

# The Face of Africa

Essays in Honour of Ton Dietz

Wouter van Beek, Jos Damen, Dick Foeken (eds.)



Universiteit  
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African  
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# **PART III**

## **African arenas**

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# 13

## Beyond ‘two Africas’ in African and Berber literary studies

Daniela Merolla

Studies on North Africa and African studies developed internationally on relatively parallel tracks: the first were usually included within the scope of research on the Arab world and the Middle East, while the ‘rest’ of Africa was approached and studied as a world comparatively homogeneous and different from North Africa. Such a north/south division still shapes current studies, as shown, for example, in the substantial number of papers that focus on Sub-Saharan Africa at the European Conferences on African Studies of the AEGIS (Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies) and at the annual meetings of the African Studies Association based in the USA. An anecdote that contributed to my reflection on the ‘two Africas’ is linked to the scientific policy of the African Studies Centre (Leiden) (ASC) in the 2000s. I intended to organize a conference on North Africa, but it was suggested that I not submit it to the ASC because its regional focus was ‘beyond the scope’ of the centre. This policy similarly emerges from the publication lists of the ASC. North Africa appears only once, and countries such as Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia do not appear at all. However, the awareness of the problematic divide of Africa has now begun to sustain the dialogue among fields that have remained institutionally distant until recently. When I organized the workshop ‘African Studies and the Epistemological Reflections on “Two Africas”’ together with Mirjam de Bruijn at Leiden University in 2013,<sup>102</sup> the ASC was represented by Ton Dietz. As organizers of the workshop, Mirjam and I were happy to hear that Ton warmly agreed upon a scientific policy going beyond the north/south divide of Africa.

This article<sup>103</sup> aims at presenting the criticism of divisive conceptions in African studies and the reflections from a field that has a marginal position in both African research and Middle Eastern research: Berber/Amazigh literary

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<sup>102</sup> Leiden University, 20 September 2013.

<sup>103</sup> I would like to thank Valeria Poli for the translation of the article (Merolla 2013) which constituted the basis for the present text.

studies.<sup>104</sup> Amazigh is a language spoken in North Africa in numerous local variants.<sup>105</sup>



Figure 13.1  
1439 portolan chart of Gabriel de Vallseca

### Critical reflections on ‘Two Africas’

Transcontinental movements of people are ancient phenomena in Africa between north and south, east and west, and vice versa. Traders and soldiers,

104 In the past, ‘Amazigh’ was a term used by activists, while ‘Berber’ was the academic denomination. Amazigh is currently used officially in the Maghreb and has also been appropriated in studies. The term ‘Berber’ will be used throughout this article to indicate the historical continuity of the field of study.

105 The number of speakers is between 30% to 40% of the Moroccan population (Rif, Middle and High Atlas, Sous). In Algeria, between 14% to 25% of the population speak local forms of Amazigh (Kabylia, Aurès, Mزاب). There are an estimated two million speakers within the Tuaregs who live in a wide Saharan and Sub-Saharan area across Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria. In Tunisia, there are small pockets of Berber speakers on the Isle of Djerba and in the south (Chenini, Douz, Tozeur), while larger communities live in Libya (an estimated 3% of the Libyan population). The range of estimates indicates that censuses, when taken at all, have not inquired about language use, and any existing sources are old or unreliable. See also Greenberg (1950); Bougchiche (1997); Chaker (2003); Lewis (2009).

slaves and pilgrims, travellers and migrants marched while bringing along goods and knowledge. They established routes that were partly disrupted by colonial borders and have now been reopened in the current acceleration of global migration. As indicated by Winegar and Pieprzak (2009: 8) with reference to the work of artist Ursula Biemann,<sup>106</sup> ancient trans-Saharan routes are now followed by migrants who traverse the desert and arrive in Morocco and Libya searching for work and a new life and often for further passage to the north—that is, to Europe. The contacts between the inhabited zones of the Sahara (oases, steppes, and woodlands) and the Sahel-Saharan regions have been intense as well, as shown by studies on networks and connectivity in southern Morocco, southern Algeria, and in the Tuareg area.<sup>107</sup> The links between Nubia, Egypt, and the Sudan have been similarly re-appreciated in recent studies.<sup>108</sup>

