



The Algerian Literary Field in the 'Black Decade': A Reinforced Polarization

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The Algerian Civil War profoundly affected Algerian writers and intellectuals, with many of them being killed and even more of them – a quarter of all active writers – at one time or another going into exile (Leperlier, 2018a). Various armed groups, some linked to the state and some claiming to be operating for reasons of jihad, fought each other during this decade (Peyroulou, and Ellyas 2002). It is difficult to give a definite chronology of events without appearing to take up a position in the debates among those involved. Some date the beginning of the political crisis that hit the country to the army's decision to halt the electoral process that would have been won by the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS), calling this a coup d'état. Others, those who consider the Islamist movement itself to have been responsible for the crisis, argue that it began in 1991 during the general strike called by the FIS. Others still point to the riots that took place in October 1988 as these weakened the power of the ruling FLN and led to the introduction of a multi-party system (Ait-Aoudia 2015).

However, whichever date is chosen it is always the case that the country's intellectuals were at the centre of the crisis, particularly during the early years of the violence between 1993 and 1995 when many of those who were politically engaged were the victims of attacks. It is also difficult to date the end of the Civil War, since the number of massacres increased after the surrender of the Armée Islamique du Salut (AIS, Islamic Salvation Army) in 1997, and there have been intermittent acts of terrorism up until the present day. Here again, the date chosen for the end of the Civil War also means taking up a position in the debates, since it means giving the credit for the end of the War either to President Liamine Zéroual or President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Without getting involved in these debates, it can at least be said that the chronology of the Algerian literary field does not follow the country's political chronology even in broad outline.

To what extent was the Algerian literary field affected by the Civil War? The introduction of the 'field' as a theoretical tool allows precisely not to slap the political issues and the political chronology on a space that operates to a certain extent in an autonomous way. On the contrary, one must observe the ways in which the politics is 'refracted', according to Pierre Bourdieu (1996), in the (relatively autonomous) field in question. Despite the political crisis, the rules of the literary field do not entirely disappear.¹ Contrary to the idea that crisis is exceptional, this chapter will show that the Civil War acted on the literary field in a way that was in line with its previous structures. The political crisis acted to reinforce statistical tendencies in the literary field that had already been seen earlier.

The Algerian literary field can be described as being both bilingual and transnational (Leperlier, 2018b). As a result, most of its actors spontaneously cite their peers regardless of this dual dividing line. Indeed, the national paradigm of 'Algerian literature' remains central to these peripheral writers and paradoxically also noticeable when some writers try to deny someone else's belonging to this 'Algerian literature' because of their geographical or

linguistic choices. It is no less the case that the linguistic division between Arabic and French (Tamazight is still of only secondary importance) is incorporated into separate institutions such as reviews, university departments and publishers, as well as transnational spaces with their capitals in Paris (Casanova 2008) or Beirut (Mermier 2005), leading to talk of two subfields that are relatively independent from each other.

By examining the Algerian literary field through the particular prism of a bibliographical database, it will be shown that the effect of the crisis has been the reinforcement of the bipolarization that structures the Algerian literary field. It will also be examined to what extent the entry in crisis of this literary field, as well as its exit from it (its 'depolarization'), depend on factors external or internal to the field: this will allow us to measure to what extent the field managed to maintain a certain autonomy during the crisis.

The study draws on a unique bibliographical database of about 2000 literary works by Algerian writers published between 1998 and 2004. The data were put together from information from the Algerian legal deposit system, the Limag database, the Electre database, the records of the King Abdel-Aziz Al Saoud Foundation for Islamic Studies and the Human Sciences in Casablanca, the Website of the Foundation of the Abdel-Aziz Saoud al-Babtain Foundation for Poetic Creativity (Mu'assasat jā'iza 'Abd al-'Azīz Sa'ūd al-Bābtayn li-libdā ' al-shi'rī), titles given by Achour Cheurfi in his *Ecrivains algériens. Dictionnaire biographique* [Algerian Writers: A Biographical Dictionary] (Algiers: Casbah, 2004), titles listed by Mohand Akli Salhi in 'La nouvelle littérature kabyle et ses rapports à l'oralité traditionnelle' [The New Kabyle Literature and Its Relationship to Traditional Orality] in *La Littérature amazighe* [Amazigh Literature] (Rabat: Institut royal de la culture amazighe, 2004), as well as numerous internet searches.

