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## Contemporary *dārija* writings in Morocco: ideology and practices

Catherine Miller

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### Introduction

Starting from the mid 1990s a new political, social and economical context has favored the coming out of a public discourse praising cultural and linguistic plurality as intangible parts of Moroccan identity and Moroccan heritage. The first signs of change occurred at the end of King Hassan II's reign, setting the first steps towards political and economic liberalization. But the arrival of King Mohamed VI in 1999 definitely accelerated the trend toward economic liberalism, development of private media, emergence of a strong civil society, call for democratization and modernization, and the emergence of new urban artistic movements. Within this general context, the linguistic, cultural and artistic issues have been openly and strongly discussed. One of the important points of debate has been the status and functions of what is considered to be the two Moroccan mother tongues: Amazigh (Berber) and *dārija* (Moroccan Arabic). The main argument raised by a number of "reformists" is that no proper democratization and national building could take place if these mother tongues remain marginalized. They are therefore asking for their promotion, codification and eventually standardization. But whereas Amazigh is considered an endangered language, *dārija* is not. Therefore their path toward literacy follow different roads and the people calling or acting for their promotion belong to rather different circles<sup>1</sup>. There is no place here to detail these points, and this paper will focus on *dārija* writings.

Moroccan Arabic (*dārija*) is the first mother tongue of 72% of the Moroccan population according to the 2004 National Census and is spoken by 90% of the population according to the Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP) 2008. It has been expanding over Amazigh in several areas and is dominant in urban areas (Boukous 2012). It is considered mainly an oral non-standard language although it has some old written literary tradition like poetry and songs (*malḥūn*, *zajal* see Elinson this volume). Until recently, written production in *dārija* was rather scarce and few people had called for the use of written *dārija* and its promotion as an official national language. However, since the 2000s, things started to change. A number of media figures called for the promotion of *dārija*. Numerous scholars have pointed to the increasing written use of Moroccan Arabic in various domains such as newspapers, novels, written poetry, internet, sms, social networks, official writings, ads, translations : Aguade (2005; 2006; 2012, 2013), Atifi (2003), Benítez-Fernández (2003, 2010, 2012a&b); Berjaoui (2002), Caubet (2005, 2007,

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<sup>1</sup> For a few references on the Amazigh issue see for example Boukous 2003 & 2012, Lakhsassi 2005, Rachik 2006, Pouessel 2010.

2008, 2012, 2013, 2016), Ech-Charfi (2004) ; Elinson (2013), Ferrando (2012a&b), Hall (2015) Hickman (2013), Hoogland (2013a &b); Langone (2003, 2006, 2008), Messaoudi (2002) Miller (2012, 2015), Morgan (2009) ; Moscoso (2009, 2011), Moustaoui Srhir (2012a), Pérez Cañada et al (2011), Salanitro (2008), Santillan et al. (2013), Youssi (2013), etc. This quite impressive academic production gives the impression that the last years represent a turning point and that *dārija* is de facto becoming a written language. Yet, the social, ideological and linguistic impact of these emerging written practices needs more investigations. Many questions remain concerning the profiles of the actors involved in the different types of writings, their objectives, their practices as well as the individual and public reception of these writings according to contexts. Unlike the development of Amazigh within the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture in Morocco (IRCAM), the written use of *dārija* is by large an individual untutored enterprise. What do people write when they claim to write in *dārija*? What is their stance vis à vis the standard language? Do they really want to establish an autonomous language distinct from *fushā*?

These questions are by no means specific to Moroccan Arabic. Writing and codification of oral languages (including pidgin and creole languages, non-standard dialects or previously unwritten minority languages) are never neutral and straightforward technical acts and are linked to issue of power and subjectivity (Jaffe 2000; Rajah-Carrim 2008, Romaine 2005). For non-standard dialects, one of the key issues is the relationship vis à vis the standard language and the process of autonomization (Kloss 1957). Orthographic and variety choices will either emphasize sameness to or difference from the standard according to ideological and identity aspirations but also pragmatic considerations and contexts. Very often we find a tension between local authenticity and literary prestige. Phonemic orthography and colloquial style/varieties tend to symbolize specificity and authenticity whereas etymological orthography and higher style sound more elegant and literary. In many cases, writers will opt consciously or not for hybrid systems, or what Gunvor Mejdell mentions as strategic bivalence (Mejdell 2014). Processes of literacy of former oral languages appear to follow some general roads from simple humorous texts, letters, riddles and folksong to scientific writing in various disciplines, official documents and complete newspapers (Mühleisen 2005). As we shall see, the development of *dārija* writings follow some of these roads. Like in many other countries we find a gradual move from documenting popular oral culture to more modern form of writing such as newspapers and novels. But the increasing impact of globalization and marketing introduces new written practices.

The paper will first present a brief preliminary historical overview of *dārija* literacy in Morocco and highlight some key differences and similarities with the Egyptian context. It will then turn to the recent period and questions the issue of continuity and changes between past and present written practices. It will describe different profiles of people involved in *dārija* writings, their objectives, their public stands, their networks and their types of publication. It will analyze how the different actors

apprehend the key issue of sameness/difference vis à vis the *fushā* in both discourse and practices. It will point out the inherent ambiguity and disjuncture between ideology and practices.

