

## Configuring Literary Criticism in Morocco: A Narrative History to the 1950s

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**Abstract:** This study is the initial part of over a century-long narrative history which seeks to map out the evolution of Moroccan literary criticism. Inspired by the Moroccan critic Mohamed Kharmach's *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth fī al-Maghrib: 1900-1956*, this study extends from the early twentieth century to the mid-1950s, one of the least mapped territories of literary criticism in Moroccan academia and elsewhere. It explores its outset in the 1920s as *taqrīzāt* (celebratory statements) and *musāmarāt* (society speeches); its growth in the 1930s into an activity and pursuit designed to aid in building a cultural identity; and its "maturity" as a critical enterprise debating and probing Moroccan, Arabic and Western literatures. It explores the historical backdrops, critical endeavours and intellectual conversations behind the making of the pre-1950s literary criticism. It argues that, despite burgeoning critical voices and views, this critical enterprise could not mature into approaches or movements based on theoretical and methodological underpinnings conducive to reading and judging literature. Certain "critics" abandoned, depreciated and misused criticism whereas others whose critical skills were unmatched but untapped advanced the critical enterprise through the introduction of nonnative ways of reading literature. These, however, did not evolve longer due to colonialism, an embryonic criticism and intense controversies. Simply put, the pre-1950s literary criticism in Morocco was a tale of two critical camps: talented but undevoted critics versus intrusive critics.

**Keywords:** Moroccan Literary Criticism; Arabic Literature, Narrative History, Mohamed Kharmach, Colonialism, Critical Backdrops, Debates, Endeavours.

The study of the beginnings of Moroccan literary criticism has not been amply undertaken. It is thought to be a "thankless" task because critics must manage a myriad of archival materials, including fragmented statements in literary works, introductory notes to poetry collections, and newspaper and magazine articles. Also, it is thought to be "worthless" because most critics agree that there was "no" literary criticism in the early twentieth century. In "Difā'ā 'an al-Manhaj al-Ijtīmā'ī," Nakouri remarks that, in the strictest sense, there was no literary criticism grounded in critical approaches, but there were mere attempts inspired mostly by rhetoric.<sup>2</sup>

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Acknowledgement: This research undertaking has been guided and corrected by my doctorate supervisor, Pr. Karim Bejjit of the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Abdelmalek Essaadi University, Tétouan. Pr. Bejjit's expert guidance and strong support has brought this undertaking to fruition. To him, I extend my deepest gratitude for his pedantic corrections and pinpoint comments. Doubtless, any insight is his, and any spelling issues or typos are mine.

2. Driss Nakouri, "Difā'ā 'an Al-Manhaj al-Ijtīmā'ī," *Al-Thaqāfah al-Jadīdah* 9, no. 1 (1978): 25.

Likewise, in “Al-Manhaj al-Jadalī,” Elaoufi reveals that there were but descriptive statements and encomiums prior to the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, in *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth fī al-Maghrib: 1900-1956*, Kharmach seeks to study the embryonic stages of literary criticism in Morocco from the turn of the twentieth century to independence. Although almost thrown into oblivion, Kharmach’s *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth* is the most in-depth probe into the rise of Moroccan literary criticism. Its sources are the most diverse, including an array of difficult-to-access newspaper and magazine articles. Its originality has gone unchallenged, if not unparalleled, for decades. The present study (over)quotes Kharmach’s *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth* because there exist no other works as in-depth, diverse in sources, and unparalleled in originality as his. It is quoted to narrate and illustrate the early beginnings of literary criticism in Morocco.<sup>4</sup> In it, Kharmach explores an array of its critical literature with the aim of confirming the existence or nonexistence of literary criticism and validating the extent of its maturity and novelty in the Moroccan context and its interplay with other movements, cultural and otherwise. He concludes that there has been “certain” criticism, and both its features and failings are worth revisiting. So, too, is its impact upon the critical and cultural scenes at large.

### The Beginnings of Literary Criticism in Morocco

Before describing those beginnings, Kharmach backdrops the dawn of Moroccan criticism against an imminent fin-de-siècle renaissance led by youth in politics, society and culture. It was pending and promising. Following Abdelaziz’s overthrow, King Abdelhafid took over. Calls were issued to write a constitution before the French protectorate took place. In the press, intellectuals were writing in favour of the country’s best interests.<sup>5</sup> Publishing was growing: several ambitious and innovative names outshone, including the fquih Guennoun, physician El Alami and historian El Nasiri. So was learning. Some students began attending foreign schools while others were sent in embassies bound for the Arab East and Europe.<sup>6</sup> Religious revival was in the making, too. The revivalist Abou Chouaïb Doukkali, for instance, led what Kharmach describes as an intellectual *Intifāḍah* (uprising or revival) to

3. Najib Elaoufi, “Al-Manhaj al-Jadalī: Ḥudūd Mutaḥarrikah wa la Nihā’iyah,” *Al-Thaqāfah al-Jadīdah* 9 no. 1 (1978): 49. Elsewhere, Elaoufi echoes the belief that there were not serious critical undertakings, let alone literary criticism in the epistemological and methodological sense. For him, before the 1960s, there were only impressionistic attempts and thoughts. Elaoufi, “Al-Mashhad al-Naqdī fī al-Maghrib,” *Fikr wa Naqd* 6 no. 18 (1998): 47.

4. Mohamed Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth fī al-Maghrib: 1900-1956* (Al-Dār al-Bayḍā’: Afrīqīyā al-Sharq, 1998), 4. Originally, Kharmach’s study is a doctoral thesis entitled “La Critique littéraire moderne au Maroc: 1900-1956” (1980). It was supervised by Ali Merad of the Lyon-based Université Jean Moulin, France. Beyond doubt, there exist earlier studies, but they do not seem to be as extensive as Kharmach’s. These include Mohamed Afifi’s *Al-Naqd Al-Adabī Al-Ḥadīth fī Al-Maghrib Al-‘Arabī: Madārisuh, Ṭarā’iquh, Qaḍāyāh* (1971) as well as Ahmed Ziyad’s *Lamaḥāt min Tārīkh al-Ḥarakah al-Fikrīyah bi al-Maghrib* (1973). Of late, the early twentieth-century stirrings were revisited by Abderrahim El Khaidar’s *Fuṣūl fī al-Naqd al-Adabī bi al-Maghrib khilāl al-Niṣf al-Awal min al-Qarn al-‘Ishrīn* (2016).

5. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 4.

6. *Ibid.*, 5.

counter Sufi orders, stirring up a controversy over modern and orthodox Islam. Attempts were made to shatter cultural isolation. Forward-looking Moroccan clerisy were captivated by the Arab *Nahḍah* (Renaissance) and Western culture alike.<sup>7</sup> The gusto for the West grew when Moroccans came in touch with Western ways of living, “devouring everything in the wonderous Western culture.”<sup>8</sup> It was an auspicious renaissance. But, its prospect were not long-lasting due to the “colonial shock.” It drove Morocco into instability. Areas whose stability was slightly maintained could witness a revival in culture. Revivalists, for instance, sought to follow the learning modes of studying and thinking, not reciting recounting. Citing the noted Moroccan scholar Abdellah Guennoun, Kharmach reveals that those revivalist writers “desired creation and invention and despised imitation and following.”<sup>9</sup>

According to Kharmach, the early beginnings of literary criticism in Morocco were modest attempts which extol literary works.<sup>10</sup> Those stirrings were *taqrīzāt* or *taḥliyyāt*, encomiums in prose and verse which celebrate a literary work or writer. In “*Taṭawūr al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth bi al-Maghrib*” (2009), the critic Akkar describes those celebratory commentaries as impressions and descriptions extolling the “virtues” of “serious works” inspired by contemporary literary taste.<sup>11</sup> Kharmach cites Abbas ben Brahim el Marrakechi’s *Al-I’lām bi Man Halla Murrākash wa Aghmāt min al-A’lām* (1936) as a stellar work of *taqrīzāt* and *taḥliyyāt*. It extols and was highly extolled by literature aficionados. Taie ben Driss el Kadiri, for instance, considers *Al-I’lām* a “masterwork” of what el Marrakechi has written in literature and history with an unusually easy-to-grasp writing style.<sup>12</sup> Certainly, Kharmach maintains that those encomiums do not amount to literary criticism. For him, they are but congratulatory statements whose aim is to laud literary works. Besides these encomiums, Kharmach views the conversations which took place among literature enthusiasts as early “critical” stirrings. Quoting Mokhtar Soussi, Kharmach remarks that, before the protectorate, “criticism” meetings or saloons were held in a Soussi literature society. Works of poetry were brought before them, and they regard them

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7. *Ibid.*, 6.

8. *Ibid.*, 7.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, 14.