The awareness of cultural continuities of North, West, and East Africa and the function of the desert as a contact zone is not new. The idea that the Sahara could function as a division wall has been criticized by African writers such as the Algerian Kateb Yacine, the Sudanese Tayeb Salih, and the Cameroonian Werewere Liking, who were keen to reflect on intra-African links.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, as indicated by Winegar and Pieprzak (2009), the criticism of conceptual divides has been raised from the world of visual arts, films, and music. Important exhibitions of African arts were held in Bamako, Dakar, Douala, Johannesburg, Fès, and Venice, among other locations. These exhibitions and festivals invited artists, musicians, and film makers from the whole of Africa to participate and enter into dialogue with each other about their work.

In reference to the studies, William Zartman discussed the function of the Sahara as a connecting area instead of as a divisive one in the 1960s.<sup>110</sup> In the same period, Cheikh Anta Diop published *Antériorité des civilisations nègres: mythe ou vérité historique?* Although Diop's work has been criticized from a methodological perspective because of his use of the concepts of 'race' and 'black phenotype', it maintains the undeniable merit of having raised the issue of the racialized division of Africa. Such a division was determined by the ideology of European superiority and by certain self-representations of the North African post-colonial states. Cheik Anta Diop's work reconnects

106 Winegar & Pieprzak (2009: 4, 8).

107 Scheele (2016); Jeppie & Diagne (2008).

108 De Simone (2014).

109 See Kateb Yacine's *Le polygone étoilé*, Tayeb Salih's *Season of migration to the North*, Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise*, and Werewere Liking's *Un Tuareg s'est marié à une Pygmée* in Tissières (2002).

110 Théodore Monod in the 1930s and Fernand Braudel in the 1940s already wrote of the connecting functions of caravans in the Sahara. See Lydon (2015: 3-4).

North Africa to the 'rest' of Africa by criticizing the obliteration of Black Nubian pharaohs from ancient Egyptian civilization. Moreover, relocating the birth of Mediterranean civilizations in Egyptian and Sudanese Africa, he debunks the acquisition of ancient Egypt into the genealogy of European history. His 'Afrocentric' perspective partially converged into the cultural and political movements connected to Pan-Africanism. The latter proposed solidarity between all Africans (and their diasporas) as an instrument to counter the political and ideological hegemony of colonial and post-colonial Europe and the United States. However, the concept of a cultural and historical divide between North Africa and the 'rest' of the continent persisted. For example, the poet and first president of Senegal as well as founder of the Négritude literary movement, Léopold Sédar Senghor, called for African unity across the Sahara but identified Africa and Africanity with being black.<sup>111</sup> The metaphor of 'Black Africa' led to internal differentiation and, in some cases, to a Pan-Africanism limited to Sub-Saharan Africa.

As discussed in the beginning, the notion of Africa as 'Black Africa' has also persisted in academic studies. Such an idea is engrained in the epistemological approach that moulds the separation of the 'two Africas', contributing to the divides among African studies, Middle Eastern studies, and Mediterranean studies in academic institutes and museums. The winds of change have begun to blow in the new century. Socio-historical processes and related disciplinary motivations of the African north/south divide have been criticized in the activities of the Saharan Studies Association since 2007 and in the publications of researchers such as Hélène Tissier (2002), Ghislaine Lydon (2005, 2009, 2015), Jessica Winegar and Katarzyna Pieprzak (2009), Mohamed Hassan Mohamed (2010), Ziad Bentahar (2011), James McDougall and Judith Scheele (2012), Stéphanie Pouessel (2012), and Judith Scheele (2016).