## **1 Writing in *dārija*: From Oral Heritage to written Modernity**

As mentioned above the great amount of recent publications on *dārija* writings leads to the impression that the 2000s gave birth to an unprecedented and massive phenomenon. In fact, *dārija* writings are not totally new, but generally speaking they were mainly associated with oral literary genres such as *zajal* and *malhūn*. If we compare the situation of Moroccan *dārija* with that of Egyptian *‘āmmiyya* two points are noticeable and can explain why this period appeared so radical in Morocco. First, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Moroccan *dārija* never reached the cultural prestige of Egyptian *‘āmmiyya* and did not have the same historical background as a written language<sup>2</sup>. This can be related to the fact that during the same period the general cultural and literary production (theater, novels and journals on the written level but also films, series and songs) was less developed in Morocco than in Egypt (Lecerf 1934, Touimi & al 1974) and that part of the literary production (particularly novels) was/is in French and not in Arabic. The bibliography of Moroccan novels in Arabic established by Al-‘Alam and Qâsimî (2003) as well as the panorama of Touimi and al (1974) and Jay (2005) indicate that very few Moroccan novels in Arabic were published up to the early 1980s. From 1952 to 1973, only one or two Moroccan novels in Arabic were published each year (including those published outside Morocco, in Cairo or Beirut). It was only after 1982 that the number of Arabic published novels reached 8 or more each year (al-‘Alam and Qâsimî 2003). As very well depicted by Jean Lecerf (1934), the *‘āmmiyya* literary tradition in Egypt and the Levant did not develop against or totally independently from *fushā* literary production but in interaction with it. Therefore it is not surprising that the spreading of *dārija* writings in the last decade follow a more general development of Moroccan Arabic literature and writings.

Another important historical difference between Morocco and Egypt is that, in the first part of the 20th century, promotion of *dārija* had never (or rarely) been advocated by leading Moroccan intellectual figures, unlike what happened in Egypt or Lebanon (Plonka 2004, Zack 2014). So far no Moroccan figures comparable to Salāma Mūsā or Said Al ‘Aql have appeared in Morocco, and no writers or journalists like Bayram al-Tunsi, Hussein Shafik or Ya‘qūb Ṣanū‘ and its journal *Abū naḍḍāra zar’a*.

In post-independence Morocco (1960-1980s), several important journals (either francophone like *Souffle*, *Lamalif*, *Intégral* or arabophone like *Afāq*, *al-Asās*, *al-thaqāfa al-jadīda*) acted as fora for the Moroccan intelligentsia/artists and addressed the issue of what should be the “Moroccan national

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<sup>2</sup> See Lecerf 1934 for early writings and Doss and Davies 2013 for a fascinating anthology of Egyptian *‘āmmiyya* writings

culture”, the role and place of language, education, oral literature, popular culture, arts, etc. (Sefrioui 2013: 169-200). Generally speaking the attitude towards popular culture remains rather ambiguous and contradictory. It never led to the explicit valorization of *dārija* or Amazigh as potential national literary languages. For most Moroccan intellectuals of the 1960-70s, the issue of the literary national language was between Arabic (standard Arabic) and French, as many of them were writing in French and considered French to be part of their culture. It seems that it is only in the late 1980, early 1990s that the first public stands toward the valorization of *dārija* started to emerge.

However, like in many other countries, two main domains appeared to have played an important role in the progressive valorization of *dārija* as a literary language (first oral literary and then written literary language): theater and poetry/oral literature.

Theater<sup>3</sup> is one domain where the use of Moroccan Arabic<sup>4</sup> has been commonly practiced, in order to attract the Moroccan public. Dramas with dialogues in *dārija* or a mix of *dārija/fuṣḥā* had been written as early as the 1930/40s<sup>5</sup>. *dārija* was present through popular proverbs, songs and in dialogues representing uneducated persons like in the plays of the *Jamā'a huwāh al-masraḥ* (The Troup of the theater lovers Cie) (Baghdad 2009:77). However the use of Moroccan Arabic was not always accepted. Baghdad mentions a polemic between Abdallah Jrari and Abdelkebir Fassi concerning the use of dialect published in the journal *Al-Maghreb* in 1934 (Baghdad 2009: 4) as well as several articles in the journal *As-sa'āda* in 1934 (Baghdad 2009: 316). The use of *dārija* developed in the 1950-1960s within the workshops of the Centre Marocain de Recherche Dramatique (CMDD) established by André Voisin<sup>6</sup>. CMDD trained many major Moroccan playwrights and stage-directors such as Tayeb Saddiki, Abdessamad Kenfaoui, Ahmed Tayeb al-'Alj, Tahar Ouaâziz, Mohammed Saïd Afifi, Farid Ben M'barek, Abdallah Chakroun, and it influenced dozens of other playwrights like Abdeslam Chraïbi or Mohammed Chahraman (Massaïa 2012). All these playwrights participated in the 'marocanization' of theater either through adaptation/translation of international dramas or through modernization of Moroccan traditional forms of performance<sup>7</sup>. *Dārija* was often restricted to popular comedies. The most famous cases are the adaptation of Moliere's repertoire by Abdelsamad Kenfaoui and Ahmed Tayeb al-'Alj, the original dramas performed by Firqat Bachir al-Alj (1956-1962), the numerous comedies written by Abdallah Chakroun for the *Troupe du Théâtre Arabe de la Radio*

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<sup>3</sup> For the history of Moroccan Theater see Baghdad (2009), Massaïa (2012), Ouzri (1997).

<sup>4</sup> In early writings, the word *dārija* never occurred. Moroccan Arabic is called either 'āmmiyya or lahja.

<sup>5</sup> See Baghdad 2009 for an analysis of 30 dramas published between 1925 and 1955.

<sup>6</sup> Established during the Protectorate CMDD gave birth to the *Troupe du Théâtre Marocain (Firqat at-tamthīl al-maghribi)* in 1956 which became then the famous Maâmora Troup (196-1974) which produced most of Ahmed Tayeb el-Alj's plays.

<sup>7</sup> Among the most famous examples of drama inspired by traditional performances are 3 plays performed by Saddiki's troupe: *Sulṭān Tolba*, written by Kenfaoui (1965), *Diwān sīdī Abdelrahmān al-Mahjūb* written by Saddiki (1967) and *Al-Harrāz* written by Chraïbi. Inspired by the *ḥālqa* tradition, they include musical performances by Nass al-Ghiwān and Jill Jilāla. They meet huge popular success. See also *Boujloud* (1970) by Abdallah Mouâwi or Chahraman's plays within the *nādi al-fanni al-marrakshi* (Massaïa 2012).