The major shortcoming of this database lies in the fact that there is no reliable information available on the literature published in the Arab countries – there is no system of legal deposit in Lebanon, for example – and this is without even mentioning the importance of self-publishing in Algeria and in the other Arab countries, which is even less likely to be recorded. However, numerous internet searches along with the qualitative research and interviews with writers writing in Arabic conducted as part of the study have confirmed that the latter not often publish their works abroad.

After coding the data, eight variables were selected for analysis: 'language of the text', 'genre', 'publisher' (and 'recoded publisher'), 'place of publication' (recoded as 'country of publication'), 'year of publication' and 'version of the text'. The present chapter concentrates on 'versions' (first edition, translation, republished in another country and co-edition), 'languages' (French, Arabic, Tamazight or others) and 'country of publication' (Algeria, France or Other country).

Immune to the crisis?

The first observation that can be made from the data is that the production of Algerian writers paradoxically appears to have been unaffected by the political crisis.

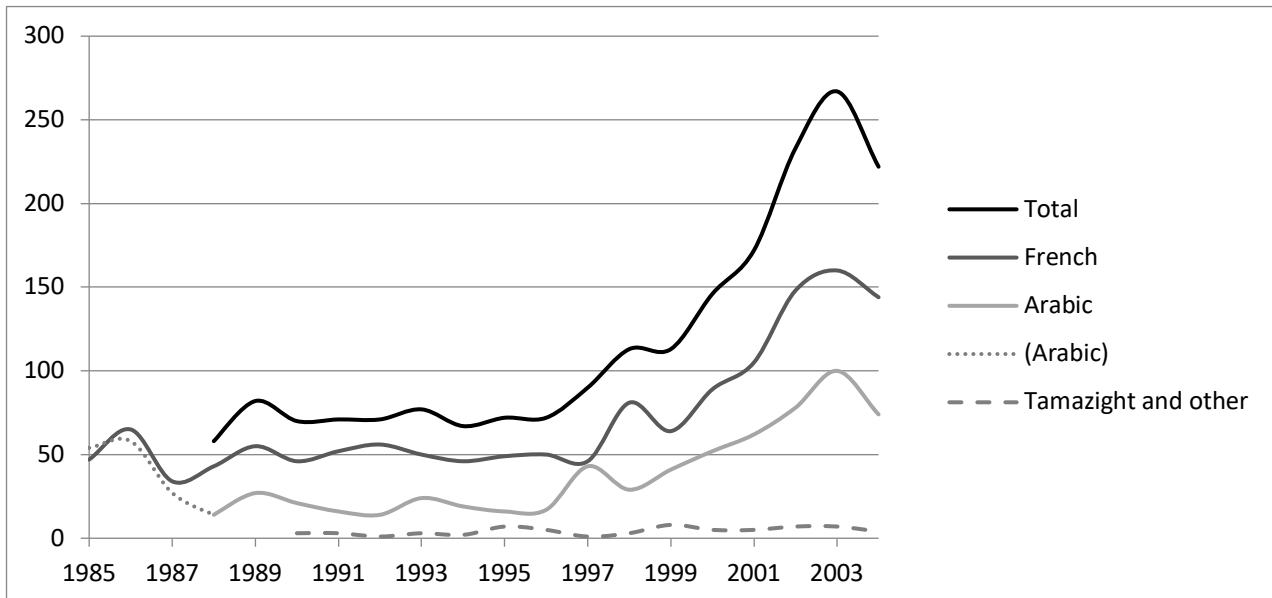


Figure 1 Publications by language. Field : All literary works by Algerian writers between 1988 and 2004 (n=2002), plus publications in French and Arabic between 1985 and 1987.