One of the most pungent and methodologically grounded critiques of the 'two Africas' and of the rhetorical figure of 'Black Africa' as 'real Africa' (Scheele 2016) has been offered by the historian Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (2006). As summarized below, Zeleza analysed the separation of Africa into North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa as an idea created on the classification of the peoples and their geographical locations through a stereotyping biological and essentialist approach associated with race theories:

The conflation of Africa with 'sub-Saharan Africa,' 'Africa South of the Sahara' or 'Black Africa' [...] ultimately offers us a racialized view of Africa, Africa as biology, as the 'black' continent. (Zeleza 2006: 15)

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<sup>111</sup> Senghor saw Africanity and Arabicity as separate identities that should enter into dialogue without merging. See Katchka (2009: 44).



As Zeleza writes (*ibid.*), the making of the 'two Africas' has occurred through long historical processes; however, it is with slavery in the colonial period that this epistemological construct takes on the form and content still inferred today.

The great partition, the so-called Scramble for Africa, carried out after the Berlin Conference in 1884-85, paved the way for the enormous colonial domains created under the rule of France, stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the Gulf of Guinea,<sup>112</sup> and of Britain, stretching almost uninterrupted from Egypt to South Africa. The colonial territorial extension, however, did not signify a unifying approach to Africa. The British colonization 'orientalized' Egypt, separating it from Africa and integrating it into a 'Near Orient' (currently referred to as the Middle East) consisting of British dominions that, in different forms, extended from Egypt to former Persia (present-day Iran). Similarly, the French colonization 'orientalized' Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia in competition with the British Near East and separated them from 'Black Africa.'<sup>113</sup> Conversely, the connections between the north and south regions of the Sahara were established exclusively through the mediation of French colonialism and its 'Francophone' world, which will also affect contemporary research as will be discussed below.

The concomitant construction of Africa and the 'Orient' as objects of knowledge and dominion has involved an entire host of epistemological effects. According to Zeleza (2006: 15), a first effect in African studies is the 'biologization' (and racialization) of Africa due to 'blackness,' which involves the assumption that cultural continuity and homogeneity characterize Sub-Sa-

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112 French colonial policy tended to expand from Western Africa to the east of the continent, which, nevertheless, failed to materialize mainly due to the concomitant English expansion. From a linguistic perspective, the Congo under Belgian rule is included in the French-speaking area.

113 According to Edward Said (1979), the 'Orientalist' construction was accomplished through a series of clichés and oppositions which can be traced in travel narratives, novels, and paintings, as well as in scientific discourse. It is defined by Said (*ibid.* 233) as a variety of social Darwinism, according to which 'the modern Orientals were degraded remnants of a former greatness; the ancient, or 'classical', civilizations of the Orient were perceivable through the disorders of present decadence but only (a) because a white specialist [...] could do the sifting and reconstructing and (b) because a vocabulary of sweeping generalities (the Semites, the Aryans, the Orientals) referred not to a set of fictions but rather to a whole array of seemingly objective and agreed-upon distinctions.' Later criticism of Said's work has emphasized that Orientalism, nonetheless, holds the merit of having gathered and issued an enormous collection of archaeological, linguistic, literary, and ethnographic data and analyses that not only provide wide-ranging subject matter but also high-profile studies, despite the fact that the reading of such material is complex and arduous due to the interpretation process that constructs its 'object', as Said indicated. For examples in Berber studies, see Merolla (2006: 42-51); Boukous (2001); Bounfour (1994).

haran Africa.<sup>114</sup> It can also be stated that a further effect of this assumption is that Africa is imagined as a 'black world' that is neatly separated from the 'ancient greatness' of the 'Orient'. Accordingly, historical connections between the regions north and south of the Sahara are disregarded.