*Marocaine*<sup>8</sup>, as well as the adaptation of *Al-ḥarrāz* by Abdeslam Chraïbi performed by Saddiki's troop *Masrah an-nâs*. The dialectal styles and registers were inspired by poetic oral traditions like *zajal* because as stated later by the poet Driss Messnaoui<sup>9</sup>

اللغة بلا ثوب زجلي تاتبقى لغه عربانه وبالتالي لغه فقيره

“A language without the garment of *zajal* remains a naked and poor language”

Those theatrical texts did not aim at reflecting the daily language (unlike more recent productions) but widened the spectrum of uses of the literary colloquial level. As for “serious” and more intellectual dramas they were mainly written or adapted in *fuṣḥā* like the adaptation of Sartre, Camus and Robles by the *Farqat al-'urūba al-masrahiyya* (1945-1995). However there are some exceptions. Saddiki translated/adapted into elevated *dārija* dramas from Gogol (1957 & 1970)<sup>10</sup>, Aristophane (1959), Ben Johnson (1960), Ionesco (1963), Beckett (n.d). Other playwrights followed like Yusif Fadul and the al-Barsim troupe who made a Moroccan adaptation of *Zoo Ztory* of Edward Albee (1972). But up to the 2000s most of these drama texts were not published and did not circulate as written texts. It is only recently that theatrical anthologies started to be published such as Kenfaoui's texts (5 volumes edited in 2010), al-Alj's texts (3 volumes published by La Fondation des Arts Vivants in 2011) or some of the adaptation by Saddiki of Gogol's and Ben Johnson's plays published by the Ministry of Culture in 2003. As far as I know (but this point needs additional research) none of the leading playwrights of the 1950-1980s made explicit claims in favor of the promotion of Moroccan Arabic, unlike what can be observed today among a number of contemporary dramaturges like Driss Ksikes (Miller 2009), Jouad Essounani, Ghassan El Hakim or Ahmed Hammoud (Miller & Abu Al Aazm 2015). According to the stage director Mohammed Zubair, who had been working with Saddiki: “In the 1970s nobody raise the issue of *dārija* as such. At this time, the need was that the drama could reach the audience. Saddiki worked the language to introduce the Moroccan imaginary and he produced true literary texts, a *fuṣḥā* adapted to the Moroccan ears” .

Concerning poetry/oral literature, one notices, starting from the 1980s but more prominently in the 1990s & 2000s, an increase of written publications on popular oral heritage: specific issues of the journal *Afāq* on *zajal* (1992), the monumental anthology of *malhūn* by El-Fassi (1986-1991), publication of *ayta* songs by El-Bahrawi 2003 & Nejmi 2007, Nass el-Ghiwanes songs (ES-Sayyid 2007), Jil Jilāla songs (Riyād & Sbahani 2010), numerous publications of *zajal* anthology by Ministry of Culture such as that of Ben'akida in 2007 or Lemsyah 2011, Moroccan proverbs (Lamghari 2009),

<sup>8</sup> Abdallah Chakroun is considered as one of the most prolific and popular Moroccan dramaturge. He is the first one to introduce drama in Moroccan Arabic at the national radio in the early 1950s (Messaïa 2012: 18-25)

<sup>9</sup> From Messnaoui's manuscript كناش التعاويد probably written in the 1990s but as far as I know not published.

Thanks to Ahmed Ech-Charfi who kindly send me a digitalized copy of this manuscript.

<sup>10</sup> See Langone (2006) for a linguistic analysis of the 1970 Saddiqi's adaptation of Gogol's *Le journal d'un fou/en-naqṣā*.

etc.. Several associations (like AMAPATRIL) and academic conferences were dedicated to oral literature such as the 1998 Marrakech's conference organized and published by the *Jam'iyyat huwāh al-malhūn* "The association of malhūn lovers"(2002). All these publications and activities represent an important step. Before, publications on oral literature were often written in French/English/Spanish and published abroad. Today these publications are written in Arabic and are published in Morocco either by the Moroccan Royal Academy, the Ministry of Culture or private Moroccan publishing houses. A number of these books are sold at an affordable price on the streets and gain a wider audience. The former oral production can be read and these publications participate in giving a literary status to *dārija*. However the *dārija* texts are almost always introduced and commented in *fushā* (the same for the stage directions of the theatrical texts) and therefore keep their orality status.

The interest in Moroccan heritage popular oral literature and the subsequent efforts to collect and write it constitute an ambiguous and complex process. In the 1980s, it developed in a context of political repression and demarcation from the progressive opening of the 1960-70s. It could then be associated with a politics of conservatism, folklorism, closure on the so-called Moroccan culture and values. But in the same time it elevated the status of the popular culture and participated in the silent valorization of *dārija* as illustrated by modern forms of *zajal* poetry by poets like Driss Mesnaoui or Ahmad Lemsyah who defended the literary values of *dārija* and tried to break the boundary between colloquial *zajal* and classical *shī'r* (Elinson this volume). As pointed out by Ech-Charfi, "[t]he promotion of some forms of 'folk' musical art to the status of 'classic' art has also contributed to make Moroccan Arabic a language of 'classic' artistic expression" (Ech-Charfi 2004). Previous cultural domains considered as 'popular, folkloric' became more legitimate and their status improved. The Moroccan situation appears here very similar to many other countries where the first step toward literacy of non-standard languages often starts with the writings of oral literature. This step did not disrupt the diglossic hegemonic representation of language hierarchy in Morocco but allowed for the start of subtle shifts within this hierarchy.

This change of perception towards popular culture and popular language indicates that the valorization of *dārija* has been a gradual process not a sudden change. From the 1980s to the 2000s the stance towards the values of *dārija* writings moved from a heritage perspective to a modernist/developmental one. The heritage phase was a kind of low-profile strategy that did not entail public claim towards the promotion of *dārija*. Today the most striking aspect of the public pro-*dārija* discourse is its visibility and outspoken claims. Embedded in a modernist and democratic discourse, it not only asks for the valorization of *dārija* literacy as part of the cultural national heritage but for its needed institutional promotion as a national/official standard in order to cope with development.