It will be noted that Algerian literary production as a whole, unchanging since the middle of the previous decade (as can be seen from production in French), continues at the same level until 1996. It is only at this date that it begins to increase at a steady rate, almost quadrupling in seven years and going from 72 titles in 1996 to 267 in 2003. As a result, it seems that the multifaceted crisis experienced by Algeria in the 1990s did not affect the overall production of Algerian literature, given that it increased markedly after the most intense period of the political and security crisis in the country between 1993 and 1996. The political and literary chronologies do not overlap, and the political crisis even had a counter-intuitive role to play with regard to literary production. The relationship between the languages also did not change much (figure 1). Even though the number of titles produced in Arabic increased towards the end of the period, quadrupling when the number of titles produced in French only tripled, the overall dominance of publication in French over the two other languages is still noticeable at between three-fifths and three-quarters of total production. This can in part be explained by the role played by foreign publishers in publishing Algerian writers, as seen in Figure 2. This graph shows that even though the crisis did not affect Algerian production overall, it did have different effects regarding the country of publication. The intertwining curves show the importance of French publishers in the 1990s, the crisis accentuating their pre-existing importance. Historically speaking, to publish in Paris was a matter of course for francophone writers in Algeria, whether they were Europeans or Muslims, as it was for any other 'region' of French literature. While this 'evidence' was later called into question by the rise of nationalism, it nevertheless continued because of difficulties in publishing with national publishers, particularly because of censorship.

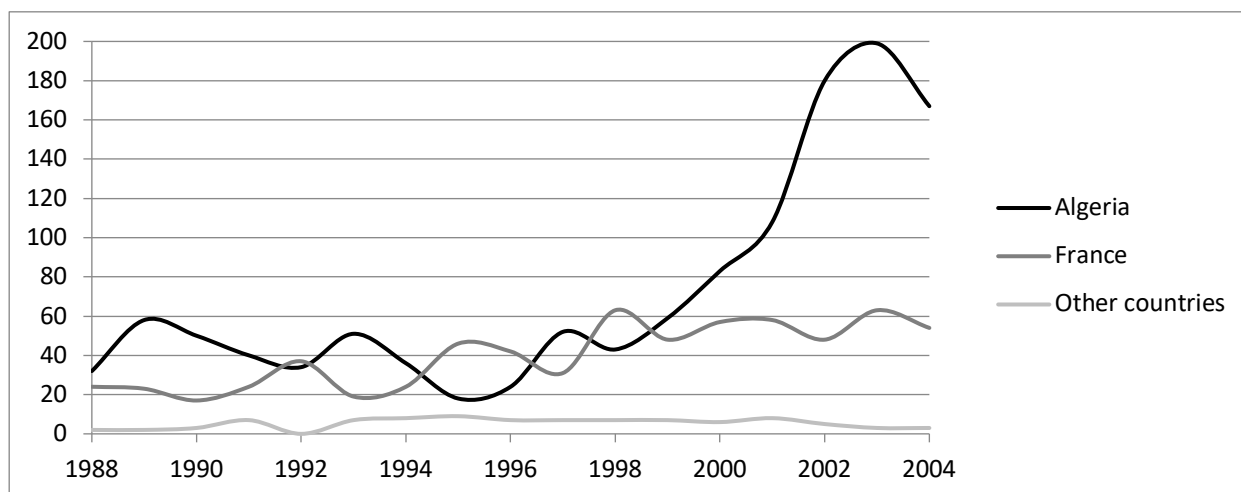


Figure 2 Publications by country. Field: All literary works by Algerian writers between 1988 and 2004 (n=2002).

From a third of the total production at the beginning of the 1990s, the proportion of works published in France by Algerian writers increased to more than half during the worst years of the crisis in the second half of the decade and to around 65 per cent in 1995. The stagnation of Algerian production seen in Figure 2 in fact conceals a phenomenon of communicating vessels between Algeria and France that the crisis seems only to have accentuated. As for publication in other countries, this was never above 10 per cent of the total, and it hovered around an average of 5 per cent during the period, being divided on an equal basis between the Arab countries (where works were published almost entirely in Arabic) and the European countries and North America (where they were generally in French).