11. Abdelhamid Akkar, “*Taṭawūr al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth bi al-Maghrib*,” in *Taḥawulāt al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Mu’āṣir bi al-Maghrib*, ed. Said Yaktin (Al-Rabāt: Maṭba‘at Dār al-Manāhil, 2009), 22. Akkar notes that celebratory writings come as prefatory notes introducing literary works or as sketchy newspaper and magazine articles. Among the most notable literary celebrators, Akkar references Mohamed ben Abbas El Kabbaj, Ahmed Ziyad, Said Hajji, Mohamed Daoud, Abdellah Ibrahim and Abdeslam Alaoui. It is worth noting that Akkar’s “*Taṭawūr al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth bi al-Maghrib*,” is one of the shortest but richest histories of Moroccan literary criticism. Initially, it was brought out in *Fikr wa Naqd*’s sixth issue (1998). Later, it reappeared in *Al-Naqd al-Adabī bi al-Maghrib: Masārāt wa Taḥawulāt* (2002) and was retitled “*Ufuq al-Khiṭāb al-Naqdī bi al-Maghrib*.” Its reappearance, however, lacks the enriching endnotes it once had.

12. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 16.

in approval or disapproval but with the utmost courtesy (17).<sup>13</sup> But, Soussi's *Al-Ma'sūl* does not instance "critical" statements or standards against which the saloons measured literary worth. In this respect, the chief Moroccan critic Ahmad El Yabouri discredits *Al-Ma'sūl* as inadequate evidence. In "Al-Naqd al-Adabī fī al-Maghrib," (2009), he dis-counts *Al-Ma'sūl* as an instance of historical writings that create a "disabled history" of Moroccan literature because they are not about literature per se but about leading statesmen and writers who lived in certain urban centres.<sup>14</sup> Kharmach elaborates that increased impetus for this nascent criticism was given by the then burgeoning press, namely the Rabat-based *al-Sa'ādah* newspaper. Its 752<sup>nd</sup> issue, for instance, includes a "jury verdict" which contrasts the poetry of El Kabbaj and Nemichi. The verdict reads, "There is strength and eloquence in El Kabbaj's poetry and softness and smoothness in Ahmed Nemichi's poetry."<sup>15</sup> Without any support, Kharmach assumes that this contrast must have been based upon "study," therefore boding for a near-to-dawn criticism. In its 2056<sup>th</sup> issue, Mohamed Boujandar writes about the late 1910s literary compositions, stressing that "there was plenty of theatricality: many writers tended towards terminological embellishment unmindful of the intended meanings and shrouded in a variety of ornamentations and alliterations."<sup>16</sup> For Kharmach, Boujandar was one of the "leading men of letters" to call upon Moroccan writers, who were steeped in linguistic embellishment, to ensure a balance between wording and meaning: crystal-clear stylistics and reader-friendly semantics. Such a call might have been unheard of or unheeded before. In a word, Kharmach seeks to look deeper into the embryonic "critical" activity, one which began to steer away from hollow and loose encomiums towards the threshold of an "emergent" criticism in the 1920s and 1930s.

### A Growing Literary Criticism and the Forging of a Cultural Identity

As a larger backdrop which helped shape the 1920s and 30s emergent criticism, Kharmach gives a thumbnail sketch of two pivotal events in Moroccan history. First was the May 16, 1930 Berber Dahir (Decree). It was designed by the French protectorate to establish customary courts for Amazighs; it was branded by the

13. Ibid., 17. As evidence, Kharmach cites Mohamed El Mokhtar Soussi's *Sous al-Ālimah*, the introduction to *Al-Ma'sūl* encyclopaedia.

14. Ahmed El Yabouri, "Al-Naqd al-Adabī fī al-Maghrib: Marḥalat al-Ta'sīs (1920-1940)," in *Tahawulāt al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Mu'āṣir bi al-Maghrib*, ed. Said Yaktin (Al-Rabāt: Maṭba'at Dār al-Manāhil, 2009), 9. Besides, he mentions similar books about scholars and writers based in urban centres, including: Abderrahmane Ben Zidane's *Ithāf A'lām al-Nās bi Jamāl Akhbār Ḥāḍirat Maknās* (1934), Mohamed Boujandar's *Makhtūṭāt* (manuscript) titled *Al-Ightibāṭ bi Tarājim al-A'lām al-Rabāṭ* (unidentified publication or production date), and Mohamed Daoud's *Tārīkh Tiṭwān* (1966). El Yabouri, 9.

15. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 19. As Kharmach footnotes, *al-Sa'ādah*'s 752<sup>nd</sup> issue appeared on June 11, 1914. It is worth remarking that the publication dates of the quoted newspaper and magazine articles are reported as they feature in Kharmach's *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth* unless stated otherwise.

16. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 20. *Al-Sa'ādah*'s 2056<sup>th</sup> issue came out on March 18, 1920.

nationalist movement as an ill-faith attempt to efface Islamic law among Amazighs and eventually convert them into Christians. Second was the shift towards non-military resistance. It culminated in the 1934 establishment of *Kutlat al-‘Amal al-Waṭanī* (The Moroccan Action Committee).<sup>17</sup> In this anti-colonial context, nationalists sought to deploy culture and thought as instruments to combat colonialism and awaken people. To this end, they designed a cultural “armoury” composed of nationalist newspapers and magazines, theatrical performances, cultural saloons, public talks and historical and literary studies which bring Moroccan identity to the fore.<sup>18</sup> Inextricably intertwined with anti-colonial politics, literature rose to prominence: poetry was engrossed in nationalist zeal; endeavours were made to write the novel and drama; the socio-historical essay thrived; and artistic and critical writings began to take roots.<sup>19</sup> Besides, newspapers and magazines were established to engage and enlighten a mass audience, including *al-Ḥayāt* and *al-Ḥuriyah* newspapers in Tétouan, *al-Taqqadum* newspaper in Salé and *al-Atlas* newspaper in Rabat, not to mention *al-Salām* and *al-Maghrib al-Jadīd* magazines in Tétouan and *al-Maghrib*, *Risālat al-Maghrib* and *al-Thaqāfah al-Jadīdah* magazines in Rabat.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, writers were no longer shelving their works but informing a vaster audience. Citing Guennoun’s *Aḥādīth fī al-Adab al-Maghribī al-Ḥadīth* (1964), Kharmach mentions that writers became very much aware of what they were writing in fear of a disrepute-incurring criticism, so the number of self-styled writers who intruded into literature was on the decrease.<sup>21</sup> In sum, the 1920s and 30s were a long-awaited chance or context for the critical enterprise in Morocco to burgeon.

A broad scholarly consensus indicates that Moroccan literary criticism began in the 1920s and 1930s. Akkar maintains that the 1920s witnessed the dawn of literary criticism in the shape of *musāmarāt*. He characterizes them as talks which were held by cultivated Moroccan and French men in literary saloons and high schools, discussing both literary and non-literary matters.<sup>22</sup> As examples of those talks which were turned into books afterwards, Akkar cites Abdellah el Kabbaj’s *Musāmarat al-Shi‘r wa al-Shu‘arā’* (1928) and Ahmed Nemichi’s *Tārīkh al-Shi‘r wa al-Shu‘arā’ bi Fās* (1928). Like Akkar, El Yabouri argues that literary criticism began in the 1930s. Its “modest” inception was stamped by history and biography, and it did not

17. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 46.

18. *Ibid.*, 46-47.

19. *Ibid.*, 47.

20. *Ibid.* For an extensive exploration of Moroccan newspapers and magazines as containers of numerous literary writings, consider Marie-Therese Cecilia Ellis’ “Empire or *Umma*: Writing Beyond the Nation in Moroccan Periodicals” (2007). It is a scholarly study which compares Arabic periodicals in Morocco and French colonial ones in the 1930s and 40s. Ellis argues that “[c]ontributors to the Moroccan periodicals, who represent the first Moroccans to produce printed texts of any kind, strove to establish a medium for equitable dialogue between Europe, the Arab Middle East, and Morocco” (2). For her, “[t]his transcontinental cooperation can be understood as an early expression of transnationalism,” one which calls into question readings Moroccan literature as exclusively “nationalist” or as “responsive to colonial cultural imposition” (2). Ellis, “Empire or *Umma*,” 2.

21. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 48.