But the discourses challenging the hegemonic linguistic hierarchy are only one trend among many others who participate in the expanding *dārija* writing practices without necessarily entailing a radical change in language ideology (Hall 2015).

## **2 Writings in *dārija* in the years 2000s-2010s: militants, business and social networks**

During the 2000s-2010s, people acting for (or participating in) the writing of *dārija* formed a rather heteroclitite grouping that included media and economic circles such as journalists, advertisers, radio owners, royal advisors but also young artists, writers, psychologists, medical doctors, social activists, translators and a few Moroccan University professors (Caubet 2007 & 2008, Elinson 2013, Bénitez-Fernández et al 2013, Miller 2015)<sup>11</sup>. These various individual initiatives did not and still do not constitute a homogeneous or a unified movement in terms of ideologies, objectives, justifications and practices. Three main circles or profiles can be identified.

The first circle includes those who adopt explicit public stands toward the necessary promotion and eventually institutionalization of *dārija*, advocating a change in the language hierarchy. They form the active minority of “pro-*dārija* militants”, whose exact number and audience is difficult to assess. The 2002 cover and dossier of the francophone weekly TELQUEL “*dārija* langue national” (n° 34, 15-21 June 2002) can be considered their first public manifesto (see picture 1). Since the 2000s, TELQUEL has been one of the main voices of the pro-*dārija* trend and has called for the codification/standardization of written *dārija*. Yet the militants’ attempts to concretize their ideas in practical acts in the writing press and in the educational sector have often raised either skepticism or strong opposition (see below).

The second circle includes actors of the economic circles (including the royal economic consortium). They understand the marketing value of *dārija* as a symbolic vehicle of Moroccan urbanity and modernity but they avoid taking any explicit stands concerning language issues. They actively participated in the public visibility of *dārija* writings (in Arabic or Roman scripts) through the increasing number of advertising boards. Most of the time they mix *dārija* with standard Arabic and/or French to add expressivity, humor and informality. They have play an active role in the shift of iconic association making *dārija* a symbol of urban consumerism and youth culture (mobile phone). This trend, common to many other countries including other North African countries (Chachou 2012), fits with Monica Heller’s analysis that economic arguments are now more authoritative than political ones and govern new forms of communication (Heller 2010).

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<sup>11</sup> The film *Casanayda !* 2007, by D. Caubet, F. Belyazid and A. Mettour (Casablanca: Sigma Production) describes the different figures of the 2006-2007 Darija galaxie.



The third loose circle includes a large majority of lay people, particularly the youth, who have massively adopted *dārija* writings (both in Roman or Arabic scripts) in sms and social networks without necessarily sharing similar opinions concerning what is/or should be the status of *dārija*. The development of internet, sms and social networks represents the strongest dynamics of spreading *dārija* writings and the major factor of change in writing practices (for the use of *dārija* in sms writings and social networks see Berjaoui 2002, Caubet 2003, 2012, 2013, 2016, Hall 2015). Like everywhere in the world, internet opens the door for new writing practices fostering expressivity, informality, humor, refusal of strict social hierarchy and the exhibition of personal subjectivity. The predominance of what has been characterized as the ‘expression of the self’ (*expression de soi*) and the ‘expressive individuality’ in public spaces (Lecomte 2013, Cardon & Granjon 2010) represents one of the major factors of change of oral and written public discourses.

Therefore, the spread and wider visibility of *dārija* writings appear to be linked to a large scale of factors and motivations. It would be a mistake to consider that all those who write in *dārija* are in favor of its institutionalization but at the same time the presence of *dārija* in so many types of writings and contexts reinforce its association with Moroccanness, from the expressive individuality to the collective construct. No strict boundaries exist between the three circles.

The same fluidity characterizes the impact of political affiliation within pro and anti-*dārija* movements. The pro-*dārija* militants tend to present themselves as the emanation of a youth progressive wing and have been often pictured as such particularly during the *nayda* cultural phenomenon of the mid-2000s (Caubet 2008). However the pro/anti *dārija* contrast does not reflect a clear left/right or democratic/non-democratic polarization. In both the ruling establishment and the leftist opposition we find quite ambiguous stands.

King Mohamed VI and his advisors are very keen to present the regime as being in tune with the times *vis à vis* the traditionalist parties like the nationalist pan-arabist Istiqlal or the Islamist PJD, even when the latter are officially heading the government. The use of *dārija* in a number of sectors is one of the symbols of this modernity. Adopting the style and the methods of the advertising and marketing circles, the regime does not hesitate to use *dārija* as part of branding of Moroccanness and symbol of patriotism. A symbol of such patriotic marketing strategies is the recycling of the famous red hand with the motto *mā tqīsh blādi* “don’t touch my country” Inspired by the French motto *Touche pas à mon pôte* during “La marche des Beurs”, the *dārija* motto first appeared in Morocco during the civil demonstrations of 2003 (in support of arrested rockers, then in the aftermath of the Islamist bombing of Casablanca cf. Caubet 2007) and became the title of a popular song released by the Marrakchi rap group Fnayr in 2004 (Moreno Almeida 2016). Since then it has been used during all kinds of patriotic gatherings and mobilizations: defense of the “Moroccan” Sahara against Polisario, the anti-paedophilia movement, etc. During the demonstrations of February-March 2011, the motto was exhibited all over

the main avenues of the capital Rabat on the giant boards owned by Mounir Majidi, a close royal adviser (see figure 3). The regime has tolerated (and even promoted?) the written and oral spread of *dārija* in the media, the ads and the cultural domains because it serves purposes of expressivity and Moroccan branding. However, King Mohamed VI never inserts *dārija* in his official Royal discourse whereas Benkirane, the PJD prime minister made himself popular by resorting mainly to *dārija* during his press conferences. But while the Palace is believed to have backed the idea of introducing *dārija* as part of a general language reform in teaching, Benkirane and the PJD in fact stood as strong opponents of this idea (see below).