Despite the rebound in the production in Algeria in 1997, it was only after 1999 that this began definitively to outweigh that of France. This was not the result of the end of the Civil War in Algeria but instead of the reintroduction of Algerian cultural policies favouring literary publication. As Luis Martinez has shown (Martinez 1998), the return of oil revenues was one of the most important factors leading to the victory of the Algerian military over the AIS and the various jihadist groups at the time, but in itself the increase in Algerian publications was not strictly speaking linked to the end of the War. State aid for publishers started in 1997, when the Bibliothèque Nationale d'Algérie, the Algerian National Library, began to buy between 200 and 300 copies of all the books published in the country, which partly explain the rebound in publication in 1997. This was also something like an act of catching-up, as it could be thought that all the books that had been difficult to publish before that date would now be able to find a publisher. In subsequent years, state aid continued to increase with the establishment of the Fonds National pour la Promotion et le développement des Arts et des Lettres, the National Fund for the Promotion and Development of the Arts and Letters, which generally aimed to buy 1,000 copies of selected titles for the country's public libraries. The upturn in the curve from 2001 to 2003 is directly linked to the Year of Algeria in France (YAF) that took place in 2003. However, as is always the case for events of this kind (Sapiro 2008), the effect of the YAF on literary production was only temporary. After 2003, the level of literary production in Algeria fell back to what could have been expected a few years beforehand.

The sudden separation between the curves of publication in France and Algeria should not therefore lead to false conclusions. If we compare the averages of the two periods just before and just after the crisis (1988–93 and 1999–2004), reducing the temporary effect of the YAF, it will be seen that production in Algeria has certainly tripled in size, going from 45 to

135 titles, but that production in France has also doubled (25–55 titles) and that it continues to represent around a third of total production (from 35 to 30 per cent of the whole). More recent data would probably show an increasing separation of the two curves (25 per cent in 2004), but to an extent that must be nuanced, as has been seen.

As a result, both the long term and the medium term of fifteen years seem to contradict the idea of the Civil War having a major impact on the literary field. The effects of the crisis are more to be seen in the short term and in the distribution of the languages in the countries: the crisis having had different effects in the two linguistic subfields.

Reinforced bipolarization of the literary field

Figure 3 confirms that the political instability seen in Algeria after October 1988 and the processes of liberalization and democratization did not in themselves have a major effect on Algerian literary production. In fact the liberalization of the cultural sector, literature in particular, had already taken place in Algeria from the mid-1980s onwards. The de facto monopoly over Algerian publishing that had previously been enjoyed by the *Entreprise nationale algérienne du livre* (ENAL – the Algerian National Book Organization) was broken at this time by the upsurge of private publishers, mostly francophone, such as Bouchène and Laphomic.

The graph also allows observing that the two languages have two different temporalities. The Arabic production curve can be divided into two periods. From 1988 to 1996, production is stable at around 15 titles on average, but then a leap upwards takes place in 1997 followed by a period of strong growth, with an average of 80 titles being published after 2002. On the other hand, the francophone production curve can be divided into three periods. From 1988 to 1993, it is stable at around twenty-five titles being published per year, before plunging downwards from 1994 to 1999, when only some ten titles were published. It then caught up with Arabic production at the beginning of the new millennium, when around seventy-five titles were published.

