



Literaire grensbewegingen. De weerslag van de Marokkaanse diaspora in de literatuur van Nederland en Vlaanderen 1994-2010

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## SUMMARY

*Litteraire grensbewegingen* (Literary Boundary Shifts) constitutes a research that combines two different approaches – an institutional and a textual one – and consequently two disciplines, Sociology of Literature and Literature Studies (with the main focus on the hermeneutic branch of the latter). Literary sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and, in the same vein, Pascale Casanova do not consider hermeneutics – or textual interpretation by means of contextualization – and the sociology of literature mutually exclusive; in fact, they complement each other.

This thesis is an elaboration of this standpoint; the first part “De institutionele spelers” (The Institutional Players, chapter 2, 3, 4 and 5) studies the emergence and positioning of Dutch literature of writers of Moroccan origin in the “literary field” of both the Netherlands and Flanders. This group of writers, whose literature is often of a contemporary character, is relatively well represented in Dutch literature, has emerged recently and due to a “different” cultural historical background this group apparently lacks a postcolonial embedding. How the positioning of this group of authors in the literary field comes about and what development can be observed in this process is what connects these chapters; the focus will be on extra-textual elements, or factors that surpass writing talent and the literary quality of books.

Dutch writers of Moroccan origin create growing diversity within the Dutch and Flemish literary landscape. In what way is this diversity, this innovative or “other” element represented in their literature? The second part “De tekst en de context” (The Text and the Context, chapter 6, 7 and 8) provides an answer to this question while concentrating on themes, certain figures of speech and language. It also studies the effect of literary migration and internationalization or globalization by these newcomers on Dutch literature and contains a textual interpretation and text analysis of Rachida Lamrabet’s novel *Vrouwland* (Woman Country, Meulenhoff|Manteau 2007), Naima Albdouni’s novel *Voyeur* (Meulenhoff|Manteau, 2009) and A. El Baraka's short story collection *De zorgstroom* (The Care Current, De Harmonie, 2008).

The timeframe of this thesis is relatively short, from the emergence of the first Dutch literary writers of Moroccan origin in the mid-nineties of the last century until the first decade of the twenty-first century (1994-2010).

The division in this dissertation can also be explained by means of Bourdieu's idea of refraction. When Bourdieu indicates 'that the field refracts' he refers to the steering effect which literary institutions and their mutual power relations cause in the 'field of cultural production'. Simultaneously the idea can refer to the fact that (literary) fiction is not an immediate reflection of reality, but a (literary) construction that does not necessarily represent (present-day) reality.

Migrant literature, including the work of Dutch writers of Moroccan origin, has been marginalized until the nineties, left in the margin, as if this kind of literature were a separate literary category and not part of Dutch mainstream literature. Migrant literature was nearly considered to be a homogeneous collection of literary texts that deviated from "the standard". The cultural and ethnic background of the writer was often considered to be more important than literary quality or themes. Several institutions in the literary field provoked this, for instance publishers, literary critics, and the paratext of literary works – the latter as a new theoretical concept – especially concerning the design of book covers.

The thesis explains the function and influence these literary institutions have *in general* and their mutual interaction. The institutions which have *particularly* influenced the emergence of Dutch writers of Moroccan origin will be discussed in detail, namely: El Hizjra, the Centre of Arabic Art and Culture in Amsterdam which organizes the El Hizjra Literary Award; Kif Kif, an intercultural, socially engaged organization in Antwerp which initialized the writing competition "Kleur de kunst!" (Colour the Arts!); Vassallucci, a publishing company in Amsterdam (no longer in business); the former imprint Meulenhoff|Manteau (a collaboration between the publishing companies J.M. Meulenhoff in Amsterdam and Manteau in Antwerp) and the foundation Collectieve Propaganda van het Nederlandse Boek (CPNB, Collective Promotion for the Dutch Book) which organized the Book Week 2001 "Het land van herkomst. Schrijven tussen twee culturen." (Country of origin: Writing between two cultures).

Publishing company Vassallucci in particular strongly influenced the emergence of migrant writers with Moroccan roots. This publisher has profited from the efforts of the cultural foundation El Hizjra, which partially adopted the role as gatekeeper from the publishing company by organizing a writing competition and the associated El Hizjra literary Award. This role can also be assigned, although to a lesser degree, to Kif Kif,

which has contributed to the emergence of Flemish-Moroccan writers in Flanders in close collaboration with Meulenhoff|Manteau.

Bourdieu introduced in the sixties of the last century the already mentioned concept of 'the field of cultural production' of which 'the field of literary production' constitutes a subfield. Within this field literary institutions define what literature is and they determine the status or social recognition of literary works. When writers of Moroccan origin entered the Dutch literary field in the mid-nineties, the innovative aspect of their work seemed to be more important than the intrinsic value of their work.

