, Masannat



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2014, Hammond 2017: 48), many novels running for the prize reflect an ongoing re-drawing of the national imaginaries and identities in the Maghreb following a pattern of pluralism and diversity. As well as novels belonging to “the Sub-Saharan African turn” (El Guabli 2021) in Maghrebi literature, also novels re-reading the Muslim-Jewish entanglements in North Africa can be analysed as attempts to rediscuss and redefine the national identity of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Discourses of national plurality and peaceful coexistence are highly valued within the framework of the IPAF, since they can help convey a tolerant image of Abu Dhabi internationally.

My presentation will focus on the double-sided value of nation building/nation branding and the ways in which the IPAF novels from the Maghreb get resignified and repurposed when they cross borders and make it to the Gulf.

Cristina Dozio, Università degli Studi di Milano

Building the Nation from behind Prison Bars: Moroccan Prison Writings and their Translation

The Years of Lead (*sanawāt al-raṣāṣ* 1965-1999) are a turning point in the construction of contemporary Morocco in terms of power relations in the post-colonial era, human rights recognition, and civil society engagement. Several cultural productions, both in Arabic and French, have contributed to the memorialization of this collective experience since the beginning of the 2000s. Nevertheless, the circulation of these works in Morocco is currently decreasing and younger generations have less access to them. This paper looks at three prison writings that are representative of the long-lasting impact of the Years of Lead's artistic memorialization: Fatna El Bouih's memoir *Ḥadīṯ al-ʿatamah* (2001), Tahar Ben Jelloun's fictionalized memoir *Cette aveuglante absence de lumière* (2001), and Youssef Fadel's novel *Ṭāʾir azraq nādir yuḥalliqu maʿī* (2013). These works will be examined for their local and transnational reception

through translation (in the Francophone, Anglophone and Italian market) to understand which image of the Moroccan nation is conveyed from behind the prison bars, with a focus on the representation of political activism, religion, education and gender issues. The analysis will look at the narrative choices, translation strategies, and paratexts.

Panel Three

Ana González Navarro, Autonomous University of Madrid/ University of Barcelona

Portraying Homosexuality in Contemporary Moroccan Fiction: Between Acceptance and Rejection?

The 2022 edition of the Salon International de l'Édition et du Livre in Morocco was the subject of a polemic, as the presentation and diffusion of a book was forbidden. The novel, *Muḍḍakirāt mithliyyah* (2022; *Memories of a Lesbian*) by Moroccan writer Fatima Zahra Amzkar, tells the story of a young lesbian woman who is torn between submitting to social mandates and living her identity and her desire with freedom. Due to the violence surrounding the debate about the promotion of this novel, the author had to temporarily retire from public life. However, Amzkar's novel is not the first work by a Moroccan woman writer to talk about female homosexual relations. In 1985, Badia Hadj Nasser published *Le Voile mis à nu*, where she narrates the sexual search of a woman who has relationships with men and women. More recently, Abdallah Taïa, the first Moroccan author to publicly recognize himself as Muslim and homosexual, regularly tours Morocco to present his books. In 2020, a group of young artists, writers, and activists published *L'Amour fait loi*, a collective work where they denounce the violence suffered by the LGTBIQ+ community in Morocco. Contrary to



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Amzkar's novel, all these works were written in French. This paper aims at discussing some questions raised by the increasing presence of this issue in Moroccan literature. Is literature promoting a debate on the rights of LGBTIQ+ people before they are dealt with on a political level? In what ways is homosexuality being represented in contemporary Moroccan literature? What circumstances led a novel like *Muḍḍakirāt mithliyyah* to cause such a polemic, compared to other works that deal with homosexuality?

Annamaria Bianco, Aix-Marseille Université/Université de Toulouse Jean-Jaurès

Migrant Images and Imaginaries: Tunisia's Contribution to *Harraga* Literature

The Maghreb constitutes the cradle of the literature of clandestine migration known as “ḥarrāga” literature. This literary genre developed in Morocco in the late 1990s and spread like wildfire to other Arab countries as the political-economic conditions of their societies deteriorated and Europe gradually closed its doors. Harraga novels reached their greatest popularity among authors and the reading public in the early 2000s and in the period following the 2011 Arab Spring. At this point, they became more integrated with the experiences of aspiring refugees from the Middle East (Sellman 2022), giving rise to hybrid cultural productions that go beyond the classic national social critique that underpins this literary genre to instead depict new migrant “imagined communities” (Anderson 2006) and even “post-nomadic” ones (Braidotti 2014). In this new landscape, an increasingly important presence is that of Tunisia. Unlike Morocco and Algeria, the country does not have a tradition of harraga novels behind it, and this is because departures from its shores have mainly involved individuals from other Arab countries or from sub-Saharan Africa (Kassab-Charfi and Khede 2019). However, with the post-2011 crisis, the literature of migration to Europe - of which Habib Selmi (al-Ḥabīb al-Sālimī) represents one of the big names on the Arabic-speaking literary scene - has started to give way to a growing number of