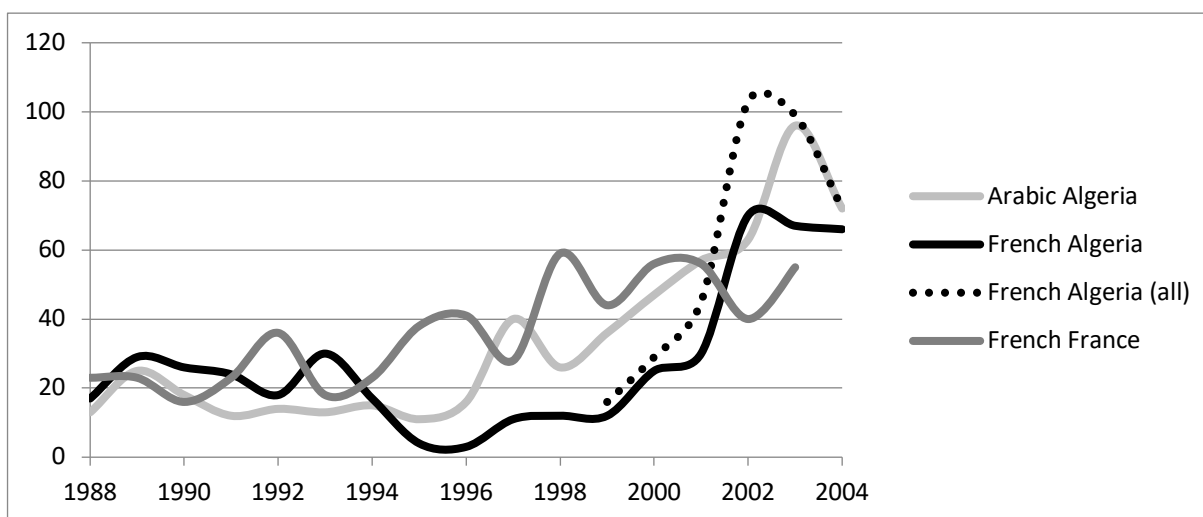


Figure 1. Development of Arabic and French production in Algeria and France. Production of Algerian writers in Algeria between 1988 and 2004 in terms of first editions in the continuous lines, and including translations and second and subsequent editions in other countries in the dotted lines. Non significant data are not shown.

It can thus be noted that the crisis in Algeria affected production in French above all, the chronology of which clearly follows that of the political crisis. From 30 titles being published per year in 1993, the number fell to only 3 in 1996, also being outnumbered by production in Tamazight, and it did not return to the level that it had seen at the beginning of the 1990s until the beginning of the 2000s. This fall in numbers is not only to be explained by the political crisis, however. The closure of the public sector company ENAL took place as a result of a decision to reduce costs that was not directly related to the political crisis. But while literature in Arabic began to appear in the private sector, sometimes from publishers close to the Islamist movement (*Ibdā'*) or at least not hostile to it (*Al-Jāhidiyya*), taking up the slack left by the disappearance of the ENAL, literature in French was left to suffer. Bouchène, a left-wing publisher, was obliged to go into exile in France in the wake of threats against it, and Laphomic ceased its activities because of the security situation in the country. Only Le Fennec, based in the west of the country at Aïn Temouchent and relatively safe from the security standpoint, was able to put together a list that was mostly francophone, but its activities, energetic though they were, were brief in duration. Publishing poetry and short books of various kinds (sixty-five pages on average), Le Fennec seems to have halted its operations for economic reasons.

Beyond the economic crisis affecting the whole of the literary field, and the political and security questions that affected Arabic-language production a little less because of the proximity of some Arabic-language writers to the Islamists, it would seem that the main explanation for the very significant fall in the number of publications in French was the ease with which books could be published in France, providing a quick solution to the reduced opportunities available in Algeria. The curves describing French-language production in France and Algeria are the mirror image of each other between 1993 and 1997, indicating the off-shoring process of francophone production during this period. Thus, the proportion produced by the French publisher L'Harmattan, the most important publisher of Algerian writers during the period and one which for the most part publishes books at the author's expense, went from 7 per cent of total production in French at the beginning of the 1990s to an average of 18 per cent between 1992 and 1995. On the other hand, the later growth in Algerian production that took place in France owed less to the off-shoring of publishing to France by Algerian authors prepared to pay for their books to be published than to a French demand in the media and the publishing industry that started, particularly after the 1995 terrorist attacks in France. From this period onwards, the demand of French publishers for books by Algerian writers went hand-in-hand with the supply of Algerian writers themselves, often living in exile for political reasons, and it even led to some career changes, like journalists becoming writers. It was then no longer an off-shored Algerian publishing in France, but more a French publication of Algerian literature.