22. Akkar, “Taṭawūr al-Naqd al-Adabī,” 19-20.

“unload” the “history burden” until it was influenced by literary values originating in the Arab East.<sup>23</sup> Mohamed Daghmoumi reveals that this cultural contact was all too visible among Moroccan writers, who eyed, were inspired by, circulated and extolled Eastern literature and its writers.<sup>24</sup> In “Qaḍāyā wa Nuṣūṣ min al-Naqd al-Maghribī” (2002), Abdelfattah Lahjomri, like El Yabouri, extends the inception of criticism to the 1930s when critics were striving to establish a literary movement whose socio-cultural space was shaped by literary views and values coming from the Arab East and European West alike.<sup>25</sup> This acculturation with the East and West impacted the literary and critical productions in the 1930s, but there was a distinct Moroccan element in the writings of those emerging critics. In agreement with El Yabouri and Lahjomri, Daghmoumi tracks the “genuine genesis” of literary criticism to the 1930s, a decade which was marked by the crystallization of nationalist sentiment, especially in urban centres in Morocco.<sup>26</sup> Quoting Ziyad and Guennoun, Daghmoumi argues that the critical enterprise was integrated “organically” into the nationalist movement: it was part and parcel of the anti-colonial struggle, and its efficacy and influence was no lesser than the political one.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, it sought to espouse and express nationalist values and voices which bore the signs of an emergent “cultural identity.”<sup>28</sup> It is this nascent criticism that Kharmach attempts to investigate and illustrate through a body of “critical” excerpts.

Charting the 1920s and 1930s landscape, Kharmach distinguishes between two “critical” camps or strands: conventional and innovative. One of those conventional literary enthusiasts is Abdellah el Kabbaj, a noted figure known for a 1923 talk

23. El Yabouri, “Al-Naqd al-Adabī fī al-Maghrib,” 15.

24. Mohamed Daghmoumi, *Naqd al-Riwāyah wa al-Qiṣah al-Qaṣīrah bi Al-Maghrib: Maḥalat al-Ta'sīs* (Al-Dār al-Bayḍā': Sharikat al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī' al-Madāris, 2006), 28. Similarly, Kharmach elaborates that Moroccan writers in the 1930s addressed works of Eastern Arabic literature and observed the deathdays of eminent Eastern writers. For instance, they organized a Remembrance Day forty days after Ahmed Shawqī's death, on which they delivered eulogies and studies extolling the virtues of the Prince's poetry and compiled later in a booklet entitled *Yawm Shawqī bi Fās* (1932). On March 1, 1936, the *al-Maghrib al-Jadīd* magazine observed a millennium deathday in remembrance of al-Mutanabbī, devoting two special issues to his life and poetry. For short excerpts of those eulogies, studies and more, consult Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Hadīth*, 99-116.

25. Abdelfattah Lahjomri, “Qaḍāyā wa Nuṣūṣ min al-Naqd al-Maghribī,” in *Al-Naqd al-Adabī bi al-Maghrib: Masārāt wa Taḥawulāt*, ed. Abdelfattah Lahjomri (Al-Rabāt: Maṭba'at al-Ma'arif al-Jadīda, 2002), 33.

26. In *Naqd al-Riwāyah wa al-Qiṣah al-Qaṣīrah*, Daghmoumi's view about the 1930s birth of literary criticism concurs with Ahmed Ziyad's in *Lamaḥāt min Tārīkh al-Ḥarakah al-Fikrīyah bi al-Maghrib*. Ziyad locates the rise of a “critical movement” between 1934 and 1952. Like Daghmoumi, Kharmach stresses that the rise of modern literary criticism may be conspicuously seen in the 1930s or before. His stress upon the 1930s shows the ground that the critical enterprise was gaining then, one which centred around ideas and views about exploring literary works based upon the interplay between culture and the then circumstantial conditions. Kharmach, *Al-Tawajjuhāt al-Thaqāfiyah wa Taṭawur al-Fikr al-Naqdī*, 49.

27. Daghmoumi, *Naqd al-Riwāyah wa al-Qiṣah al-Qaṣīrah*, 46.

28. Ibid., 27-28. Daghmoumi names major writers who invested literature and the burgeoning criticism with nationalist sentiment, including Allal El Fassi, Abdellah Ibrahim and Abdelkhalek Torres, among others.

entitled “Al-Shi‘r wa al-Shu‘rā’.”<sup>29</sup> In it, El Kabbaj remarks that, besides connecting writers and celebrating sovereigns, poetry teaches and cultivates a “sophisticated taste.”<sup>30</sup> Not akin to “dry” prose, poetry is lively: it evokes deeper emotions and inspires inner selves; it is an inborn gift which is written in an eloquent and soft language as well as an elegant and smooth style, drawing on imagery, metaphor and simile.<sup>31</sup> For El Kabbaj, poets should be emotionally deeper and imaginatively richer, so they can betray and convey what they experience.<sup>32</sup> “Promising” as this major talk or text may seem, el Kabbaj’s look at poetry by his contemporaries did not yet abandon laudatory language or ascend what Kharmach depicts as “the throne of criticism.”<sup>33</sup> Another conventional but influential name is Mohamed ben Abbas El Kabbaj, the eminent writer of *Al-Adab al-‘Arabī fī al-Maghrib al-Aqṣá* (1929). For El Yabouri, El Kabbaj’s book is a central contribution to writing the history of Moroccan literature, one which reveals the impact of Egyptian literary trends on this generation of Moroccan writers.<sup>34</sup> For Akkar, El Kabbaj’s work is the “amplest embodiment” of a growing movement which sought to anthologize writers and writings.<sup>35</sup> In “Breaking the Canon,” Fernández Parrilla, a chief Spanish Arabist, considers El Kabbaj’s milestone anthology a “pioneer contribution of modern literary criticism”<sup>36</sup> Still, it extends beyond anthologizing Moroccan writers to bringing a burgeoning literary identity to the foreground.<sup>37</sup> For Kharmach, El Kabbaj’s *Al-Adab al-‘Arabī* highlights the crucial features of Moroccan literature in Arabic with “clear views” about literature and writers and the “critical views” held

29. El Kabbaj’s talk was brought out in *al-Sa’ādah*’s 2473<sup>rd</sup> issue (January 1, 1923). As noted above by Akkar, this talk was turned into a book entitled *Musāmarat al-Shi‘r wa al-Shu‘rā’* (1928).

30. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 25-26.

31. *Ibid.*, 27; 28.

32. *Ibid.*, 26; 42.

33. *Ibid.*, 29-30.

34. El Yabouri, “Al-Naqd al-Adabī fī al-Maghrib,” 11.

35. Akkar, “Taṭawūr al-Naqd al-Adabī,” 20.

36. Gonzalo Fernández Parrilla, “Breaking the Canon: Zafzaf, Laroui and the Moroccan Novel,” in *From New Values to New Aesthetics: Turning Points in Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. Stephan Guth and Gail Ramsay (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 76. Elsewhere, Fernández Parrilla makes a similar statement that celebrates the “critical” status of El Kabbaj’s *Al-Adab al-‘Arabī fī al-Maghrib al-Aqṣá*. Gonzalo Fernández Parrilla, *La Literatura Marroquí Contemporánea: La Novela y la Crítica Literaria*, trans. Sanae Chairi (Toledo: Escuela de Traductores de Toledo, 2006), 23-24..

37. Akkar, “Taṭawūr al-Naqd al-Adabī,” 22. One more seminal work highlighting the endurance of an Arabic literature in Morocco is the celebrated scholar Abdellah Guennoun’s *Al-Nubūgh al-Maghribī fī al-Adab al-‘Arabī* (1938). Like El Kabbaj’s *Al-Adab al-‘Arabī fī al-Maghrib al-Aqṣá*, it seeks to forge or foster a Moroccan literary identity. For El Yabouri, Guennoun’s seminal book brings to light the brilliance of Arabic literature in Morocco ever since the Muslim conquest: it introduces political and cultural backdrops and addresses literary works in poetry and prose. El Yabouri, “Al-Naqd al-Adabī fī al-Maghrib,” 12. For Akkar, El Kabbaj’s and Guennoun’s works endeavour to grant “aesthetic legitimacy” to modern Moroccan literature and craft its literary identity. Akkar, “Taṭawūr al-Naqd al-Adabī,” 23. For Parrilla, the two works seek to unveil “Morocco’s Arabness in stressing the existence of a long literary tradition, as a symbolic way to fight colonial policies.” Also, they seek to redress the oblivion into which the Moroccan engagement in extending Arabic literature has been consigned by Eastern writers. Parrilla, “Breaking the Canon,” 76.

by those writers.<sup>38</sup> Aware of literary movements in the Arab world and the evolution of literary works there, El Kabbaj groups writers into leading, inter-generational and budding, cautioning against anachronistic readings of literature and commenting that criticism should address the history and milieu where the works of each group arise.<sup>39</sup> He advises “critics” to advance approaches that ensure objectivity in comprehension and accuracy in judgment, calling upon the most acquainted among them to identify and remedy shortcomings in literary writing and thought.<sup>40</sup> These views about literature managed to go beyond encomiums and stir up the “critical” scene. Kharmach, however, reveals that the 1920s and 1930s literary devotees advanced views about literary writings, not theoretical theories: they thought highly of taste as essential to appreciating and approaching literature; they thought circumstantially of how history and society shape literature; and they thought of critics as having to be culturally competent, intellectually disposed and accurately articulate.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, some like Mokhtar Soussi and Mohamed El Mekki Naciri went as far as to encourage writers to advance national and human causes larger than literature. For them, writers have to engage in lived actualities and voice people’s beliefs, feelings and hopes.<sup>42</sup> These circumstantially inspired calls for engagement seem to have been the very “murmurs” of the 1970s Marxist/Realist criticism.