Denied connections include historical and cultural continuities as well as the massive trade that had connected northern Africa with western Africa (Mali and Niger, in particular) and with eastern Africa (Sudan and Tanzania). This 'erasure' is largely due to the omission of what Zeleza (*ibid.* 17) calls the 'Islamic Library,' that is, the knowledge accrued through both intellectual and economic exchanges that thrived around the immense centres of Islamic culture in the Sub-Saharan area of current Mali and Niger. There is a further point to be considered according to Zeleza: the African belonging in both Christianity and Islam, which are customarily presented as foreign and antagonistic to local religions, whereas history shows that 'Christianity and Islam were implanted in certain parts of Africa almost at their inceptions and Africans made significant doctrinal contributions to both religions' (*ibid.* 20). Another important effect of the biologization of Africa is the erasure of its past history, which particularly concerns the Berber-/Amazigh-speaking populations:

the characterization of North Africa as exclusively Arab erases the history of the peoples and cultures that existed in the region long before the coming of the Arabs and Islam and the subsequent creation of complex creolized cultures. (*ibid.* 16).

For instance, the scholar Martin Bernal conceived a 'Black Athena'—following somehow in the footsteps of Cheikh Anta Diop—to advance the critique of the oblivion of the African role in the rise of the ancient civilizations that thrived around the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>115</sup> Such a definition, however, once again identifies the role played by the African component in Greek culture by reducing it to the 'black' adjective. This has subsequently provided a reason to the Berber studies scholar Vermondo Brugnatelli to record an 'epistemological void' in North Africa<sup>116</sup> because colour appears crucial to the definition of Africa and leaves no opportunity to other components, particularly the Berber one, which is local, Mediterranean, and African all at the same time.

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114 'Unless culture is coded in skin colour, the homogeneity or heterogeneity of cultural practices in Africa [...] should not be assumed a priori [...]; the Hausa of West Africa had more in common with their neighbours to the North than with the Zulu of South Africa' (Zeleza 2006: 16).

115 See also van Binsbergen (1996-97).

116 Brugnatelli (2009-2010: 1-6).

The critique of the separation between a north and a south in Africa offers a perspective through which also the relationships between African studies and Berber studies can be reviewed. The following sections of this article attempt to track down some elements of the connections and disjunctions of these fields of study today as far as literary studies are concerned.



Figure 13.2  
Part of the 1375 Catalan Atlas by Abraham Cresques

### African and Berber literary studies

From the perspective of African literary studies, we should consider the pivotal work of Denise Paulme in the 1970s, which included African examples and North African tales (Kabyle Berber), and of a few scholars who specialized in Saharan studies (Calame-Griaule 1977, 1982, 2002; Bernus & Calame-Griaule 1981).<sup>117</sup> By and large, however, research primarily developed on separate or parallel tracks (see the bibliography published by Görög-Karady 1992). Ziad Bentahar (2011) shows that the interpretative model based on the ‘two Africas’ has been strengthened by a set of international political factors and edi-

<sup>117</sup> In the field of African history, see the works of Paulo Fernando de Moraes Farias on Saharan connections (de Moraes Farias 1967, 1974, 1999, 2006, 2008).

torial policies linked to the legacy of the division between 'Francophone' and 'Anglophone' studies. For the English-speaking world, the separation of the studies between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa roughly corresponded to the attention given to the new African literature published in English, while North African literature remains the domain of what is written in Arabic or French. In the case of French studies, the situation is more complex. A tendency to overcome the north/south divide is found in literary studies that include Francophone authors from North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa (Bentahar 2011: 8). This can be linked to the fact that, as previously mentioned, the north/south division of Africa as well as its reunification under the label of French rule and 'Francophone world' was an essential component of the colonial policy. Bentahar writes that the north/south divide continues to permeate French African studies because the latter do not recognize Arabic as an 'African' language. If the non-African origin of Arabic motivates this exclusion, it denies the appropriation and 'Africanization' of Arabic over the centuries and in the immense geographic area stretching from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean beyond the Middle East (ibid. 9). This approach can be traced back to the desire to create an autonomous disciplinary field for African studies and to the long process of construction of European identity in opposition to the Arab-Islamic world that, during the colonial period, was combined with the downplaying of the Arab cultural impact in Africa. It should be added that the tendencies retraced by Bentahar, combined with the negation or marginalization of the connectivity between Sub-Saharan Africa and northern Africa, have involved the continuous emphasis of the cultural and religious links of North Africa and the Middle East and the exacerbation of the opposition as well as of the union of Arab and Berber speakers and of their languages and literatures.<sup>118</sup>