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narratives that focus on irregular displacement across the sea, depicting the radical changes the country has undergone in the last decade (Mastrangelo 2019). We will attempt to explore the development of this phenomenon in more detail, analysing how the relationship to the nation of Tunisians has radically changed. To this end, we will focus on two recently published novels: *Raqṣat al-marākib al-ġāriqa* (2016) by emerging author Sihem Kardous Abid (Sihām Kardūs ‘Abīd) and *Šaṭṭ al-arwāḥ* (2020) by and award-winning writer and academic Emna Remili (Āmina al-Ramīlī).

Federico Pozzoli, Università degli Studi di Milano/ University of St Andrews

“No illness but”: Rajab Bū Ḥuwayyish al-Minifī’s Anticolonial Poem in and Beyond Libya

Composed during the poet’s detention in the concentration camp of al-‘Aqīla, Rajab Bū Ḥuwayyish al Minifī’s oral poem *Mā bī maraḍ* (1931) has become one of the canonical works of the struggle against Italian colonisation in Libya. The poem, widely known in today’s Libya, is built around the anaphoric repetition of the expression ‘[I have] no illness but’, pathologizing the experience of life at the mercy of the fascist guards in the camp, which is contrasted with the nomad life of the poem in pre-colonial Barqa/Cyrenaica. Yet, despite its centrality to Libyan literary imaginary, the poem has remained virtually unknown outside the Arab world until the new century, when it was translated first into English on *Jadaliyya* (Khaled Mattawa 2011), and then, in book form, into French by Kamal Ben Hamed (2014). Ben Hamed’s translation operates indeed a powerful actualisation of the originally oral text and has indeed served as the basis for the poem’s secondary translation into Italian (2022). The contribution will address the poem through and against its translations/adaptations, focusing on two axes that shape the original texts and its rewritings/re-readings: anti-fascism (as opposed to national frames of anticolonial struggle), and the pathological as the key register to construct a literary image of the concentration camp – a register



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that was indeed to become a trope in post-WWII world literature. By adopting what Rebecca Walkowitz calls “close reading at a distance” (Walkowitz 2015), the paper will identify the textual workings of these axes and the ways in which they configured following reception, especially in the context of the elaboration of colonial past in Italy.

Panel Four

Jamal Bahmad, Mohammed V University, Rabat

Colonised by the Post-colonial Nation-state: Amazigh and Jewish Voices in Recent Moroccan Cinema

Despite their fierce armed and non-armed resistance to the French and Spanish occupation of Morocco (1912-1956), the Amazigh people of Moroccan found themselves and their language and culture systematically marginalised and condemned to gradual annihilation by the post-colonial regime. This marginalisation was carried out in the name of Morocco's imagined Arabness and Islamic identity. This political instrumentalization of the Arabic language and Islam to undermine Morocco's ethnic majority's existence was also applied to the Jewish minority. The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 was only one factor behind the mass exodus of Morocco's Jewish population of over 250,000 (Boum 2013; Bin-Nun 2014; Mata 2018; Yolande 2019; Bahmad 2020). The exclusion of the Moroccan Jewish existence by the Moroccan nationalist movement and its post-colonial heirs, on the hand, and the rise of Antisemitism in the country following the rise of Nasserism and Pan-Arabism in the 1950s and 60s, on the other, were key factors behind the loss of Morocco's millennial Jewish population, which has dwindled to around 2,000 people today. Talking about the tragedy of the Amazigh and Jewish people of Morocco was taboo if

not outright censored in the second half of the twentieth century. In recent years, Morocco has seemingly adopted partial multiculturalism as its state ideology. This was enshrined in the 2011 constitution, which recognise the Jewish element of Moroccan identity and its Amazigh substratum. The Amazigh language was also declared the second official language of the country next to, or rather *after*, Arabic, “which remains the official language of the state” (Constitution 2011). Several Moroccan filmmakers from the Amazigh and Jewish diasporas have taken it upon themselves to reclaim the voice of their people. Some films like Kamal Hachkar’s *Tinghir-Jerusalem: Echoes of the Mellah* (2013) and *In Yoru Eyes I See My Country* (2019) combine the Amazigh and Jewish voices by focusing on Amazigh Jews, the oldest component of Moroccan Jewish identity and existence. Using Hachkar’s films and applying a decolonial perspective, this paper argues that what is at stake in these visual narratives is a radical reimagination of the Moroccan nation-state from its margins and, the process, the creation of more inclusive narratives of belonging for a plural country yet to be embraced by the Moroccan post-colonial state and large parts of the political and public spheres.