The same ambiguity characterizes the linguistic stands of the leftist wing of the political spectrum: the 20<sup>th</sup> February movement. An interesting turn took place in 2011 with the emergence of the movement and subsequent street demonstrations (Moustaoui Shrir 2013, Caubet & Miller 2016, Caubet 2016 and this volume), that led to new styles of political expressions, rather similar to the Tunisian ones (Lecomte 2013). In February 11<sup>th</sup>, the movement posted a video where a number of young people and one older lady explained in *dārija* and Amazigh why they will go down for demonstration on February 20<sup>th</sup>. The subtitles of the video were written in Amazigh in tifinagh script, *dārija* in Arabic script and French - to the exclusion of standard Arabic.<sup>12</sup> During the demonstrations, many written slogans of the movement were in *dārija* but also in Amazigh, French, English and standard Arabic (Figure 4). In the following weeks and months debates for and against the 20th February movement, the Constitutional Referendum, the demonstrations, the alliances with the Islamists occupied social networks, blogs, clips, with thousands of written comments in *dārija*, French, Amazigh, standard Arabic, English and in a mix of several languages on Facebook, Youtube etc. From then on, political discussion in *dārija* became more and more common and we can say that *dārija* entered the domain of politics. However, the 20<sup>th</sup> February movement never explicitly demanded the officialization of *dārija* (unlike what happened with Amazigh among the Amazigh militants). An important function of *dārija* in written or oral political discussions on social networks appears to be a discursive one, emphasizing as I mentioned above expressivity and subjectivity.

Before the spring of 2011, there were few political discussions on the Moroccan Facebook. Most members were sharing their personal life-events or their artistic and cultural choices (Caubet & Miller 2016). Eventually youth expressed their discontent of the main caveats of the Moroccan society (corruption, sexism, unemployment, hypocrisy) as many rap artists were doing, but without direct connection with formal political organizations. *dārija* was a means to render personal feelings, from joy to anger or frustration without any pretention to adopt an objective and rational discourse

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<sup>12</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A\\_LF0JqnMzw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_LF0JqnMzw) (posted February 2011, 11<sup>th</sup>, 370.608 views in 12 December 2014). The video starts with the sentence « *ana maghribi, ghadi nekhroj nhar 20 febrayer...* » (I am Moroccan, I will come out on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February).

encapsulated in a formal language, as many youth consider that political discourses are just bafflegab. From these beginnings, a number of youth became cyber activists and opted for more direct political comments and discussion while keeping the same “free expressiveness” in *dārija* in their Facebook pages and blogs (Caubet 2016). But not all 20<sup>th</sup> February militants write in *dārija* and a number of activists continue to write in standard Arabic when they want to discuss political issues on a more formal and “objective” register as can be seen on the website of the movement mamfakinch.com<sup>13</sup>:

### من نحن / Qui sommes-nous ?

مامفاكينش.كوم موقع إخباري يسهر عليه مجموعة من المدونين و المناضلين المغاربة. أنشئ هذا الموقع على إثر دعوات التظاهر التي أطلقها شباب مغاربة، من شتى أنحاء المغرب، من أجل المطالبة بإصلاحات سياسية و اقتصادية و اجتماعية يوم 20 فبراير 2011. و ذلك في إطار ما أصبح يطلق عليه الآن في المواقع الاجتماعية : حركة #Feb20.

رغم تعدد حساسياتنا و مشاربنا السياسية المختلفة، نتقاسم الإيمان العميق بقيم الديمقراطية و الحرية و احترام حقوق الإنسان.

مامفاكينش.كوم ليس بجريدة، بل هو وسيلة إعلام مواطنة تؤمن بحق الوصول للمعلومة التي غالبا ما تصدر أو تشوه من طرف وسائل الإعلام الرسمية و غير الرسمية.

“Mamfakinsh.com is a News site animated by a group of Moroccan bloggers and activists. The site was established immediately after February 20th, 2011 calls for demonstrations launched by young Moroccans, from all across Morocco, demanding political, economic and social reforms. This as part of what became known within social networks as the Feb20# Movement. Despite the diversity of our sensitivities and political inclinations, we share a deep faith in the values of democracy, freedom and respect for human rights. Mamfakinsh.com is not a newspaper, it is a citizen media that believes in the right of access to information that are often confiscated or distorted by the official and unofficial media”

Facebook posts by 20<sup>th</sup> February members reflect a high diversity of levels and styles. It seems here that the personal background of each militant plays an important role as well as his/her vision of political styles. Those who are more educated and had a political background before 2011 are keener to continue to use mainly standard Arabic in their political posts, as someone like Najib Chaouki whose facebook pages contain relatively little *dārija*. On the other hand, some activists coming from musical/artistic background or from popular background opt for writing mainly in *dārija* (see Caubet 2016 for the case of Mouad Lhaqed or Mohamed Sokrate). The former select what they consider a neutral, objective style whereas the latter opt for a subjective and more personal style that sounds tougher and closer to “the street” but which is also closer to artistic expression.

Therefore the use of *dārija* in written political discussions plays an important stylistic function. It does not necessarily indicate a wish to promote *dārija* as a distinctive and eventually institutionalized language. It rather tends to make political involvement less formal and to mark disconnection from traditional political formations.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.mamfakinch.com/>, accessed March 2012.

In short, if *dārija* writings have expanded tremendously in the last decade, it does not mean that all those who are using it either in personal or public writings agree with the idea of its institutionalization. The spread of *dārija* writings rather coincides, for the time being, with a trend toward coolness and informality. Does it mean that this trend will affect all domains? Analyzing some recent experiences and events, it appears that the ‘pro-*dārija* militants’ are faced with the fact that many people still doubt the value of *dārija* as a ‘true literary language’ which could become a formal institutional language.