In the century-long French colonization of Africa, Berbers have come to occupy a particularly ambiguous position.<sup>119</sup> Following the indications provided by Hélène Claudot-Hawad and Paul Pandolfi,<sup>120</sup> it can be ascertained that an ensemble of studies and literary texts have contributed to creating the 'myth' of the Tuaregs of the Sahara as a population different and opposed to the black inhabitants of the Sub-Saharan oases.<sup>121</sup> The Tuaregs were considered as the noble 'whites' ruling over the 'black' vassals of the oases. The

118 Lydon (2015: 13).

119 See the studies by Ageron (1972); Lacoste-Dujardin (1984); Lucas & Vatin (1975).

120 Claudot-Hawad (1990, 1993); Pandolfi (2001). See also: Camel (1996); Henry (1996); Vallet (1990).

121 Pandolfi (2001) mentions researchers such as Duveyrier (1864), Stefanini (1926), Gautier (1935), and writers such as Georges de Labruyère, Pierre Benoit, and Jules Verne (see *L'invasion de la mer* 1903). See also Foucauld (1888: 88, 140, 264) and Lhote (1955).

French representation of a 'White Africa' that was separated and opposed to the 'Black Africa' south of the Sahara supported the establishment of settlement colonies in North Africa both politically and ideologically.<sup>122</sup> These representations have recently re-emerged in newspapers and magazines because of the uprising of the Tuaregs in northern Mali in January 2012 and the ephemeral creation of Azawad, an independent state not recognized by the international community.<sup>123</sup>

It is important to clarify that the French 'myth' of the Tuaregs reconstructed the sociological division between pastoralists and sedentary farmers, according to a division of 'colour' that denied forms of alliance and collaboration that existed among different language groups. Again, an effect is that, in such a representation, the Sahara became an area of separation, and not the area of trade and communication interchange that it had always been, between a barbarian but heroic (or 'anarchic and unreliable' in negative portrayals) north and a 'black' and more 'primitive' south, along the lines of the social Darwinism prevalent until the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the literary field, an example of these colonial models and their latent persistence can be found in the interpretations of the literary forms that epitomize love, whereby *romantic* love is a prerogative of European narratives, *sensual* love is associated with Arabic-Berber tales, and *functional* (social-reproduction) love is associated with tales from 'Black Africa'.<sup>124</sup>

It should be remembered that the Tuaregs were also opposed to the Arabs, following the dictates of a *divide and rule* policy in which the Berbers were represented as either more or less 'developed' than the Arabs or, in any case, as being less Islamized than Arab populations, which made establishing a division line possible. The colonial discourse toward Berbers was indeed ambivalent. On the one hand, Berbers were imagined as the Roman civilization's heirs, who only aspired to be reintegrated into Western civilization

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122 Lydon (2015: 9-11).

123 On Azawad, see Zounmenou (2013); Lecoq (2010, 2015).

124 Finck (1899: 116): '[Romantic love] is a modern sentiment less than a thousand years old and not to be found among savages, barbarians, or Orientals. To them, [...] it is inconceivable that a woman should serve any other than sensual and utilitarian purposes.' Alta (1961: 131-132): 'The closest approach to this [European tales of romance] are the historic tales of the Hausa and Fulbe, which do depict the bravery of the dashing hero [...] but scarcely [his mistress's] purity or loyalty [...] There is sufficient evidence even in the stories to show that tenderness and affection do exist between a man and a woman. However, the deeper and more enduring relationships are shown to be those between a parent and child or between siblings.' The influence of such a division was perceptible in later texts of well-known scholars; see for example in Calame-Griaule (2002: 34-35): 'Dans la littérature traditionnelle d'Afrique noire, il est rarement fait allusion aux sentiments individuels [...] Par contre, [quand] l'influence méditerranéenne et même orientale est évidente, les sentiments sont exprimés clairement.' Romantic/passionate love is expressed in poetic genres in several African languages (Okpewho 1992: 143-146).

