

The Literary Qur'an: Narrative Ethics in the Maghreb. Hoda El Shakry
(New York: Fordham University Press, 2020). Pp. 235. \$28.00 paper. ISBN:
9780823286355

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Hoda El Shakry's *The Literary Qur'an: Narrative Ethics in the Maghreb* is a phenomenal contribution to a number of key fields, fields that have grappled for so long with issues and problems of the Orientalist gaze, Euro-centrism, imperialism, colonialism, and ambivalent—and sometimes simplistic and reductive—attitudes toward religion. El Shakry re-frames approaches to Arabic literature in the Maghrib through a deep grasp of multiple, intersecting fields. In so doing, she charts a path out of the vice-like hold of Eurocentric mentalities on fields of study like literary theory, Francophone literature, and post-colonial theory. In seriously considering the Islamic literary heritage in modern Maghribi literature, in both Arabic and French, she shifts the conversation to other literary histories and helps de-center the European tradition's grip on comparative literature, comparative religion, and world literature. Her deep, respectful understanding and treatment of the Arabic and Islamic literary tradition bring its substantial history and legacy to bear on a nuanced analysis of Arabic literature in the modern era. Long viewed as derivative of the colonial condition and European influence, especially in the Maghrib, El Shakry disabuses her readers of this notion, bringing the full force of the Arabic and Islamic intellectual tradition to bear on the analysis of her topic.

El Shakry is working at the forefront and intersection of several intellectual traditions. For the field of literary criticism, she synthesizes and furthers the contributions of some of the most important intellectuals of our age who have been working in and around the Islamic tradition: Hussein Agrama, Leila Ahmed, Arjun Appadurai, Talal Asad, Margot Badran, miriam cooke, Stathis Gourgouris, Ronald Judy, Saba Mahmood, Fedwa Malti-Douglas, Aamir Mufti, and Edward Said, among many others. Bringing these thinkers into concert, she illustrates how they have problematized and defined the concept of secular critique. Moreover, she demonstrates the importance and centrality of an Islamic ethics to their formulations of a concept of secular critique, de-centering European colonial secularism's myth of itself as the origins of secular modernity. For some of these writers, the Islamic intellectual tradition functions as a subtext, or perhaps more accurately, as an ur-text, demonstrating the centrality of the Islamic intellectual tradition to not just Enlightenment thought, but also to Europe's own literary tradition, as well as its modernity. El Shakry highlights their critiques of European secularism's grounding in a Christian morality, one rooted in the Crusade-like mentality of not just colonial wars but also more recent imperial ones, oftentimes waged from afar and through proxy wars. This colonial legacy has informed the politics of knowledge formation, disciplines that have been repeatedly constituted in relation to and against Islam, the Muslim world, and an Islamic politics. El Shakry illustrates the centrality of the Islamic intellectual tradition to the formation and conceptualization of European secular modernity—and asks us to reconsider the roots of the world, its imaginaries and ethical systems otherwise.

El Shakry's intervention is particularly welcome for the field of Francophone studies, which El Shakry refers to as “hypertrophying,” a field rooted in concepts of *laïcité* that have so clearly been formulated with Islam, Muslims, and Islamic practices as its colonial other. Francophone literary criticism has a penchant for psychoanalyzing the Arab (*à l'Étranger*), repeatedly addressing the wounds of colonial racism and domination in the works of Driss Chraïbi, Tahar Ben Jalloun, Rachid Boudjedra, Assia Djebar, Abelkabar Khatabi, Kateb Yacine, among many others. (And admit a *mea culpa* in this regard.) El Shakry brings salve to those wounds by situating the Arabic literary tradition alongside the French, not just as equals. In a welcome turning of the tables, she uses the Arabic literary tradition to interpret the Francophone rather than vice versa. Yet El Shakry eschews reductive binaries by emphasizing the colonial elements of the Arabic and Islamic literary tradition in the Maghrib—its own colonial domination of the Amazigh region of North Africa, home to the Tamazight, Chleuh, Chenoua, Kabyle, Shawiya,

and Tuareg. She destabilizes the reigning concept of an immutable European racial, military, and economic dominance, provincializing European colonialism. Her foundational critique of Arab and Islamic occupation of indigenous lands makes her exploration of the politics of dominance that much more effective.

Perhaps most importantly, in the field of Islamic cultural studies, El Shakry roots her scholarship conceptually in the long tradition of literary approaches to the Qur'an. Her extensive discussion of the concept of *adab* masterfully synthesizes ongoing debates in the field, bringing Ebrahim Moosa's brilliant work on al-Ghazali to bear on her discussion, as much as scholarship on Arabic literature by Michael Allan, Tarek El-Ariss, Serge Bonebakker, and Issa Boullata. El Shakry illustrates how vibrantly the Qur'an continues to resonate in contemporary literary intellectual life—something so clear from the massive, global Islamic publishing industry that more freely and openly shares and circulates its texts affordably, sometimes through digital open access resources. The multiple and manifest ways that Islamic references have woven their way through the fabric of contemporary cultural life and its ethical imperatives is a project still to be further explored. El Shakry re-orientes cultural studies on a new path that is more able to carefully consider the complexity, depth, and resonance of these diverse spiritual underpinnings for different modes of creative expression.

El Shakry moves Francophone studies beyond its premise of the Islamic as reactionary and atavistic, opening up a deep field of referentiality woven through the written word. It is a frame of reference that has always been extant in this literature, but she shows how it has been only partly tapped. She beautifully illustrates how *adab* continues to function as an ethical guide for addressing problems of human tyranny, for conceptually imagining a more just and human way forward, and for re-thinking the politics of dominance in society and politics. She is clear that religion has not always been put toward these ends. But she shows us that this is distinct from how the Qur'an has functioned through time and history as a literary intertext in practice, as scripture and recitation, in the imagination, as vision and revelation, as mystical inspiration, and as an ethical document. With good reason, the book won the Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for Comparative Literary Studies. *The Literary Qur'an* opens up new avenues of inquiry in multiple, related fields, as El Shakry charts a path forward for literary studies rooted in the Islamic intellectual tradition, the spirit of the Qur'an, decolonial theory, and secular critique. Such an intervention has long been needed in world literature, comparative literature, Arabic literature, and Francophone studies as El Shakry moves us beyond the binaries of the East-West, secular-religious nexus. She leads us toward a new kind of hermeneutics for our contemporary age—one permeated by a religious sensibility but not necessarily confined to it. In so doing, she challenges the scholarship with her moral imperative to reshape the pursuit of knowledge through a deep and informed consideration of the Qur'an's impact and the injunction to cultivate a more ethical self.

doi:10.1017/S0020743821001136

Coping with Defeat: Sunni Islam, Roman Catholicism, and the Modern State. Jonathan Laurence (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021). Pp. 606. \$35.00 paper. ISBN: 9780691172125

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Throughout the medieval and early modern periods, Catholic and Sunni Islamic religious authorities had substantial spiritual *and* secular power over their flock. The papacy governed a large swath of central Italy, and the Church was by far the largest landowner in Europe. In various Muslim empires in North Africa and the Middle East, religious authorities played a central role in legitimating rule and were independent from secular power. By the mid-nineteenth century, this had changed. The papacy was under assault