### **Contesting the language hierarchy: discourses, actions and limits**

The discourse of the pro-*dārija* militants advocating the promotion, valorization, codification and eventually officialization of *dārija* (also called Moroccan language/*lughā maghrebiyya*) follows the path of the international movement of defense of minority languages/mother tongues. They refer to the universal trend toward protection and promotion of heritage mother tongues according to language rights enacted by International laws<sup>14</sup>. They point to the failure of the Moroccan educational system attributed mainly to language problems as recognized in several Moroccan official documents such as the COSEF 1999 or the *Plan d’Urgence* 2009-2012 with the idea that according to International Institutions such as UNESCO or UNDP promotion of mother tongue (Amazigh and *dārija*) may enhance educational results and foster Moroccan economic development and cultural creativity. They consider that the Moroccan people need to reconcile with their specific Moroccan identity in order to reinforce democracy and modernity. They believe that promotion of Moroccan mother tongues will help Moroccans emancipate themselves from the former colonial language (French) and from an Arabic classical literary norm that does not correspond to the reality of the Moroccan society.

Their perception of the Moroccan linguistic reality and their ideas about how to ameliorate it are strongly influenced by the model of the historical development of the European national languages. They consider that the diglossic *fusḥā* /*dārija* relationship is similar to the Latin/Roman vernaculars of medieval Europe and they conclude that in the Arab world as in Europe, modernity implies the development of the vernaculars as full-fledged languages. We find here the same arguments as those advanced during the 19<sup>th</sup> century to explain the backwardness of the Arab world. But whereas it was considered a kind of colonial ideology during the golden years of pan-arabism, it gains revival during the 1990s at a time of pan-arabism’s disillusion. A linking figure between Egypt and Morocco on this issue is the Egyptian psychoanalyst Mustafa Safwan whose publications and stands in favor of Arabic vernaculars have been very well received in the pro-*dārija* circles in Morocco (Miller 2015). Let me

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<sup>14</sup> such as Art 5 of 1960 UNESCO Convention against discrimination in Education, 1999-2000, the UN launching International Mother Language Day, the 2001 UNESCO Charter, etc.

note here that a number of European scholars such as Francisco Moscoso (2011) or Jan Hoogland (2013) strongly support *dārija* writing and codification and participate in the Moroccan debate.

Pro-*dārija* militants do not limit themselves to discourses. In order to participate in the making of a literary Moroccan Arabic that could become recognized as a ‘full language’, a few individuals embark on different writing experiences such as the translation of European classical literary texts (Miller 2015) or the writings of novels (Aguade 2006, 2013; Elinson 2013, Ferrando 2012a&b, Pérez Cañada & Salinitro 2011). But these experiences have a limited audience. Another field of experience has been the written press. Three examples are very often quoted<sup>15</sup>: *Khbār blādnā* (خبار بلدنا) (launched in 2002 by Elena Printice in Tangiers, *Al-Amāl* (الامل) launched in 2006 by journalist students in Sale and *Nichane* (نيشان), the Arabic weekly version of TELQUEL created in 2006 by Driss Ksikes (chief editor) and Ahmed Benchemsi (director). *Khbār blādnā* was a kind of artisanal newspaper, printed at 6 000 copies, written in *dārija* in vocalized Arabic script, targeting the poorly literate readers and freely distributed in the medina of Tangiers from 2002 to 2007 (see picture 6). Printice’s publishing house edited also small books like health booklets, tales, novels, etc, all in the same vocalized Arabic script. *Al- Amāl* was a short-lived (6 months) experience, printed at 2000 copies and written also in vocalized *dārija*. Both *Khbār blādnā* and *Al-Amāl* remain rather marginal experiences. Their philosophy can be related to an old trend of social reformism found for example in Egypt in the late 19<sup>th</sup> c. that sees dialectal literacy as a means to widen literacy and social consciousness among the poor. It cannot be considered as a decisive participation in the creation of a modern *dārija* language.

The *Nichane* experience lasted four years (2006-2010) and had a far wider audience and impact (around 30 000 issues weekly). *Nichane*’s format was a professional one, written in non vocalized Arabic script like most Arabic newspapers. *Nichane* attracted considerable international attention and was very often presented as THE Moroccan newspaper in *dārija*. The renommée of *Nichane* was due to its link to TELQUEL, to its contents, its style, and to the charismatic personality of its director (Ahmed Benchemsi) and first chief-editor (D. Ksikes). TELQUEL and *Nichane* always positioned themselves as ‘les portes paroles’ of the progressive wing of the civil society. The main goal of *Nichane* was to spread the progressive stands of TELQUEL in Arabic to the non-francophone readers, with the same freedom of speech. This boldness caused several judicial problems that many attributed to the *dārija* factor. *Nichane* had in fact a rather low percentage of *dārija* more or less estimated at 20% by J. Hoogland (2013). *Dārija* was present mainly in the cover titles, the headlines and some specific pages like the interview pages. But why has *Nichane* so often been considered THE symbol of *dārija* writings when it contains only a small percentage of *dārija*? As it has been often observed

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<sup>15</sup> For references on these 3 newspaper See Aguade (2012), Benítez-Fernández (2008, 2010, 2012), Caubet (2012), Elinson (2013), Hall (2015), Hickman (2013), Hoogland (2013), Langone (2003), Miller (2012), Moustauoui-Srhir (2012b).

(Romaine 2005) a few words or sentences suffice to act as tags for the entire text. The subjective perception of Nichane was also certainly influenced by the public stands of TELQUEL in favor of *dārija*, particularly by the strong position of A. Benchemsi.

Let us note here that there has been quite a divergence of language representation between Driss Ksikes who acted as Nichane chief editor for 3-4 months and Ahmed Benchemsi, TELQUEL director who took over after Ksikes' withdrawal due to Nichane's first trial. In his first editorial "Why Nichane" *علاش نيشان* Driss Ksikes explains what will be Nichane's style and describes it as "an easy Arabic language, a language of its time and its place, free of rethorical expressions and with a Moroccan fragrance":

. نيشان ستكتب بلغة زمانه عربية سهلة خالية من العبارات البديعية و لغة مكانه أي فيها نفحة مغربية .