by French colonization (see Masqueray 1885: 261-265; Frémeaux 1984: 29-46).<sup>125</sup> On the other hand, Berber societies were stigmatized as being more retrograde than the Arab ones.<sup>126</sup> The stigmatization of Berbers gained political credibility after the insurrection of Kabylia (North Algeria) in 1870 but could not erase the first attitude toward Berbers as '*bons sauvages*'. The differences of approach, however, were not substantial; both attitudes were instrumental to the construction of French Algeria. One attitude planned on dividing Arabs and Berbers by prospecting the possibility of assimilating the latter within 'White Africa',<sup>127</sup> while the other attitude intended to oppose Berbers and Arabs without fancying the assimilation of the Berbers (Hanoteau 1867; Basset 1920; see Lucas & Vatin 1975).

Whereas the negation of connectivity prompted the French divisive colonial politics of 'Arabs', 'Berbers' and 'Blacks', post-colonial nationalist policies emphasized the associations between North Africa and the Middle East and negated the requests for cultural recognition of Berber activists. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century post-colonial approach, the unifying hyphen in the definition '*arabo-berbère*' became an unavoidable requirement in African, (Maghreb-ian) Arab, and Berber studies, signalling both their anticolonial discourse and their disregard for the affiliations with the 'south' and the local ('African') component of the creolization of the Maghreb.<sup>128</sup>

Moving to Berber studies, it can be noted that most of the research has looked to the 'east' and 'north', somehow disregarding the possible connections to the 'south'. When the bibliography of Berber research published by Bougchiche (1997) is studied, it can be determined that in-depth comparisons with African literatures is only sporadically undertaken in the field of Tuareg research and is based on literary genres from Mali and Niger.<sup>129</sup> This

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125 Anthropological differentiation between Arabs and Berbers was initially constructed around elements such as the blonde hair and blue eyes of the Kabyles (for example, see Masqueray 1882: 333). Sociological elements of differentiation were seen in their democratic village organization and in their women's condition. Kabyle Berber women were appreciated since they worked in the gardens outside the houses and did not wear a veil. These practices would demonstrate that Berber women enjoyed a higher status than Arab women (Sabatier 1883; Masqueray 1886, 1914). See the discussion on the representation of Berber women in Lacoste-Dujardin (1984).

126 Also in this case, a major example was found in the Kabyle Berber woman's condition, one that was presented as particularly backwards since women were disinherited and they could be married off before puberty and 'sold' to their husbands, according to Hanoteau (1867); Coulon (1930).

127 On the 'Kabyle myth', see Ageron (1972: 267-292) and Lydon (2015: 9-11). Criticism of the presumed philo-Berber cultural policy of France is discussed in Chaker (1989: 83-91).

128 Merolla (2006: 54).

129 See the already mentioned studies by Calame-Griaule. In Berber linguistics, see for example Tilmatine (1996).

is linked to the current consequences of the historical context of the studies and of the north/south 'great division' discussed above. It should be considered that Berber studies remained a domain largely investigated by French researchers until the 1950s.<sup>130</sup> Even after independence, research published in French played a central role in the field of Berber studies. A process of internationalization and 'maghrebization' of the studies (Chaker 1998) is perceptible after the year 2000, when the effects of the new national policies in Algeria and Morocco (and currently in Tunisia and Libya as well) began to appear after the establishment of institutes committed to the study of the Amazigh and the opening of Amazigh courses of studies.<sup>131</sup> This process of internationalization and maghrebization, however, has not yet led to a new interest in the comparison of African studies.

