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Editorial

Voices of Morocco: Perspectives on Contemporary Moroccan Literature

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The call for submissions for this special issue invited scholars to engage with Moroccan literature across languages, genres, and periods. The response confirmed what we had suspected, that the field is vibrant, contested, and generative. Eleven contributions appear here. They include research articles, interviews, and book reviews. Each engages Moroccan literary texts with critical attention to form, cultural context, and political stakes.

This collection opens with Brahim Barhoun's study of Laila Lalami's *The Dream Hotel* (2025). Barhoun reads the novel through surveillance capitalism, the New Jim Code, and necropolitics, arguing that its central concern is the gap between the person and the data double—the statistical surrogate that governs while remaining inaccessible. The analysis traces how this gap is authorized, institutionalized, technically produced, and racially constructed, while also attending to the forms of resistance it enables. The article positions the novel as a crucial intervention in contemporary literature's engagement with algorithmic injustice.

Ali El Abdelaoui offers a comparative reading of Laila Lalami's *The Other Americans* and Leila Slimani's *The Country of Others*. He draws on Freud, Heidegger, and Bhabha to theorize the unhomely, and on Beauvoir to theorize otherness. Nora and Mathilde, the protagonists, navigate lives marked by double marginalization. Both are Othered by gender and race in their host societies and their homelands. Both manage to set up reciprocal claims against their otherness. The essay reveals how these Moroccan women writers create space for agency within narratives of displacement.

Kholoud Letrach examines Mhani Alaoui's *Dreams of Maryam Tair: Blue Boots and Orange Blossoms* through trauma theory. She foregrounds insidious trauma, cumulative psychic wounds inflicted by systemic violence, colonial erasure, and gender oppression. Alaoui's use of magical realism renders visible the traumas of state violence, historical erasure, and patriarchal subjugation. Female characters embody a genealogy of feminist resistance. Figures like Zohra and Maryam evoke a queer grotesquery that destabilizes heteronormative paradigms.

Kaoutar El Felly reassesses the representation of Moroccan diaspora women in Tahar Ben Jelloun's fiction. She draws on transnational studies and postsecular feminism. Examining *Leaving Tangier*, *A Palace in the Old Village*, and *The Happy Marriage*, El Felly

dismantles conventional binaries. Moroccan transnational women are neither simply traditional nor simply hybrid, neither merely religious nor merely secular. They reconcile Moroccanness and Westernization, the sacred and the secular, in ways that empower them within Western multicultural contexts.

Mohamed Rouichi turns to oral tradition with a close reading of the Moroccan folktale "The Woman and the Devil." He draws on psychoanalytic, anthropological, and gender-theoretical perspectives. The tale constructs the female character as a site of danger and deceit while reflecting deeper cultural anxieties about gender, power, and morality. Rouichi situates the tale within Moroccan proverbial discourse and cross-cultural variants. The narrative functions as a vehicle of misogynistic discourse and as a cultural mirror revealing male vulnerability and latent admiration for feminine control.

Meriem Ait Bbih and Brahim Barhoun offer a gender-critical reading of Abdellatif Laâbi's *The Bottom of the Jar*. Laâbi declares his aim to give voice to those who cannot speak for themselves, particularly his mother. Drawing on Spivak's theory of subaltern representation, the article argues that nationalist ideology shapes the representation of female characters. Ghita, the mother figure, occupies an ambivalent position. She is frustrated with her condition in a patriarchal household, yet participates in reproducing the gender norms that oppress her. The essay contributes to postcolonial feminist scholarship by redefining Maghrebi mothers' resistance as a continuous negotiation with patriarchal structures.

Three interviews enrich this special issue. Chakib Amghar interviews Kenza Sefrioui, whose work as a scholar, journalist, publisher, and cultural activist has shaped Moroccan intellectual life. Sefrioui reflects on the legacy of *Souffles* (1966-1973), the journal that theorized political and cultural revolution in post-independence Morocco. Drawing on her foundational research and her experience co-founding Éditions En toutes lettres, she addresses translation as a means of transnational solidarity, the diverse heritage of Moroccan identity, and the impact of state repression during the Years of Lead. Her insights connect the journal's historical project to contemporary challenges in publishing, linguistic barriers, readership issues, and the need for collective engagement.

Ikram Ben Talha and Brahim Barhoun interview Latifa Labsir, whose novel *Ṭayf Sabība* (*The Phantom of Sabiba*) received the Sheikh Zayed Book Award. Labsir reflects on writing from within the consciousness of a child, the invisible burdens carried by mothers and siblings of children on the autism spectrum, and the role of imagination in approaching difference. The conversation ranges across women's writing, autobiography, visual art, and the relationship between realism and the imaginary in contemporary Moroccan literature.

Inass Essrhir interviews Mohammed Mrabet, the Tangier-born storyteller whose collaboration with Paul Bowles produced a remarkable body of translated tales. Mrabet speaks about his creative process, his relationship with Bowles, and his frustration with waning public interest in oral storytelling. He insists on his authorial agency, stating, "I'm the author of my stories," while acknowledging Bowles's role as translator. The interview preserves his words and, through accompanying photographs, a visual record of the storyteller in his home.

Two book reviews close the special issue. Khaoula El Khalfi engages Laila Lalami's *The Dream Hotel*, reading the novel at the intersection of Kafkaesque bureaucracy, surveillance dystopia, and theoretical fiction. The review attends to predictive detention, neurotechnological control, and the transformation of the unconscious into administrable territory.

Imane Derrazi reviews Karima Ahdad's *Al-Mar'atu Al-Ukhra* (*The Other Woman*). Ahdad, writing in Arabic, has distinguished herself within the Maghrebi literary landscape. Her novel explores jealousy, obsession, and the maternal wound. Derrazi highlights how Ahdad's protagonist departs from her legendary namesake, trapped not by an external tyrant but by a self-inflicted cycle of narrative obsession reflecting internalized patriarchal norms.

These contributions affirm what the editorial team believes, that scholarship on Moroccan literature illuminates texts and the cultural, political, and social questions they engage. From Lalami's speculative futures to Mrabet's oral traditions, from Laâbi's carceral poetry to Ben Jelloun's diaspora women, the work gathered here speaks to the richness of literary expression in Morocco.

The contributors include scholars based in Morocco and internationally, working in English, Arabic, and French, trained in literary studies, cultural studies, and interdisciplinary approaches. Their essays engage texts written in Arabic, French, and English, performed in Darija, and translated across multiple languages. This multilingual approach is the collection's fundamental premise: Moroccan literature demands critical frameworks adequate to its complexity.

We thank the contributors, the peer reviewers, and the editorial team at *Confluence*. Special thanks to the research laboratory LLCIS at Abdelmalek Essaadi University, whose support makes this journal possible.

Moroccan literature continues to gain international visibility. Novels win prizes. Translations appear in multiple languages. Scholarly attention grows. We hope this special issue contributes to the critical conversation. The voices gathered here are many. They speak in different languages, from different locations, to different audiences. Together, they constitute the plural, contested, endlessly generative field we call Moroccan literature.

Brahim Barhoun
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Disclaimer and Conflict of Interest Statement

The views expressed in the articles published in *Confluence* are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial board or affiliated institutions.

This special issue includes contributions from members of the editorial team, including the Editor-in-Chief and members of the LLCIS Research Lab. All such submissions were subject to the journal's standard double-blind peer-review process and evaluated independently to ensure fairness, objectivity, and the highest standards of scholarly integrity.

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