This opportunity for Algerian writers to publish in Paris and come out head high from the tragedy of their exile was also fed by the idea that it was impossible to publish in Algeria, even for those still living there. Nevertheless, a publisher such as Marinoor, owned by a military figure close to the most anti-Islamist side of the regime, was still able to publish literature in French in Algiers after 1996, if only in dribs and drabs. However, while at that time terrorism no longer prevented cultural activities in the big cities, the Civil War remained present in minds, and this delayed any exit of the literary field from the crisis.

As a result, for reasons that have as much to do with the political positions taken up by the writers themselves as with the strongly transnational structure of the literary francophone subfield, during the most severe years of the political crisis in Algeria a bipolarization of the Algerian literary field along both territorial and linguistic lines was seen. In Algeria, production

in Arabic continued by writers who did not oppose the Islamists directly, or even supported them under their breath. On the contrary, in France was being concentrated nearly all Algerian francophone literature by writers of whom the vast majority were radically anti-Islamist. This phenomenon could support the essentializing discourse of the period, which, promoted by radicals on both sides, held that the Civil War was in fact a 'war of languages', French being the language of secularism or Western alienation and Arabic being the language of Islamism or authenticity. On the contrary, it can be seen that this division was in fact the result of a historical process that harked back to earlier trends structuring the field. These included the earlier transnational character of the Algerian literature written in French and the higher concentration of commitment in the left side among French-language writers.

This situation thus led a certain number of radically anti-Islamist writers writing in Arabic to publish their work in France, and therefore in French, since there was enormous pressure being put on Algerian publishers by jihadists and terrorists at the time. (Something similar was also seen in Lebanon, one writer talking in an interview about his publisher's fear of being targeted by Hezbollah.) It was the case for writers such as Rachid Boudjedra, Amin Zaoui, Waciny Laredj, Mohamed Sari and Merzak Bagtache. After they started to be published in France in French, they contributed to already existing statistical trends and, despite themselves and their strong denials, to the belief of some in the supposedly essential difference between the French and Arabic languages.

The end of the crisis and reduced polarization

Did the bipolarization in Algerian literary production end at the beginning of the new millennium? While up until 1998 translations and the acquisition of international rights represented only at most 5 per cent of total production (reeditions and posthumous editions excluded, according to the way the data are put together), they represented up to 20 per cent of the total in 2002, increasing the circulation of books between the different languages and between the two countries. Figure 6.3 shows that the curves representing production in French and Arabic in Algeria and France also rejoined at this time. In particular, it can be seen that French-language production in Algeria increased very rapidly, catching up with the level of publication in Arabic and ending the situation in which Algerian literature in French had been associated with France. Algerian publishing in French, the disappearance of which had been feared (Sadek 1997) (or hoped for) by some, had thus regained the place it had enjoyed before the crisis.

But the increase in French-language production in Algeria does not mean that there was a systematic 'relocation of production' from France to Algeria. Generally speaking, less than 5 per cent of all publications are republications in another country (generally from abroad to Algeria, aside from some rare cases such as Rachid Mimouni's work in the 1980s and more recently books by Barzakh publishing house).

Begun at the end of the 1980s by the publishers Bouchène and Laphomic, the strategy of buying up the rights to republish works that had first appeared abroad was taken up by Marsa-Alger at the beginning of the 2000s, which published almost 60 per cent of all the titles republished in Algeria in the period covered by the data. This strategy has been greatly assisted by the French government, particularly by the Bureau du Livre of the French Embassy in Algeria and the Bureau du Livre Français à l'Étranger run by the French Ministry of Culture at the beginning of the decade. This aid was almost indispensable, in that the Algerian dinar cannot be used for such transactions, and the Bureau du Livre therefore took charge of them and paid in francs (or euros).³ However, Marsa's strategy of 'relocating' books published in

France was later reduced when they became more accessible on the Algerian market. Moreover, few authors publish back to Algeria ('relocate') after having first published their books abroad, aside from those who had published their work with very small publishers in France. The continuation of the same level of publication in France after the crisis was essentially due to the fact that Algerian writers, often bound by publishers' contracts, continued to publish their books in France.