On the other hand, the new strand among conventional critics took shape in the “glory” 1930s. One of the inaugural talks or texts was given by Bennacer Ribati: “Fan al-Naqd” (1932).<sup>43</sup> For him, critics should extensively know the author’s life and work as evaluated by the norms of the author’s milieu and time; they should self-situate within the author’s life, emotion, thought and writing.<sup>44</sup> Before exploring a literary work, Ribati suggests a series of study steps which high-lights the author’s geographic locale, socio-historical milieu, former work, ancestry and behaviour in the “battle of life.” As for the work, critics should probe its composition, theme(s) and history with a view to impartially studying the author’s character as it features there; the work’s thematic essence (not linguistic embroidery); and the key ideas and views backdropped against the author’s age and its spirit.<sup>45</sup> Kharmach comments that Ribati foregrounds the interplay between the text and the larger context: authors write under the impact of their age’s spirit, and their writings – notably when seminal – impact the age’s reader. For him, critics neither laud nor lash. The highly “cultivated” critics ought to guide readers through “the most valuable” works to

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38. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 31.

39. *Ibid.*, 32.

40. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 32-33. Kharmach mentions that El Kabbaj was the first critical enthusiast to assert the utmost importance of criticism in redressing and serving Moroccan literature in Arabic. He, however, does not elaborate on the bases and steps of criticizing nor upon the analytical skills that critics should acquire and improve.

41. *Ibid.*, 42.

42. *Ibid.*, 43.

43. Bennacer’s lecture or talk was brought out in *al-Sa’ādah*’s 3807<sup>th</sup> issue (March 3, 1932).

44. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 48.

45. *Ibid.*, 49; 50.

boost the nation's ethical virtue and literary worth, explaining mysteries and niceties there, so that they can be understood by the less cultivated.<sup>46</sup> Ribati might have been a distinguished "critic" had he unlocked his promising potential. It seems to have been kept untapped and unheard of later, however.

Among many growing voices in the 1930s, Kharmach discusses two: the lead journalists and nationalists Said Hajji and Abdelkhalek Torres. In "*Al-Nahḍah al-Adabiyah al-'Arabiyah*" (1933), Hajji looks into what literature is about.<sup>47</sup> For him, it is a "talking [walking] image" which describes human life's delights and sorrows and a "roaring fire" in the bosom of a "revolting genius" in search for the ideal.<sup>48</sup> It is a description of human highs and lows and a revolt or quest amidst them to achieve a better status. Its principal aim, Torres believes, is to serve humanity emotionally, mentally and spiritually. In Hajji's wording, literature is a "divine spirit" destined to celebrate humanity's good and glee and to guide through life's desired ecstasies and despised miseries.<sup>49</sup> Besides, Hajji credits modern Arab writers with managing to embrace the humanistic, authoring works which connect to their inner being and feeling far from language decorations oft-thought to "murder" beauty for the sake of linguistic and stylistic embroidery. Similarly, Torres lauds this transition from hollowly embellished wording to easier and deeper meanings.<sup>50</sup> Unlike Hajji, however, Torres criticizes Arab writers for not defending the Arab nation and not worldly literature, so that it would help combat social woes there.<sup>51</sup> Despite this pan-Arab tone, Torres extols the intellectual movement in the West. He esteems the Western taste for beauty and life so long as it does not bring about assimilation. His, Kharmach maintains, is a worldly view about literature. It stresses depth in meaning and ease in wording and seeks an equilibrium between the emotional and the intellectual.<sup>52</sup> Conversely, Hajji views literature as the most emotionally imbued and most authentic articulation of human experience, leading to truth, good and beauty.<sup>53</sup> In short, Hajji has a humanistic view on literature while Torres has a worldly one.

The 1930s critical scene was marked by a series of magazine articles entitled "Ladaghāt Barī'ah" by Mohamed ben Abbas El Kabbaj. In the "Ladaghāt" (stings in English), El Kabbaj's leading critical essays deepen, attacking "conventional" ways of writing poetry in favour of new ways which celebrate the poet's emotion.<sup>54</sup>

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46. Ibid., 50.

47. Hajji's "*Al-Nahḍah al-Adabiyah al-'Arabiyah*" was published in the Tétouan-based *al-Salām* magazine's inaugural issue (October 1, 1933). So, too, was Torres' talk or text, which came out untitled in the magazine's third issue on December 1, 1933.

48. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 60.

49. Ibid., 60-61. As noted by Kharmach, Hajji also believes that literature reveals one aspect of immortality and one secret from the depths of human self because it stems from "burning" and "consuming" emotions.

50. Ibid., 61; 63.

51. Ibid., 62.

52. Ibid., 63.

53. Ibid., 62.

54. Akkar, "Taṭawūr al-Naqd al-Adabī," 22.

El Kabbaj addresses literary matters and exposes short-comings in Moroccan poetry, leading up to controversy among writers. Controversial as they may have been, those articles, Kharmach argues, excited interest in criticism and unlocked El Kabbaj's critical potential.<sup>55</sup> In his debut article "Hal Yasma' Shu'arā'nā?" (1934), for instance, El Kabbaj attacks contemporary poets, especially those who crawl to the court and the well-off.<sup>56</sup> Before decrying them, El Kabbaj highlights the import and worth of poetry as a "record" and "mirror" of cultural habits, morals and ways unsurpassed by other genres. For him, "true" poetry derives from the author's gift to capture the self's inner emotions, devotion to sincerity and moderation in writing, and clarity of meaning and wording.<sup>57</sup> It "cleanses" its readers' hearts and minds: it is a "supreme breath" and "sweet scent" that eases and undoes lived anxieties.<sup>58</sup> Above all, El Kabbaj holds that the most supreme aim of poetry is to "awaken" and "enlighten" nations (even though without explaining how so). In the 1930s, however, away from those worthy ends, poetry became celebratory due to self-styled writers who sought to grovel kings and toffs. El Kabbaj ascribes this declining or decaying poetry to the nonexistence of a critical movement that could bring them to account and a literary press that could boost the movement's growth. Kharmach foregrounds El Kabbaj's stand, insisting that had there been a critical movement, it could have stopped poetry's "descent into chaos" and the so-called poets' quest for favours and titles.<sup>59</sup>

El Kabbaj mentions a leading but short-lived column titled "Abḥath 'an Shā'ir" (1933) by Mohamed ben Saleh Maysa.<sup>60</sup> This budding critic contends that poetry should go beyond exalting sovereigns and saints in feasts to embracing nobler and worthier causes like history, the vanguard, ethics and progress. For him, criticism should expose the courtly and saintly exalters, stripping them of their usually underserved titles.<sup>61</sup> Maysa, however, lapsed into silence, much to the dismay of the emergent critical enterprise. El Kabbaj maintains that Maysa should not have stopped, and the enterprise must continue unsilenced and unhindered, so it can unmask "festivity" aficionados whose verse is "poor" and "stupid," if not a "wrongdoing" against Arabic literature.<sup>62</sup> One of those whom El Kabbaj decries is Abdellah El

55. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 73.

56. El Kabbaj's highly critical column appeared in *Al-Maghrib* magazine. His debut "Hal Yasma' Shu'arā'nā?" was issued on July 3, 1934.

57. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 73-74.

58. *Ibid.*, 74.

59. *Ibid.*, 74-75. Among the most common titles held by Moroccan poets are *al-shā'ir al-maḥbū'* (the gifted bard), *shā'ir al-Maghrib* (the bard of Morocco), and *al-bulbul al-ṣaddāḥ* (the chanting nightingale). Kharmach mentions that it was incumbent upon critics to celebrate major poets, describing them as "accomplished" and "distinguished." But, El Kabbaj sought to break new ground, doing away with those deceptively grandiose descriptions and calling upon critics to impartially judge poets from their written verse. Kharmach, 79.

60. The Algerian-born Mohamed ben Saleh Maysa was the head of the Rabat-based *al-Maghrib* magazine. His "Abḥath 'an Shā'ir" column was initially issued there on January 1, 1933.

61. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 53-54.

62. *Ibid.*, 75.