Literary critics were thus overly interested in biographical elements and in particular in the ethnic background of these authors, which provoked 'ethnic labelling'. In the course of time, the increasing number of 'ethnic minority writers' led to a certain degree of habituation, which lessened the emphasis on the writer's background. This is referred to as a boundary shift: a shift from the use of 'ethnic minority labels' to 'majority labels' (such as 'Dutch writer' or 'Flemish author'). 'Migrant labels' are no longer common practice. This *boundary shift* which we observe in the literary critic can also be detected, albeit in a different shape, a so-called *paratextual shift*, on the book covers from Dutch writers of Moroccan origin. This shift indicates a decrease in the use of exoticism or orientalism. We thus can conclude that a publisher can give a book a certain 'mark', which consequently shows, inter alia, that a publisher is not only a material producer, but also has a certain influence on the so-called symbolic production of literature.

Both shifts, the *boundary shift* and *paratextual shift*, indicate a movement of migrant writers in het literary field from 'the margin' to the 'mainstream'. This movement is also reflected in the publishing world: publishers working within the margin as well as publishers from the establishment are interested in 'migrant literature' or 'migration literature'. We can thus state that within Bourdieu's literary field 'the literary classification' has changed; writers of Moroccan origin are no longer consigned to a separate literary category.

Exoticism and orientalism – I use these terms in the same vein as Edward Said – were initially used as a *marketing strategy* by publishers. The Book Week of 2001 "Schrijven tussen twee culturen" (Writing between two cultures) induced a transition. Traditionally, the CPNB, which organizes the Book Week, is a trend follower. Migrant writers were obviously not so 'new' anymore. Moreover, critics spoke about hyped

writers. This provoked a change in the use of exoticising marketing strategies. The excessive attention for these writers as 'exotic candy', had apparently led to overkill. There is no longer sign of a one-dimensional approach, which focuses on the cultural and ethnic background of the writer.

Related to what is mentioned above is a shift from a biographical to a functional vision on the literary production about migration themes. A more adequate term for *migrant* literature would thus be *migration* literature, because the latter term focuses more on the literary theme rather than on the cultural or ethnic background of the writer. This vision will also pave the way for complete incorporation of migrant writers in Dutch literature. This involves changes *within* the Dutch literary landscape, and not something in the margin, as if they were a separate group of authors. This way, writers of solely Dutch origin can also be categorized as migration literature, when they depict literary migration in their works or include literary representations of interculturalism or the multicultural society. It is a continuous balancing act which has to be made in the context of research in this field: mentioning the 'specificity' of 'migrant literature' or 'migration literature' and simultaneously integrating it in the national literature.

Should exoticism still exist after 2002, it is rather a *literary strategy*, used by the writers themselves. For instance, one can see the use of a sort of oriental magical realism in Lamrabet's debut novel *Vrouwland* (2007). The use of Arabic terms, phrases and words in Moroccan-Arabic or Tamazight (Berber) also contributes to an oriental atmosphere. This literary strategy has been described as self-exoticism or -orientalization.

Lamrabet's *Vrouwland* (2007) and especially Albdioni's *Voyeur* (2009) are inspired by current affairs in Morocco. The literary works discuss themes such as the issue of the *harraga*, also referred to as a *sans-papier*, the (illegal) crossing of the Strait of Gibraltar, the fixation on the 'fortress Europe', the inequality between men and women (in Lamrabet's *Vrouwland*), the unique city (or location) of Tanger, the government acting as 'Big Brother (is watching you)', torture practices in a secret prison, terrorism and religious tensions, the 'modern' dynasty (in Albdioni's *Voyeur*). Alongside the more traditional migrant issues (culture conflicts, identity crisis due to migration, the literary representation or imagination of the homeland), more international appealing issues are incorporated in these works. The overly present social criticism on both Europe and Morocco, the inequality which is emphasized

between 'wealthy Europe' and 'poor Morocco', makes it fairly easy to establish a connection between this Dutch literature and international postcolonial writing, as well as with new genres, such as *harraga* fiction and *littérature carcérale*, which appear worldwide on the literary horizon. Further research could thus be focused on a stronger international connection with postcolonial studies.

El Baraka's *De Zorgstroom* (The Care Current, 2008) differs from the other literary works discussed above. This short story collection does not specify a location, nor does it mention 'migrant markers'. The characters do differ from other people or feel different, often in a psychological or physical manner. Some characters are influenced by a certain cultural internalization. Thus, 'Otherness' comes from within. In this respect you could consider this literary work as the essence of interculturalism: 'Otherness' is not an external entity, it is within us and is part of all of us. While some characters have internalized a cultural background, El Baraka argues, consciously or subconsciously, in favour of Dutch literature that changes from within.