Youssef Amine Elalamy, Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra

Graphic Archaeology or the Story of an AlieNation in Hicham Lasri’s Graphic Novel *MaRRoc*

This paper will seek to examine and explore the ways in which Moroccan author and filmmaker Hicham Lasri problematizes in his graphic novel *MaRRoc* the concept of identity and the idea of the nation. Dissecting different layers, with the simulated expertise of an archaeologist, the author presents the reader with a newly found or rather recovered community, that of Al Marrok (The Moroccans), whose cultural specificity and complexity both require some new aesthetic, formal and narratological approaches, ones which borrow from various dispersed cultural traditions of graphic



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storytelling and do not discriminate among different media formats, such as comic strips, comics, graphic novels and even movie storyboarding. The present contribution will therefore seek to analyse how the presence of a multi-layered structure and the use of a large set of media, ranging from texts, illustrations, drawings to collage, photography, and painted photography, contribute to the idea of the nation/community as a constructed narrative, also made of overlapping international, transnational and transcultural components. For this purpose, a special attention will be paid to the ways in which the various intermedial and transmedial frames of reference that usually define graphic narratives are used here to tackle (to question?) the issue of national identity in relation to the national imaginary circulating through, among other things, cultural and artistic productions like Hicham Lasri's *MaRRoc*.

Elizabeth M. Perego, Appalachian State University

From Mers El Kébir to Mars? Science Fiction and the Stellar Trajectories of Postcolonial Maghribi Nations, 1960-2000

Science fiction's popularity skyrocketed around the globe in the middle 20th century just as human efforts at reaching outer space first became realized. Pop culture developments along with Space Age jockeying for technological supremacy among the world's major nations did not go unnoticed among the three countries generally identified as comprising the Maghrib. As Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia underwent long processes of decolonization and disentanglement from European empires, some citizens looked to space and science fiction surrounding space travel as a way of commenting on the potential future trajectory of their nations. For their part, postcolonial governments also strove to benefit from science fiction tropes and space race imagery to project an image of themselves to their citizens as capable of heralding citizens into a brighter, more technologically advanced future and their countries on par with the most technologically developed countries of the world. As science fiction



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as a genre was deeply rooted in European imperialism (Rieder 2008), this turn may have not been surprising as artists may have wanted to subvert earlier narratives praising European exploration in the immediate wake of independence. Yet, as some state development projects faltered in the decades following independence, some citizens equally responded to failed promises of better futures through science fiction. Famed humorists like Fellag and cartoonists like Slim parodied popular science fiction works such as Star Wars and tropes like space invasion to stress that Algeria would not soon find its place among the world's space-faring nations. They also emphasized that material conditions at home were eroding rapidly in the wake of state shortcomings. Rather than pitching this work to an international audience, however, virtually all works of science fiction and science fiction parody were produced for local audiences and in local languages, making this discussion of Maghribi nations outside of the stratosphere a strictly national or regional affair. While this paper will provide an overview of postcolonial Maghribi science fiction and science fiction parody, it hones in on Algeria as a case study and examines cartoons, plays, short stories, and other genres of cultural production from some of the country's most lauded artists, including Kateb Yacine and Safia Ketou. I draw upon critical discourse analysis and theories of science fiction, postcolonialism, humor, and the nation in the Maghrib, including Khatibi's *Magheb Pluriel* (1983), to show that science fiction provided a critical space for Algerians to comment on the postcolonial trajectory of their nation and attempt to hold the state to its promises in the realm of development. This work will answer McDougall's (2017) call for more scholarship on the history of development efforts in the region to account for cultural aspects of these efforts while also highlighting the significance of references to science fiction and the space race in recent cultural production and national imaginings in the Maghrib.