French aid in relocating publishing back to Algeria was not negligible, and it indicates something of the role France played in helping to unite (debipolarize) the Algerian literary field. This role was reinforced during the 'Djazaïr, Year of Algeria in France' event, which as its name indicates consisted of a set of events designed to promote Algerian culture in France from 31 December 2002 to 31 December 2003 and was agreed by French president Jacques Chirac and Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika during an official visit by the latter to Paris. As far as the publishing industry was concerned, the committee in charge of the YAF oversaw a system of grants:

The cultural partnership will cover, in France, 133 authors and 144 publishers, or 275 works by Algerian authors. In order to promote these books, a thousand copies of each title will be given to French municipal libraries and other educational institutions. Monsieur Mohamed Raouraoua, head of the committee organizing the Year of Algeria in France for the Algerian side, said: 'I am very pleased that this cooperation has come to pass. We have not hesitated to increase the aid budget for publication. The year of Algeria is open to all without exception ...' It should be remembered that the funds made available for the organization of the Year of Algeria were around 90 billion centimes [of Algerian dinar]. (El Watan 21 April 2002)

The very extensive Franco-Algerian financing of this event was thus part of the policy of providing grants for publication developed earlier.⁴ Algerian cultural policy and French soft power⁵ went hand-in-hand but also with Algerian soft power. The new Algerian government intended to use the YAF as a way of restoring a positive image to the country abroad at a time when the attacks in Algeria had still far from disappeared.

It had a definite effect in putting the publishers on more secure foundations and contributed to rebuilding the publishing industry as a whole. 'The leaders of the publishing industry are grateful to the organizing committee of the Year of Algeria in France for the considerable help it has given in relaunching the publishing sector. This has been seen in the production by the committee of more than 400 titles in various subject areas [...]' (El Watan 19 May 2003). If these figures are to be believed, literature profited by this help in a very significant way: out of our database we count some 80 works 'published with the support of the organizing committee of the Year of Algeria in France', according to the formula appearing on their inside pages. This means that one book in five of those supported by the YAF was a work of literature.

Moreover, the financial aid played an even more important role if we look only at the francophone literature. Eighty-five per cent of the financial support given by the committee of the YAF was allocated to literature in French, 90 per cent if translations are included. YAF did not have only short-term effects on the francophone subfield. If first editions alone are taken into account, it can be seen that production in French for 2004 is the same as it was in the preceding year, and more recent data would probably also confirm this tendency. Between 2001 and 2002, French-language production went from 28 to 68 titles published as first editions and 85 in 2004. As a result, the YAF acted to help long-term reconstruct Algeria's francophone literary infrastructure. Despite allegations of nepotism in the handing out of

public commissions, which increased sharply in number after the YAF, these nevertheless helped to ensure the financial stability of many Algerian publishers, among them Barzakh, and helped Algerian francophone literature to depend less on the French publishing industry. The international success of Meursault, *contre-enquête* [The Meursault Investigation] by Kamel Daoud, first published by Barzakh in 2013 before the rights were sold to the French publisher Actes Sud in 2014, is an important indication of the renewed capacity of some Algerian publishers at least to recruit promising authors.

Production in Arabic was less affected by the financial aid, and with delay: it was only in 2003 that a significant increase in Arabic-language books was seen, with production going from 67 titles in 2002 to 94 in 2003, and even then it seems to be for the committee of YAF a matter of catching up with francophone production or a way of looking for a balance between the two languages after the emphasis had been placed on French. However, this policy of favouring French-language publishing was also clearly explained by the fact that French-language books could be exported to France in order to promote Algerian culture. The whole of the Algerian publishing sector benefitted from this policy in favour of French, and publishers that up until 2003 had only ever published in Arabic, such as the Algerian Writers Union (AWU), or al- Ikhtilāf, now started to publish authors writing in French (al-ikhtilāf) or to commission translations of their authors into French (AWU) in order to take advantage of the grants.