A specific case that I have investigated (Merolla 2013, 2014) is that of the Berber studies in Italy which have developed somewhat differently from international research. African, Arab, and Berber studies in Italy have been conducted under the aegis of 'Afro-Asian' studies and unifying academic institutions. Such institutional and ideological connections were established in the early colonial period and later under fascism when a school of 'Orientalists' (see Baldinetti 1997; Soravia 2004) included research on North and Sub-Saharan languages alike, which reflected the Italian colonial interests and the invasion of Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Libya.<sup>132</sup> It is thus not surprising that, in such a framework, African and Berber studies appeared in the same journals and conferences. The long-term influence of such constructions is perceptible in the post-colonial time as well. Although there is no 'ontological' separation between north and south of the Sahara in Italian studies,

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130 As indicated by Chaker (1982: 83): 'The research remains, until independence, almost a French monopoly [...] Apart from the work of Italian and Spanish researchers on the Berber varieties spoken in the areas under Spanish or Italian domination (Libya, Rif, Ifni), almost the entire production of this period is written in French and a good part of it is edited in Algiers.' [my translation].

131 In Algeria, the HCA (Haut Commissariat à l'Amazighité) was instituted in 1995. In 2002, the Amazigh language was recognized as a 'national language' and, in 2016, as a 'national and official language'. In Morocco, the pilot project of alphabetization in Amazigh has been launched by the Moroccan Royal Institute for Amazighity, and the Amazigh language gained official status in the new Moroccan constitution of 2011. Nevertheless, Amazigh is not yet fully integrated into mass education, and contradictory policies affect government recognition of multilingualism. Recent demonstrations in the Moroccan Rif in favour of economic, democratic, and language rights have been met by military force.

132 However, the differentiation between North Africa and the 'rest' of Africa along the lines of the Cultural Evolution theory is also found in Italian studies. In the context of the Italian pro-Arab policy (in opposition to the British influence in the area), the African world—once again, 'Black Africa'—was considered inferior to Islam, which, in contrast, had to be politically and culturally supported. See, for instance, Beguinot (1936).

the strength of colonial constructs can be still evidenced; the concomitant presence of articles on North and Sub-Saharan Africa has neither required nor involved any need to establish a connection between the two areas that are drawn together without a real dialogue as historical and cultural exchanges are not usually envisaged (Merolla 2013: 77, 81).

The tendency to work together but on parallel tracks can also be found in the publications that have begun to overcome the north/south 'great division' within academic institutions and research (Baumgardt & Bounfour 2000, 2004; Lafkioui & Brugnattelli 2008; Lafkioui & Merolla 2008; De Féral et al. 2014). However, an approach that analyses the relationships between the north and the south of the Sahara in their local contexts and details not only has its own epistemological validity; it also discloses new research paths on the multiple realities of contemporary Africa (which, in my view, includes North Africa), such as in the case of the pioneering work of Paulme (1976). Such an evolving situation is shown, for example, by the comparison between Berber studies and (other) African studies in Merolla (2005, 2013), Kossmann (2010), Lafkioui (2013), and Souag (2013, 2015).



Figure 13.3  
Sahara, route from Ouargla to Ghardaia, Algeria (Photo Daniela Merolla)



## Perceptions and constructions of 'Africans' and 'Berbers'

A final point is that the colonial divide of 'two Africas' does not imply that such a construct is a conjecture with no factual basis or utterly imposed from the outside. There is also correspondence—and a reuse for local purposes—with internal perceptions and constructs, which has subsequently re-processed colonial imagination. The French 'orientalization' of the Maghreb has built up from and integrated the historical domination by Turkish regencies along the coast of present-day Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. As to the ideas about 'white' and 'black' Africa in Muslim writings, Lydon (2015: 5-8) provides an impressive overview including the works of famous authors such as Ibn Khaldun and Leo Africanus (al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan al-Fasi). She convincingly writes that 'the self-identification of North Africans and Middle Easterners as "white" clearly has a long history' (Lydon 2015: 8). This history intertwines with the continuous demand for slaves from eastern Muslim regions, which created slaving practices in North Africa involving the Arab conquerors as well as the local Berber populations, the latter being massively enslaved until the 8<sup>th</sup> century when several Berber confederations became enslavers (Savage 1992). Pouessel (2012: 77) remarks that, in the Maghreb, subordination is marked as 'black' and (citing Valensi 1986) that a person is perceived as black when he/she is subordinate; thus blackness is socially ascribed.