Panel Five

Amina Boubia, Rabat International University

Music Festivals, *Zellige*, and Football: Moroccan Popular Culture, Nation Branding and Soft Power in the 21st Century

How can music festivals, football fever, and handcrafted clay tiles possibly be put in relation, not only to one another, but also, and most crucially, to the concepts of “nation branding” and “soft power”, when applied to contemporary Morocco? Looking at the ever-growing importance of traditional and modern symbols of Moroccan popular culture in terms of national identification and cultural diplomacy since the turn of the millennium, this paper explores to which extent such a recent development illustrates a “re-invention of tradition”, as Eric Hobsbawm argued in his ground-breaking work around nationalism. Furthermore, the paper examines how the “popularity” factor of cultural production is instrumental when it comes to the continued re-definition of Moroccan identity at the national and international level, yet in line with the classical image the country has been cultivating, between “tradition and modernity”. Eventually, the paper argues that, far from the worldwide decline of nationalism predicted by some, the contemporary processes of “Re-ImagiNation” at play in Morocco speak, on the contrary, for a remarkably flexible and, in some cases even inclusive form of nationalism. Enhanced through a powerful official Moroccan foreign policy discourse built on an “open, diverse and tolerant” country at the crossroads of civilisations, with a strong and long “tradition” of intercultural, interfaith, as well as inter- and transnational dialogue, popular culture provides, more than ever in our globalised era, the actual content and material allowing for the more abstract influence generated by strategies of nation branding and soft power to, literally, be heard, lived and embodied emotionally; in short to “take shape” .

Angelika Palmegiani, University of Naples "l'Orientale"

The Renewed Morocco's Image after Qatar 2022: An Analysis of Cultural Elements and Paradigms

The World Cup hosted in Qatar between November and December 2022 sparked criticism before and after its conclusion. The World Cup's awarding to the Arab country, the working conditions of the foreign labourers hired to build the stadiums, the discrimination for the minorities (in particular women and LGBTQ+ communities), and the decisions of some national teams to revindicate their right and duty to stand for them are but a few controversial issues extensively discussed. But also, the masterful organization of the event, the construction of infrastructures, and the numerous initiatives to entertain the supporters before and after the matches are some of the positive aspects mentioned. It was the first time that an African and Arabic-speaking country, Morocco, reached the semi-final competing with France, Croatia, and Argentina to get the title. The Cinderella of the World Cup earned her own supporter's trust match after match, as well as the support of other fans. Considering the interest raised by the Moroccan national team's success at the World Cup, we intend to investigate the mechanisms that have enabled the consecration of its image. This research will be conducted by analysing, simultaneously, how the image of Morocco was conveyed by the Self and how it was received by the Other during the competition, identifying the univocal cultural elements that assumed fundamental importance. It will be observed that this process affects how the Moroccan (the Self), whose identity consists of numerous elements, presents himself to the Other. It is also necessary to determine whether the image transmitted by the Self is actually at his service. In other words, we aim to define whether the Moroccan's image is rehabilitated (particularly in the Western imaginary), or whether this new image, as it is perceived and then narrated by the Other, is the result of a vision that tends to



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infantilize the Moroccan, to simplify the numerous and complex elements that shape his identity by reducing him to an easy and recognizable, therefore controllable type. To conclude football, as a mass culture phenomenon, can create and change images, having a strong impact on the mass imagination that should lead to the reflection on the extent that the narration created might have, potentially orienting public opinion.

Kaoutar Ghilani, Forum Transregionale Studies, Berlin

National Imaginaries in Times of Lockdown: Digital Culture and the Nation during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Morocco

What is more powerful than a global pandemic to make the nation, both as a conceptual and experienced community, obsolete? The permeability of national borders to the virus has revived the critique of the nation as a dated construction that is challenged by globalisation and the intensive circulation of people and goods. Yet, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted, if not strengthened, the nation as a primary community of responsibility and care. Indeed, the response to the pandemic worldwide was national. The nation, as a concept and a community, was heavily invested, both by governments, calling for national solidarity, but also by civil society, organically organising networks of national support. Once confined at home, the internet became the primary space of communication and articulation of new national imaginaries. In Morocco, a figure marked the first wave of the pandemic and the national imaginary in relation to it: Qayda Ĥuriya. This female neighbourhood official, dressed in a military outfit and charged with sending people home during the lockdown, became known for her funny, vulgar, and irreverent expressions. Filmed several times while calling on people not respecting curfews and lockdowns in working-class neighbourhoods, she quickly transformed into a Moroccan social media star associating her name and image with state authority in pandemic times. Looking into the construction of national imaginaries away from elitist materials, this paper



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investigates the discourses of digital culture in Morocco during the Covid-19 pandemic and the articulation within them of new national imaginaries. Relying on a gender and cultural studies approach, the paper will analyse the construction of a national imaginary in the discourse of the Moroccan state as verbalised by Qayda Ḥuriya and as commented on by Moroccan internet users, therefore tackling gender, social class, and state-society dimensions of national imaginaries in the contemporary Maghreb.