In a personal interview I conducted with him in Rabat in May 2009, he mentioned that "my model was the Egyptian magazine *Roz el Youssif* and my main idea was to show that Arabic could be an economic and a non redundant language". He added that "we knew that we couldn't create a written *dārija* from scratch but our goal was to accompany the movement toward the Moroccan language, to reach a clear project of codification, transcription and standardization. As media people we thought that we could maybe force the progress of history". However, he added that "the issue of *dārija* cannot be set up independently from Arabic. In the written press, the isolation and autonomy of Moroccan *dārija* from Arabic would not work, because there wouldn't be enough readers. Morocco is far behind Egypt and needs to solve first the issue at the oral level before it works at the written level". This is why he suggested that *dārija* should be first used in theater and novels, a task he followed from 2009 to 2012 with the Dabateatr (Miller 2009, Miller and Abu El Aazm 2014).

As for Ahmed Benchemsi, he always emphasized the structural gap between *dārija* and *fusha* and called for the rapid institutionalization of *dārija* in several editorials in TELQUEL:

« Our sole common language is *dārija*. Some translate *dārija* by Moroccan Arabic. I don't agree. It's Moroccan only. Yes, Moroccan includes a majority of words of Arab origin, but a small majority. There are as many words from Berber, French and Spanish origin (TELQUEL 230, June 2006).

"Only *dārija* integrates all the obscured faces of our identity. It's it (*dārija*) which should be standardized, used as teaching medium in our schools, and sooner or later constitutionalized ». (TELQUEL, May 9<sup>th</sup> 2009).

Despite their different language stands, both Ksikes and Benchemsi never wrote their editorial in "plain *dārija*" and like most other Nichane journalists they opted for a mix variety (see figures 6 and 7), but each one with his own style. There are a few *dārija* sentences in Ksikes' editorials ( *بصراجة* ). These sentences render oral discourse and are always introduced by commas, a practice found in other Moroccan newspapers like *al-Masa' or Ahdath maghrebiyya* (Miller 2012):

و يأتي الجواب من الهمة واصجابه صريحا "ما تبقاوش تحلموا الملك باغي يقتل من السلط ديالو ولكن مع صعود الاسلاميين ما يمكنش يقبل دابا"

« And the answer from El Hima and his friends comes quickly ‘Don’t stay dreaming, the King wants to resign from his power, but with the raising of the Islamists he cannot do it now’ ». (16-22/9/2006).

Somewhat more mixing is found in Benchemsi’s editorials (entitled ديريكت ) and translated from French by Benchemsi himself. He often peppered his text with *dārija* words and expressions without demarcating them by comas. Below are two sentences of the same editorial published in its French version in TELQUEL and in its Arabic version in Nichane the 23/1/2010.

« On avait fini par les oublier. La publication des recommandations de l’Instance équité et réconciliation avait pourtant été un moment fort de la « nouvelle ère »

نسيناهم كاع اصدار توصيات "هيئة تاتنصاف والمصالحة" كلن زعمة من اقوى لحظات "العهد الجديد"

« Où en sommes-nous de la constitutionnalisation des droits de l’homme ? On n’a encore rien vu venir. En tout cas rien de ce qui était essentiel pour rompre définitivement avec les pratiques du passé »

فين وصلنا فديسترة حقوق الانسان , ما زال ما شفنا والو أو علي الأقل , ما زال ما شفنا والو من ما هو أساسي لضمان مستقبل أفضل

Ahmed Benchemsi is certainly one of the very few Moroccan journalists who tried as much as he could to introduce *dārija* in his political editorials. His writings certainly deserve deeper linguistic analysis. However, Benchemsi never succeeded to make Nichane a *dārija* newspaper. Most of the other Nichane journalists wrote dominantly in standard Arabic and the ambitious project of codification/standardization never really concretized.

All the experiences quoted above that try to push *dārija* in the domain of the written press came to an end around 2009-2010. Since then, no printed or online newspaper adopted *dārija* as ‘une carte de visite’, even good.ma, the online version of Nichane (except for some personal blogs). What remains in most newspapers is the rather traditional discursive use of some *dārija* words and expressions for stylistic purposes (popular wisdom, irony, indignation etc.).

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the Nichane experience. First, it does not matter how people really write as there is no direct association between the real language level of the text and people’s perception. If the text is claimed to be in *dārija*, if it contains a few *dārija* tags (wallu, za’ma, ‘alaš), then it is perceived to be in *dārija* whatever its level. Second, the marginal presence of *dārija* within journalistic writings indicates that this domain is still perceived as a “serious” literary domain

not suitable for “plain” *dārija*, particularly if the journalist wishes to sound serious and objective. The militant discourse wants to disrupt the language ideology but still it cannot win over it in practices in all domains. *dārija* is not yet perceived as a legitimate serious literary language. Third, the *exact identity* of what could or should be the long awaited codified *dārija* remains unclear for the time being, even if some common rules start to emerge. One is the dominant trend towards the use of Arabic script with an etymological orthography, albeit with many variants. This orthography can be found in most Moroccan newspapers, novels, students’ production (Gago- 2016) and is more and more present on social networks (Caubet 2016). But yet no codified literary *dārija* has been fixed and nationally accepted, because as mentioned before, writings of *dārija* remained largely an individual enterprise. It is certainly this absence of a recognized literary *dārija* norm that makes its entry in formal domains such as education unconceivable for a large part of the population, at least currently.