Kabbaj, the “gifted bard” or the “nation’s bard” who is unwilling to reconsider his poetry. For him, El Kabbaj’s verse has aged, growing “poor,” “trite” and “wordy” as well as showing more theatricality and less sincerity.<sup>63</sup> Apart from the “ancients,” El Kabbaj criticizes the “moderns,” chief among whom was Allal El Fassi, “the bard of youth,” whose writing engages in long verses, strange rhymes and diverse imagery. Still, El Kabbaj does extol El Fassi’s poetry for exploring worldly themes: faith, politics and, most importantly, women empowerment.<sup>64</sup> Although tough and vocal, El Kabbaj calls upon critics to be impartial and upon writers to be innovative. His critical “stings” and the ensuing debates were an important event for Moroccan criticism to “revolt” and “mature,” but they did not continue, unfortunately. In regret, Kharmach notes that if the debate had not ceased, it could have brought forth new opinions or laid the groundwork for a critical enterprise.<sup>65</sup>

While the above 1930s views and voices approach criticism and poetry, there were also critical attempts at addressing fiction as a burgeoning genre in Morocco. One was made by the chief critic Abdellah Ibrahim in a newspaper article entitled “Al-Qiṣah al-Maghribiyah” (1940).<sup>66</sup> In *Tatawur al-Qiṣah fī al-Maghrib*, El Yabouri describes Ibrahim’s critical approach to fiction as “rigorous” and “profound,” one which could predict the growth potential of story writing in Morocco.<sup>67</sup> For Ibrahim, fiction is the “most effective” genre which gives everyday life a “human expression” and gives ways of feeling a “philosophical character.”<sup>68</sup> As El Yabouri makes clear, Ibrahim predicts fiction – emergent as it was then – to be the most popular mode of thinking and writing because it excels at exteriorizing people’s inner struggles and turmoils. It combines the everyday (the social) and the innermost (the mental). It is Ibrahim’s belief that when literature, namely fiction, avoids narrating socially and mentally lived conditions, it inevitably “devolves”; to evolve and thrive, fiction should merge into the lived world with its struggles and delve into the interior world of human self with its secrets.<sup>69</sup> It should explain human silence and enliven the human self, so it can aspire to comprehend life. For him, the “best” stories are the

63. Ibid., 79-80. El Kabbaj’s scathing criticism of Abdellah El Kabbaj’s verse came out in another “Ladaghāt Barī’ah” column issued on August 3, 1934.

64. Ibid., 85.

65. Ibid., 87.

66. As Kharmach mentions, Ibrahim’s article is one of the inaugural texts to approach Moroccan fiction. It was issued in the Salé-based *al-Taqqadum al-Thaqāfī* on June 24, 1940. Albeit inaugural, Ibrahim’s study was preceded by calls to embrace fiction. Among them are the ones made by Abderrahman El Fassi, a chief critic who encouraged Moroccan writers to author works of fiction. According to El Yabouri, El Fassi, in a 1934 *al-Maghrib* magazine article, wonders why Arabs, who are celebrated for authoring the world-literature classic *One Thousand and One Nights*, have not yet amply embraced and excelled in storytelling (*Tatawur al-Qiṣah fī al-Maghrib* 28). For him, fiction is a literary form through which writers navigate a storyworld inhabited by imaginary characters and champion moral and social causes in a way better than advancing them in straightforward writing. Ahmed El Yabouri, *Tatawur al-Qiṣa fī al-Maghrib: Marḥalat al-Ta’sīs* (Al-Dār al-Bayḍā’: Kuliyat al-Ādāb wa al-‘Ulūm al-Insānīyah, Ben M’sik, 2005), 28.

67. El Yabouri, *Tatawur al-Qiṣa fī al-Maghrib*, 29.

68. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 127.

69. Ibid., 97.

“Socratic” ones since they bombard or intrigue readers with a string of questions, not the ones fraught with “truths” and “events.”<sup>70</sup> He does not believe in an unworldly literature: literature is an expression of life, and its crux or focus must be life itself. But, it is about local and national life, not the global one. Provincially oriented, Ibrahim encourages writers nationwide to be inventive and productive, narrating everyday matters and themes from a local angle or with a local mindset.<sup>71</sup> Kharmach, who maintains that “immortal literature” concerns human and universal causes and transcends cultural or national borders, conceives of Ibrahim’s view as “parochial” because it discredits inter-literary contact among cultures and nations.<sup>72</sup> El Yabouri differs from Kharmach, arguing that Ibrahim sees local and inner lives as the groundwork for writing fiction which reveals human depths to bridge distances and consider universal themes.<sup>73</sup> Besides the views on fiction, Ibrahim mounts a combative stand against what he deems an “intellectual bourgeoisie” without clarifying what it means nor identifying any “bourgeois” writers and works.<sup>74</sup> He calls upon Moroccans to abandon works inimical to imagining and thinking. Moreover, Ibrahim calls for quashing this “bourgeoisie” or “orthodoxy,” so that Moroccan fiction can “originate in” and “orientate towards” society.<sup>75</sup> His “anti-bourgeois” stand seems to foresee the 1970s Marxist/Realist criticism. In brief, whether seen as an extreme realist or myopic parochialist, Ibrahim is one of the early “critical” enthusiasts who sought to approach Moroccan fiction in depth.

### Debating and Probing Moroccan, Arabic and Western Literatures

In *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, Kharmach backdrops the 1940s and 1950s criticism against three cultural contributors to its evolution: changes in teaching, a cohort of innovative intellectuals and a thriving literary journalism. Three teaching trends or ways were predominant: conventional, modern and *al-Hur* (literally free). Mostly based in Al-Quaraouiyine University and Ben Youssef School, conventional teaching adjusted its curricular content with focus upon “exploration” and “discussion” instead of “memorization.”<sup>76</sup> Advocated by the protectorate, modern teaching largely occurred in mission schools, targeting elite students – children of notables. Though unfavoured by most Moroccans given its colonial connections, this teaching trend helped train small government employees and develop a taste for foreign and modern culture.<sup>77</sup> On the contrary, free (non-formal) teaching was advocated by nationalists to counter French as an invading culture, thus training and orienting Moroccan youth in line with Arabic culture and Islamic thought, not to mention the study of modern sciences and foreign languages. Amidst the educational

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70. Ibid., 127.

71. Ibid., 97.

72. Ibid., 98.

73. El Yabouri, *Taṭawur al-Qiṣa fī al-Maghrib*, 30.

74. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 97.

75. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 97 and El Yabouri, *Taṭawur al-Qiṣa fī al-Maghrib*, 32.

76. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 135.

77. Ibid., 136.

changes, an aspiring intellectual youth with divergent views on politics and society burst onto the cultural landscape. Allal El Fassi, for instance, sought to unmask what he considers an “intellectual disability” in “ancient culture,” calling for improving and reviving knowledge, reason, curriculum, research methods, the impact of religion and literature.<sup>78</sup> Ahmed ben Hssain, the editor-in-chief of *al-Taqqadum* newspaper, demanded to remove the inherited “fetters” which were curbing Moroccan thought and to borrow European conceptions and inventions which befit the Moroccan mindset and environment and help improve the skills of analyzing, exploring and inventing.<sup>79</sup> Also, Hssain observed that Moroccan literature cannot advance should it not derive from Western culture and modern Arabic writings, notably the greatest works of Arabic literature. Taking a stronger stand, Abdellah Ibrahim insisted upon a “revolution of reason,” thus appealing to intellectuals to be versed, analytical, truthful and sensible when discussing important matters.<sup>80</sup> Both a writer and minister, Mohamed Larbi Khattabi assigned intellectuals the enormous task of uniting with people to hone their intellect, polish their sentiment and upgrade their taste, asserting that an unlettered and unrefined nation cannot limp, let alone stride.<sup>81</sup> El Fassi, Hssain, Ibrahim and Khattabi are but few voices of a larger movement which, Kharmach argues, had the “intellectual courage” to moot new ideas and views and laid the groundwork for a “modern awakening.”<sup>82</sup> Within this movement, literary journalism thrived. In the debut July 29, 1938 issue of the Salé-based *al-Taqqadum* newspaper, it reads that this newspaper is designed to serve culture and literature in modern Morocco, a nation whose literary scene should break new ground and bring the Moroccan character to the foreground.<sup>83</sup> This editorial encourages a renewal of this scene through writing in various genres and injecting “constructive” values into the “leading Moroccan mindset” inspired by both modern culture and deep-seated traditions.<sup>84</sup> A lead journalist, Said Hajji stressed the vital role assumed by journalism in bettering and mastering Moroccan prose which had already begun to ignore irksome verbosity and synonymy. His was an age of encyclopaedic knowledge, not linguistic fancywork, when new ways of thinking and writing were taking shape.<sup>85</sup> Overall, this cursory snapshot reveals how advances in teaching, thinking and writing shaped the critical and cultural scenes in the 1940s and 1950s.

The 1940s and the mid-1950s saw a major push towards developing the critical enterprise in Morocco. Indeed, there was a steady increase in the debates, opinions and studies centring upon the literary and critical landscapes. One of the liveliest debates was about the utility of literature. According to Kharmach, there were two

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78. *Ibid.*, 138.

79. *Ibid.*, 139.

80. *Ibid.*, 140.

81. *Ibid.*, 143.

82. *Ibid.*, 143.

83. *Ibid.*, 144.

84. *Ibid.*, 144.

85. *Ibid.*, 145.