The correspondence of internal and external constructs similarly applies to the constitution of post-colonial North African states as Arab (and Muslim), which has not only entailed the erasure of the Berber component but also, until recently, the oblivion of historical connections between Morocco, the Timbuktu area, and present-day Mali, as well as the enduring marginalization of the Nubian influence from Egyptian civilization and culture. Conversely, contemporary Berber artists' decisions to connect to Africa as an identity referent is associated with their quest for autonomy and their will to overcome the marginalization they have experienced in North African states.<sup>133</sup>

In the Maghreb, the term 'Africanity' is akin to the valorization of an identity that is alternative to proposed or imposed cultural identities, [it is] a movement of disconnection from Arabism and sometimes from Islam, by stressing the belonging to 'Africa'. (Pouessel 2012: 14) [my translation]

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133 Cynthia Beker (2009: 72): 'Amazigh painters [...] use colonial memory but use it as the basis of a transnational movement that allows activists to confront the pan-Arab Islamic nationalism propagated by their governments and to create a counter-narrative that promotes their Amazigh identity and their connection to the African continent.'

The discourse on 'Black Africa' must similarly take into account the various contestations and movements arising in Africa, in the diasporas, and in the United States, in particular, which have reused the metaphor of 'Black Africa' for their own strategies and purposes—as in the case of the Negritude artistic movement (France/Senegal), the political movement named 'Black Consciousness' (South Africa), and the 'Black is beautiful' cultural and artistic movement (United States). Such movements have played an enormous role in redeeming and celebrating 'blackness' in opposition to the connotations labelled upon it by racist and colonial approaches. It is, however, equally necessary to acknowledge that these movements have likewise emphasized the unity of Africans by defining and 'essentializing' their identity in terms of colour.<sup>134</sup>

Differences in historical processes are reflected in the self-perception and identity of various African people; consequently, North Africa can be differentiated and identified as a specific socio-cultural area in academic studies. However, a fundamental concern is inevitably raised when the differentiation becomes radical and metaphysical and based on distinctions in colour and cultural terms that are carried to extremes, absolutized, and reputed to be innate—thus ahistorical—and when, at the same time, continuities and exchanges among the various African linguistic, artistic, and social components are marginalized.<sup>135</sup>

## Conclusions

In the way that research on the 'two Africas' developed, we recognize socio-historical processes that emphasized the unity of Africans by defining and 'essentializing' their identity in terms of colour. Building from recent critical works, we have seen that it is fruitful to investigate specific cases of the north/south division of African studies and to reflect on the specific conditions of such links and on the eventual new dialogues that have been recently established. Berber/Amazigh studies offer a valuable case for reflecting on the 'divided' construction of the field of research regarding the separation between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. Although Berber

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134 Without going into the debate on Pan-Africanism, Afrocentrism, Black Nationalism, and the 'Black Atlantic' in texts of authors such as Keti Molefi Asante, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Manthia Diawara, and Paul Gilroy, the search for political unity and a common heritage resulted in building 'an idea of Africa' that critics define as fictitious, while its supporters define it as a form of 'strategic essentialism'. See Ronald (1993).

135 See the critical concerns expressed at the conference 'North Africa and the Pan-African Movement: Retrospect and Prospect' (North Africa Region), 27-28 September 2003, Cairo, Egypt, organized by CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa).

studies have tended to look to the east and to deny the south, recent publications have started to include forms of comparison with African languages, literary themes, media, and social processes.

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