The fierce polemic arose in 2013-2015 following the suggestion to introduce *dārija* as a medium of education in the first years of schoolings, which highlights the limits of the *dārija* legitimation. The debate was launched by publicist & makhzen insider Nourredine Ayouch, through his Zakoura Foundation. The Foundation is involved in literacy courses within rural areas. Relying on this experience, N. Ayouch actively militates for educational reforms and for the use of *dārija* as a medium of instruction in initial and primary schools<sup>16</sup>. The Foundation organized two International Conferences in Casablanca in 2010 and 2013. The first one (*La Langue, Les Langues*, Casablanca June 2010) focused on the language situation in Morocco compared to a number of countries which have gone through language reforms, like Turkey and Greece. The second Conference (Colloque International sur l’éducation, *Le Chemin de la Réussite*, 4-5 October 2013) discussed the needs of a large educational reform. It took place only two months after the 20<sup>th</sup> August 2013 Royal Speech, where Mohamed VI asked for an urgent educational reform and harshly criticized the PJD-led government for its failure concerning educational reforms. The conference was considered to be more or less backed by the Palace and was attended by representatives of the World Bank and Microsoft, high official figures such as Ministers of Education and two Royal Advisors, Fouad El Himma and Omar Azziman. Both the 2010 and 2013 conferences concluded with several recommendations concerning the place and role of language in Education. They called for the need to introduce the mother tongues (Amazigh and *dārija*) as a medium of instruction in early years of schooling to enhance literacy. The idea was not totally new. It was already suggested in the 1999 *Chartre Nationale de l’Education et de la Formation* (COSEF 1999) (cf. de Ruiter (2001) and Benítez (2010)). But COSEF’s recommendations had never been implemented. In both Conferences, the recommendations of the

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<sup>16</sup> Hall 2015 provides a very interesting account of a similar experience of adult literacy programs in rural areas held by a USAID sponsored association Passerelle and shows that in reality the teachers were quite reluctant to *darija* writings and use mainly *darija* as oral medium.



Zakoura Foundation were always careful to highlight the convergence between classical and Moroccan Arabic. But this carefulness did not stop the fury of the opponents.

The 2013 Conference raised an unprecedented mediatic storm, from October 2013 to February 2014 (Caubet & Miller 2016, Miller 2016, Hall 2015, Schulthies 2014). Many people, including intellectual and political figures stand against this idea. In November 27<sup>th</sup>, a debate on the Moroccan TV Channel 2M between Nourredine Ayouch and the famous historian Abdallah Laroui was watched by 5 million people. During this media storm nobody seriously discussed which kind of *dārija* could or should be used as a medium of instruction in the first years of schooling. None of the efforts of the Zakoura Foundation to present literary Moroccan Arabic as a legitimate bridge that will help to create a convergent Arabic that combines *dārija* and *fuṣḥā* were heard, believed or considered irrelevant. For most of his detractors, Ayouch (as Benchemsi before him) is acting for the domination of French over Arabic; *dārija* is a Trojan horse that will reinforce the prestige of the foreign languages.

In 2015, the polemic continued within the *Conseil Supérieur de l'Education* (CES). CES' main function was to write a strategic report to be presented to the King that will define the new educational policy. According to numerous press releases, CES members (nominated by the King and including N. Ayouch) did not agree on the place of *dārija* in schools. This lack of agreement is said to have caused serious delay in the writing of the final strategic report. Last press releases in September 2015 indicated that opponents to teaching in *dārija* finally succeeded to kick out the suggestion from the strategic report.<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion

*Dārija* is definitely making its ways in various spaces of expression, communication and artistic creation. Its diversity in terms of dialectal varieties, registers and styles makes it a powerful tool of expression at both the oral and written level. The success of a number of Moroccan Facebook or Youtube links attracting million viewers by circulating cartoon using youth *darija* slang attests the powerful attraction of *dārija* (see for example the case of Bouzebbal in Ziamari & Barontini 2016).<sup>18</sup>

Mixed with *fuṣḥā*, *dārija* contributes to the expressivity of Arabic in more formal levels and creates a feeling of proximity with the Moroccan public. It is more and more closely associated with Moroccan patriotism in songs, political motto and political discourses, and on web sites.

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<sup>17</sup> A first draft was presented in February 23<sup>th</sup> 2015 to the King but not made public. See [http://www.aufait.ma/2015/02/25/langue-arabe-un-collectif-veut-la-tete-de-belmokhar\\_638522](http://www.aufait.ma/2015/02/25/langue-arabe-un-collectif-veut-la-tete-de-belmokhar_638522) and <http://www.panorapost.com/la-darija-nouvelle-ligne-de-front-de-la-bataille-de-leducation-nationale/>.

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RB7jSX-6200&ebc=ANyPxKqW4x580JhXw-YXRslrw\\_7qTFULYqENAw7b6O\\_w1lwVWSgVwmEFJ55Y4YDvePsc6IjAhjheplc6\\_fVlzV52UxK1E2IZrQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RB7jSX-6200&ebc=ANyPxKqW4x580JhXw-YXRslrw_7qTFULYqENAw7b6O_w1lwVWSgVwmEFJ55Y4YDvePsc6IjAhjheplc6_fVlzV52UxK1E2IZrQ)

But, at least for the time being, its standardization and institutionalization as a Moroccan official language is not perceived as a social and political priority by what seems to be a large portion of the population. The reasons for such reluctance are many. It can be attributed to the weight of the traditional language hierarchy supported by the traditionalist and pan-arabist political intelligentsia who cannot imagine the rupture with *fuṣḥā*. It can be also understood for very pragmatic reasons. The failure of the Arabic public educational system to provide economic opportunities for the young Moroccan graduates is deeply internalized by most Moroccan Youth people and their parents (Boutieri 2016). They are deeply convinced that opportunities are provided by the mastery of international languages such as French and English. They fear that the teaching of Moroccan Arabic will not ameliorate their situation but rather worsening it. Finally the idea that the gap between *fuṣḥā* and *dārija* is so wide that it became almost two different languages does not seem to be shared by the majority of the people who attended Moroccan Arabic schools, due to the fact that Moroccan Arabic is de facto very present at the oral level in schools (Boutieri 2016).

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