“movements” that advanced two divergent views: an art-for-art’s-sake stand and an art-for-life’s-sake stand. In “Al-Insān wa al-Adab” (1949), the author and historian Mohammed Zniber observes that literature attracts human spirit as it reflects beauty whose most desired attributes are eternity and truth.<sup>86</sup> For him, to “engineer” a literary work which reveals beauty, the writer should craft a “coherent whole” that manages to merge polar opposites: mind and emotion, logic and whim, and thinking and improvising. Above all, it is the writer’s “genius” and “taste” which “meticulously” mix the seeming opposites to create aesthetic appeal (152).<sup>87</sup> Another aesthetic advocate is Mouhamed El Bouanani. Unlike Zniber, El Bouanani high-lights freedom as an aesthetic value intrinsic to literature. In “Kayfa Nurīd al-Adīb al-Fanān” (1951), he describes literature as one of the “finest” and “freest” arts whose supremacy stems from its self-sufficiency; it is an end in itself free from life’s entanglements, and once it surrenders its freedom to morally or socially motivated ends, literature loses its “beauty” and “delight.”<sup>88</sup> For him, the aesthetic writer, who holds “the most supreme torch,” ought to mingle with all walks of life to hone instincts, refine selves and polish feelings, thus serving as a force for good, beauty and virtue.<sup>89</sup> In short, among other “l’art pour l’art” voices whom Kharmach considers, Zniber and El Bouanani argue that literature improves taste, evokes emotion and describes beauty – be it inner or outer, and it is “incidental” or even “abusive” to orient literature elsewhere.<sup>90</sup>

This supposedly “abusive” stand is taken by the art-for-life’s-sake exponents who entangle literature in worldly existence. For them, worldling literature is not an “abusive” act: it should be engrossed in the world, so that it can enhance it. An author writing under a pen name, Ibn El Bahja, for instance, considers literature a “major record” and “true aspect” of cultural life which is crucial to a nation’s growth or decline.<sup>91</sup> Its cruciality, El Bahja notes, can be evidenced through Homer’s enduring poetry as a “charming” description of ethics, habits and systems in ancient Greece, one which guides through the earliest human attempt to dispel illusion. For him, literature must be a portrayal of life as it is or as it is “loved” or “loathed” to be: it must bear upon social, political and national lives, and beyond the world of imagination, (wo)men of letters ought to embrace the circumstantial actualities of society and politics which is a step closer to reality and reason.<sup>92</sup> Like El Bahja, the

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86. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 152. Zniber’s article appeared in *al-‘Alam* newspaper’s 870<sup>th</sup> issue (June 24, 1949).

87. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 152.

88. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 153. El Bouanani’s article on the “aesthetic” people of letters appeared in the Tétouan-based *al-Anīs* magazine’s fiftieth issue (March 6, 1951).

89. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 153.

90. Kharmach considers other “l’art pour l’art” views held by Abdeslam Alaoui, Abdelaziz Benabdallah, Abdelkarim Bentabet, Abdellah Guennoun and Abdelkarim Tabbal. For their aesthetic conceptions, consult Kharmach, 148-57.

91. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 158. Kharmach does not mention the titles of Ibn El Bahja’s two articles. Still, he mentions their source: *al-Taqqadum* newspaper’s 221<sup>st</sup> and 227<sup>th</sup> issues, which were came out on January 26 and March 8, 1948, respectively.

92. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 159.

novelist Abdelkarim Ghallab believes in the worldly essence of poetry. In “Risālat al-Shā‘ir” (1950), he distinguishes between the aesthetic and worldly views towards the usefulness of poetry or literature.<sup>93</sup> Ghallab takes a worldly stance but limits poetry’s mission to enhancing emotions, not to the enhancement of certain circumstances. He explains that the aim of poetry is to hone people’s taste, depict beauty in the universe and capture human emotion. For him, among literary genres, poetry is the most enlightening: its link with human life is the closest, its impact over selves is the strongest, and its service to society is the greatest.<sup>94</sup> In a word, though varyingly, El Bahja and Ghallab concur that literature should exceed its aesthetic aim to search and service the world where it is brought in.<sup>95</sup>

Aside from those “conceptual” strands and views about the utility of literature, analytical attempts were made in the 1940s and early 1950s to approach literary works – be they Moroccan, Arabic or Western. Among them is the magistrate Abderrahman El Fassi’s extended commentary on Abdelmalek Belghiti’s poetry collection titled *Bāqat Shi‘r* (1947).<sup>96</sup> El Fassi disputes the Fés-born Belghiti’s claim of writing “innovative” verse. For him, the collection’s metrics do not differ from classic poetry, including refined verse, quality wording, stately style, continual rhyme and monotonic rhythm.<sup>97</sup> It has what El Fassi sees as a “salafist” makeup and character, highlighting Belghiti’s ardent love for nature versified in the style of Andalusian writers that includes narration. Probing one of the collection’s poems titled “Bayna Ādhār wa Aylūl,” El Fassi explores its surface and deeper meanings, literary features and impact over the reader’s mind, depicting its “unmoving” style as “lifeless” and “detached” despite investing numerous hackneyed metaphors and similes.<sup>98</sup> Apart from Moroccan poetry, the 1940s and 1950s attempts enlarged to analyze Arabic poetry. Kharmach considers a “critical” study by Abdelkader Zemmama titled “Bayna al-Buḥturī wa al-Mutanabbī” (1943).<sup>99</sup> He contrasts the two Abbasid poets’ depictions of a lake as an illustration of how the poet’s socio-historical context, individual attributes and outlook on life help sculpt their poetry. Al-Buḥturī, who was living in the lap of sheer luxury, likens the purity of water in

93. Ibid., Ghallab’s magazine article about the mission of and literature as a whole appeared in *Risālat al-Maghrib*’s 59<sup>th</sup> issue on April 24, 1950.

94. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 159.

95. It is worth remarking that the spirited debate between art-for-art’s-sake and art-for-life’s-sake advocates is not the only one which took place the 1940s and 50s critical scene. Kharmach brings to light other “advanced” critical views held by Abdellah Ibrahim on the value and vigour of a “living” literature and by Abdelkarim Tabbal on the embryonic movements in Moroccan literature then, including Realism, the emerging Symbolism and Classicism. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 162-63; 171-73.

96. As a source which features El Fassi’s extended commentary about Belghiti’s *Bāqat Shi‘r*, Kharmach quotes Ahmed Ziyad’s *Lamaḥāt min Tārīkh al-Ḥarakah al-Fikrīyah bi al-Maghrib* (1973).

97. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 189.

98. Ibid.

99. Zemmama’s comparative study of al-Buḥturī’s and al-Mutanabbī’s poetry appeared in *Al-Taqqadum* newspaper’s 112<sup>th</sup> issue on May 26, 1943. As mentioned above, interest in Eastern Arabic literature began in the 1930s. For sampled studies, consider Kharmach, 99-116.

the lake to pure silver. On the contrary, unlike the art- and joy-inspired al-Buḥturī, al-Mutanabbī, whose imagination was captivated by war and glory ventures in search for statesmanship, likens water to conquering and vanquished armies.<sup>100</sup> Despite thematic similarity (a body-of-water description), imagery does diverge. Zemmama ascribes this divergent imagery engraved in al-Buḥturī's and al-Mutanabbī's verses to two different lives: one was stamped by wealth and another stained by warfare. Besides, he maintains that poetry and prose inscribe and reveal the author's life, psyche and spirit in a way unparalleled by biography and history.<sup>101</sup> For him, within and through literary works, much can be unveiled about the writers' selves than within and through biographical and historical works exploring their lives. Kharmach extols Zemmama's study because it builds upon the guiding critical belief that the writer's backdrop and outlook contribute to shaping their output. His, however, was a short-lived enterprise because it was left unelaborated in follow-up works. Beyond studying Moroccan and Arabic literatures, critical attempts were aimed at examining Western literature. Noteworthy among them is Aboubaker Triki's "Al-Tashā'ūm fī al-Adabayn al-'Arabī wa al-Faransī" (1943). In it, Triki advocates that poetry and prose reveal the writer's inner thoughts and feelings both in joy and grief.<sup>102</sup> Among these feelings or moods, Triki singles out pessimism as a focus of study. Pessimism is a major theme which runs through world literature, and its causes do not seem to diverge from one literature to another. These include the writer's chaotic life or the moral and social chaos which pervades their age. Triki, for instance, compares verses fraught with pessimism from ibn al-Rūmī and François de la Rochefoucauld, arguing that al-Rūmī's pessimism stems from his "dark" attitude towards life and the unnerving family traumas which he went through, and so does Rochefoucauld's pessimism, stemming from similarly un-settling experiences.<sup>103</sup> It is those traumatic moments or setbacks undergone by the writers which cloud their writings with cynicism. As Kharmach contends, Triki's initiative to compare Arabic and French verses was unprecedented in the nascent scene. But, like most critical endeavours, it was not continually enriched, so it could evolve into a critically comparative approach.<sup>104</sup>

100. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 180.