Indeed, the number of translations from Arabic to French considerably increased, the YAF being an opportunity for Arabic-language writers in Algeria to gain greater visibility in France. Such translations amounted to 15 per cent of publications for 2002 and 2003. The events organized in France also brought together francophone and arabophone writers who did not always speak to each other in Algeria.

However, this policy did not increase the circulations between the two languages on the long-term scale. The translations stopped after the 2003 YAF. Moreover, the increase in translations from Arabic into French did not result in an increase in the number of translations from French to Arabic that was already rarer than the former. These translations from Arabic to French represent three-quarters of all the translations published in the period, 80 per cent of them done in 2002 and 2003. The bilingualism of many arabophone writers and the relative lack of interest of many francophone writers in the publications of their arabophone peers explain that translation in both ways is the result of a policy – in this case as much French as Algerian.

The YAF contributed to the depolarization of the literary field less to the extent that it increased the circulation between the languages than to the extent that it was part of the general policy of promoting of the French language, along with the identity campaign launched by President Bouteflika designed to promote the 'plurality' of Algeria, as a way of rallying the support of the anti-Islamists and also of papering over the violence that took place in Kabylie after the 'Black Spring' of 2001.

However, the partial unification (depolarization) of the literary field cannot be reduced to the effects of policy initiatives and diplomatic decisions alone. These in turn relied on an Algerian avant-garde movement that brought together young writers and editors associated with the publishers Barzakh and al-Ikhtilāf, and this alliance between writers and editors working in the two languages of French and Arabic was based on the same opposition to the unprecedented domination of francophone writers publishing in France. It was a literary opposition, against what was castigated as a 'literature of emergency' dedicated for foreign market. But this opposition is also to be related to a generational one – the younger writers

were born at the end of the 1960s, while the writers exiled in France had been born in the 1950s – and a political one. The younger writers rejected the radical anti-Islamism of the exiles, and for some because of their own sympathies with the Islamists at the beginning of the 1990s.

Conclusion

Thanks to the statistical survey of literary works, it can be said that the Algerian literary field retained a certain degree of autonomy even during the worst years of the Civil War. The political and literary chronologies did not overlap, and the effects of the crisis on the literary field were felt in ways that were proper to it, notably in terms of bilingualism and transnationalism. Despite this, the autonomy of the field was strongly affected, and political tendencies in the two linguistic groups led to radically different developments. But the decline in the number of French-language titles published in Algeria cannot be explained by the political variable alone, but must also be put down to variables that are more properly literary, including opportunities for publication in France, that the crisis opened up wider for exiled Algerian writers. By contrast, the end of the crisis afflicting the Algerian literary field was due primarily to factors external to it, such as the intertwined political and diplomatic interests of France and Algeria, and only secondarily to factors internal to the field itself, the bilingual alliance that took place in the Algerian literary avant-garde being a way of taking up position against francophone writers publishing in France and dominating the field at the time.

Notes

1 The effects of the 'synchronization' of fields (Bourdieu 1988) that the political crisis led to in the intellectual field are not explored here.

2 Arabic-language production for 1985–87 is given in an indicative fashion (as a dotted line) as the way in which Hadj Miliani collected his data differed from that adopted by Jean Déjeux and myself. Miliani used information provided by the *Entreprise nationale algérienne du livre* (ENAL – the Algerian National Book Organization), which is very misleading as the 800 Dewey class includes works that are not literary and also does not take into account publications not registered by the ENAL. Déjeux, on the other hand, divides the publications he counts into genres, meaning that he has checked all the titles. See Miliani (2002) and Déjeux (1993).

3 Interview in Algiers with Rachid Alik, in charge of the Bureau du Livre at the French Institute in Algiers (27 February 2013).

4 It also provided the model for the policy of making grants to 'large-scale projects' that the country later adopted.

5 'Richard Jacquemond has underlined the role played by French cultural diplomacy in the exchange of translations with the Arab world' (Jacquemond 2008: 357–8).

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