101. *Ibid.*, 179-80.

102. *Ibid.*, 181.

103. *Ibid.* Besides the comparison between al-Rūmī and Rochefoucauld, Triki brings to light another comparative instance of the Arab Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī's and the French Alfred de Vigny's poetry. Likewise, Triki concludes that the poets' life fiascos and ill-fated search for a high status abroad and its concomitant discontent have cynically stamped their verse.

104. Doubtless, Triki's study was not the only "critical" enterprise to approach Western literature. On February 8, 1948, the eminent Abdellah Ibrahim, for instance, wrote an *al-'Alam* newspaper article entitled "Al-Kuttāb al-Amrīkiyyūn al-Mu'āširūn." For him, one of the cardinal virtues of American literature is that it fuses into "everyday tragedies" and faces the "dangers and disasters" into which humanity has been driven on account of its descent into an "economic civilization" and "social turmoil." Ibrahim remarks that American literature differs from European literature because it has sought to maintain a "singular human character." According to Kharmach, Ibrahim has addressed and evaluated literary works in a way indicative of a "clear thinking," "deep view" and "broad knowledge." In a word, he was un-rivalled. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 182-83.

Furthermore, there were attempts at studying drama and fiction which were growing and inviting genres in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>105</sup> According to Daghmoumi, those attempts are “modest,” not making a critical enterprise whose size and depth are compelling.<sup>106</sup> In “Al-Shi‘r al-Tamthīlī wa al-Qaṣaṣī wa al-Ādāb al-‘Arabiyah” (1941), Taher Zniber, for instance, calls upon Arab writers to engage in writing drama though nonindigenous to classic Arabic literature.<sup>107</sup> Zniber attributes the nonemergence of drama among Arab writers to an inability or “impatience” to conform to the norms of writing drama and creating characters and themes specific to this genre.<sup>108</sup> He invites Arab writers to embrace this nonnative genre, laying down three writing conditions. First, drama, written or performed, should come from a “purely” Arabic source because it is designed to address an Arab audience. Next, its subjects and themes should be inspired from Arab history, which boasts watershed events appealing to the audience’s grasp, taste and feeling. Last, the costume and furniture used in this “nativized” drama should mirror the age it portrays.<sup>109</sup> In a word, Zniber calls for integrating drama into Arabic literature in a way which derives from Arab history and culture. Unlike Zniber’s invitation to nativize drama, Abdeslam Alaoui calls upon writers to embrace and emulate great drama although it may be born in the West. In “Corneille” (1941), Alaoui introduces the seventeenth-century French dramatist to Moroccan readers, stressing the value of morality.<sup>110</sup> Corneille’s drama teaches “the greatness of self and steadfastness of morality”; it underlines self-control and strong will which are guided by an inquisitive mind unexposed to whims.<sup>111</sup> Alaoui invites readers and writers to explore Corneille’s drama teachings in that they offer “strong morals” worth instilling.

Albeit moralistic, Alaoui’s open-up call to study Corneille signaled a shift towards Western literature.<sup>112</sup> His call seems to have been heeded by a writer under the pen name Abou Chafik. In “Al-Qiṣah fī al-Ādāb al-‘Arabiyah” (1943), he addresses the usual storyline in Western literature: exposition, climax and denouement.<sup>113</sup> Abou

105. It is worth noting that there were early attempts aimed at exploring drama and fiction in the 1930s and early 1940s made by Abdelahad Kettani and Abdellah Ibrahim. Consider Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 124-27.

106. Daghmoumi, *Naqd al-Riwāyah wa al-Qiṣah al-Qaṣṣah*, 29.

107. Zniber’s article was published in *al-Thaqāfah al-Maghribiyah*’s third issue (October 1, 1941). By “performed and recounted poetry,” Zniber means drama or theatre. Zniber uses “theatrical novels” to dub plays. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 190; 191.

108. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 191.

109. Ibid.

110. Alaoui’s newspaper article appeared in *al-Taqqadum*’s 67<sup>th</sup> issue (April 30, 1941).

111. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 192.

112. His call to learn from Western or world literature is not unprecedented. One call, for instance, was made by Ahmed ben Hssain, *al-Taqqadum*’s editor-in-chief. As aforementioned, Hssain invited writers to consider European cultural conceptions and inventions in line with indigenous ways of thinking. Kharmach, 139. Indeed, far earlier calls to adapt from Europe can be traced to the early twentieth century. It is worth noting that Zniber’s and Alaoui’s bids to address drama are two among many. Consult Kharmach, 192-93.

113. Abou Chafik’s magazine article appeared in *Risālat al-Maghrib*’s seventh issue (February 15, 1943).

Chafik makes clear that this storyline does not differ despite the story's theme or writer's talent. For him, storywriters are inspired by genius, motivated by language mastery, and oriented towards clarity away from "cold" and "hefty" words enveloped in worn-out clichés.<sup>114</sup> They invest the storyworld from rising to falling with critical moments or stances which help uncover its characters, settings and psyches. As a great classic, About Chafik cites Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Its creation, make-up and artistry are incomparable and worth emulating by Moroccan writers. He notes that Flaubert writes in an "enchanted" style which caters for several sensibilities; Flaubert builds and depicts the novel's hero and heroine, unveiling their deepest thoughts and feelings as though they delight and grieve in person.<sup>115</sup> Chafik's Flaubertian celebration invites writers to experience a shred of the West's literary merit. Heading eastwards, Abderrahman El Fassi considers the Lebanese storywriter Karam Melhem Karam, whose writings are "outstanding" examples of novelistic advances in Arabic literature. El Fassi explores Karam's *Dam 'at Yazīd*, which stands "unstained" despite the impact of "alien" (Western) sources and what was seen as "language pornography."<sup>116</sup> He lauds the writer's literary style, imagery and command of shaping events within a storyline which incorporates a depiction and analysis of characters and attitudes. Karam creates what El Fassi calls "compelling drama," one which mixes the historical and the fictional and one where the virtues of good and right battle the vices of evil and wrong as instanced by the woven moves and stands made by the novel's characters.<sup>117</sup> This merging and weaving, El Fassi explains, owe to Karam's vivid imagination which does not only help characters speak in line with their abilities, beliefs and customs, but bespeak their interior monologues and sentiments. In short, like the critical efforts made by Zniber, Alaoui and Chafik to consider plays and stories, El Fassi's study bears testimony to what Kharmach calls the "strength" and "maturity" in which the critical endeavour was growing over the 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>118</sup>

While the above critical endeavours and enthusiasts strove to approach literary works – Moroccan, Arab and Western, others undertook to discover what literary criticism means along with its bases, aims and ways of doing. In "Da'āmat al-Naqd: Al-Baḥṭh 'an al-Ḥaq wa al-Jamāl" (1943), the storywriter Mustapha El Gharbaoui describes criticism as an "enormously useful and immensely impactful art."<sup>119</sup> For him, it is an emblem of intellectual activity and maturity crucial to a nation's march towards excellence. In "Al-Naqd al-Adabī" (1949), Zniber holds that criticism has

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114. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 195.

115. *Ibid.*, 196.

116. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 197. El Fassi's study featured in *Risālat al-Maghrib* magazine's first issue (August 6, 1947).

117. *Ibid.*, 197.

118. *Ibid.*, 198.

119. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 201. El Gharbaoui's newspaper article was published in *al-Widād*'s 153<sup>rd</sup> issue (January 1, 1943).

a major role in elevating literature.<sup>120</sup> It unravels beliefs, views and texts based upon study, analysis and comparison to distinguish great works from mediocre ones. Similarly, in “Kayfa Yajib An Yunqad al-‘Amal al-Adabī” (1944), Ahmed Ben El Haj stresses the value of literary criticism, stating that criticism is not joking, flattery or prejudice. It is not grounded entirely in individual taste; it does involve norms and rules by which critics should abide.<sup>121</sup> In “Al-Naqd fī al-Adab wa al-Fan” (1949), Bentabet, who appears to elaborate upon El Haj’s statement, remarks that criticism is a “gift” whose basis is fine taste, vast knowledge and deep sensibility (203).<sup>122</sup> It is a “gift” sculpted by great learning and deep feeling for the beautiful, and a self-styled critic whose taste and knowledge on art and life are poor cannot address or esteem literary works. Zniber notes that “genuine” criticism aims to uncover the extent to which the literary work under study manages to achieve the mission and purpose set by writers.<sup>123</sup> To unveil this, el Gharbaoui argues that critics need to demonstrate high potential: broad knowledge, strong character, genuine expertise, ample ingenuity and excellent taste.<sup>124</sup> So does Bentabet, who concurs that, to be highly cultivated, critics need to acquire an encyclopaedic knowledge of psychology, sociology and history, not to mention local and global languages and literatures.<sup>125</sup> Like El Gharbaoui and Bentabet, Zniber views this vaster-than-taste knowledge as central to critical judgement, encouraging critics to embrace the freedom of creating beyond “antiquated” ways of writing, to bring clarity to the critical language, and to clarify and justify beforehand the critical concepts advocated or employed.<sup>126</sup> Fleeting as they may be, those statements by Zniber and others are but scraps quoted by Kharmach to explain how the 1940s and early 1950s “critics” conceived of the critical enterprise.<sup>127</sup>

Overall, the initial twentieth-century half saw the rise of literary criticism in Morocco. In the 1940s and 1950s, it culminated into what Kharmach sees as an important “step” or “leap,” one which would help smooth the ground for the critical enterprises to come.<sup>128</sup> Most importantly, it helped dispel two once prevailing myths:

120. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 204. As indicated by Kharmach, Mohammed Zniber’s “Al-Naqd al-Adabī” seems to have been a news-paper column which appeared in *al-‘Alam*’s 1004<sup>th</sup>, 1026<sup>th</sup> and 1044<sup>th</sup> issues (November 27, 1949; December 23, 1949; and January 13, 1950, respectively).

121. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 202. El Haj’s magazine article appeared in *Risālat al-Maghrib*’s 35<sup>th</sup> issue (October 31, 1949).

122. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 203. Bentabet’s article appeared as part of the “Ḥadīth Miṣbāḥ” column, *Risālat al-Maghrib*’s 31<sup>st</sup> issue (September 26, 1949).

123. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 204.

124. *Ibid.*, 201.

125. *Ibid.*, 203.

126. *Ibid.*, 204-05.

127. The above-mentioned “critics” and short-lived “critical” snippets are not the only ones sampled by Kharmach. In fact, he addresses other “critical” endeavours made by Ahmed Ziyad, Abderrahman El Fassi, Mohamed Ben Taouit and Abdelouahed Bennani. For him, those “critics” have sought to study other critics – both modern and traditional – to explain their views and to expand the burgeoning critical landscape. For sampled studies and stands, consider Kharmach, 200-18.

128. Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 251; 254; 258.

criticism is laudatory (encomium) and criticism is “derogatory” (opprobrium). Instead, it was (re)seen as a scholarly study into which critics cannot enter without language mastery, literary expertise, extensive knowledge in the humanities, familiarity with world languages and literatures and an inborn talent or taste to distinguish greater from lesser works. Promising as certain views and voices were, they did not manage to mature into approaches or movements grounded in theoretical and methodological underpinnings conducive to reading and judging literary texts. Their shortcomings cannot be overlooked. Kharmach arrives at almost dozen conclusions exposing those shortcomings.<sup>129</sup> First, certain “critics” were writing shallowly unmindful of how central criticism is in enhancing cultural life. Second, others were too negligent to abandon critical activity. Third, certain critics stood out sometimes, but their critical potential was unheard of later. Fourth, had there been no adverse conditions (namely colonialism), some writers might have grown into critics. Fifth, on the contrary, others were eloquent “clowns” or “orators” lacking a critical thread or view. Sixth, given shortage in critical culture, most criticism sought to monitor literary works, not to criticize or theorize. Seventh, most studies were largely motivated by baring stylistic and semantic flaws. Eighth, foreign-grown approaches were brought up for discussion, but their aims, concepts and methods were not invested. Ninth, among those approaches, the socio-historical and psychoanalytical ones pervaded critical conversations. Tenth, at times, the conversations might become or trigger controversies whose main motive was neither critical nor cultural; it was selfish: guarding or boosting one’s character and standing. Eleventh, politics stamped those controversies in a way inimical to criticism. Indeed, it is politics that would turn into a critical leitmotif in the two decades to come. In short, while certain “critics” abandoned, depreciated or misused criticism, others whose critical skills were unmatched but untapped strove to advance the critical endeavour through the introduction of nonnative approaches, ones which did not evolve longer due to colonialism, an embryonic criticism and intense controversies. This endeavour was a tale of two critical camps: talented yet undevoted critics versus intrusive critics. After independence, the twin tale would survive on with an ideological thrust between “modern” critics and “salafist” critics.

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<sup>129</sup> Above is a sum-up of those shortcomings. For a full list, consider Kharmach, *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth*, 258-61.

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#### العنوان: نشأة النقد الأدبي في المغرب: تاريخ سردي حتى الخمسينيات من القرن العشرين.

ملخص: تعتبر هذه الدراسة الجزء الأول من تاريخ سردي يمتد لأكثر من قرن من الزمان، هدفها تحديد معالم تطور النقد الأدبي المغربي. تستوحي هذه الدراسة كثيرا من كتاب الناقد المغربي محمد خرماش النقد الأدبي الحديث في المغرب: 1900-1956، والذي يعد العمل الوحيد المتعمق في فحص بدايات المشروع النقدي منذ أوائل القرن العشرين حتى منتصف العقد الخامس، وهي واحدة من فترات النقد الأدبي الأقل دراسة في الأوساط الأكاديمية المغربية وغيرها. تبحث هذه الدراسة في بداية النقد الأدبي المغربي الذي اتخذ شكل تقريظات ومساهمات خلال العشرينيات من القرن الماضي، وتحوله إلى نشاط ومسعى نقدي خلال الثلاثينيات بغاية المساهمة في بناء هوية ثقافية، و"نضجه" كمشروع نقدي يناقش الآداب المغربية والعربية والغربية ويسبرها خلال أربعينيات وخمسينيات القرن الماضي. وتبحث هذه الدراسة أيضا في الخلفيات التاريخية والمحاولات النقدية والمحادثات الفكرية وراء صنع النقد الأدبي قبل الخمسينيات، مجادلة بأنه على الرغم من ازدهار بعض الأصوات والآراء النقدية، لم يستطع المشروع النقدي اعتماد أو إنتاج مناهج أو حركات تقارب الأدب على أسس نظرية ومنهجية. فقد هجر بعض "النقاد" المشروع وانتقصوا من قدره وأساؤوا دراسته، بينما سعى البعض الآخر، ممن اكتسبوا مهارات نقدية متميزة وقتئذ، إلى تطوير المشروع النقدي مستلهمين طرقا مشرقية وغربية لقراءة الأدب. غير أن هذه القراءات لم تتطور لفترة طويلة بسبب الاستعمار أولا، ثم بحكم جنينية المشروع وبعض الخلافات السطحية. لقد كانت بدايات النقد الأدبي في المغرب من صنيع فئتين من النقاد: فئة متطفلة وأخرى موهوبة لكنها غير متمرسة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النقد الأدبي المغربي، الأدب العربي، التاريخ السردى، محمد خرماش، الاستعمار، الخلفيات والمناقشات والمسااعي النقدية.

**Titre: La configuration de la critique littéraire au Maroc: Une histoire narrative jusqu'aux années 1950.**

**Résumé:** Cette étude est la première partie d'une histoire narrative d'un siècle qui cherche à tracer l'évolution de la critique littéraire marocaine. Inspirée par l'œuvre de le critique marocain Mohamed Kharmach s'intitulant *Al-Naqd al-Adabī al-Ḥadīth fī al-Maghrib: 1900-1956*, cette étude s'étend du début du XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle au milieu des années 1950, l'une des périodes les moins étudiées de la critique littéraire dans l'université marocaine et ailleurs. Elle examine ses débuts en tant que *taqrīzāt* (commentaires de félicitations) et *musāmarāt* (conversations dans les associations littéraires) durant les années 1920; son développement en une activité et un effort critique conçues pour aider à la construction d'une identité culturelle durant les années 1930; et sa "maturité" en tant que projet critique débattant et explorant les littératures marocaine, arabe et occidentale durant les années 1940 et 1950. De plus, elle examine les contextes historiques, les efforts critiques et les conversations intellectuelles qui ont contribué à cette entreprise critique. Cette étude soutient que, malgré l'émergence de voix critiques avancées, l'entreprise n'a pas pu évoluer vers des approches ou des mouvements basés sur des fondements théoriques et méthodologiques utiles pour lire and juger la littérature. Certains "critiques" ont abandonné, déprécié et abusé de la critique, tandis que d'autres, dont les compétences critiques étaient de haut niveau, ont cherché à faire progresser l'entreprise critique, en introduisant de nouvelles manières de lire la littérature. Mais, ces manières n'ont pas évolué longtemps en raison du colonialisme, d'une critique embryonnaire et de controverses superficielles. Dans l'ensemble, la critique littéraire d'avant les années 1950 au Maroc était une histoire de deux camps critiques: des critiques talentueux mais peu dévoués contre des critiques intrusifs.

**Mots-clés:** la critique littéraire marocaine, la littérature arabe, l'histoire narrative, Mohamed Kharmach, le colonialisme, les contextes, les conversations et les efforts critiques.