

Morocco

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Morocco is an ethnically diverse country with a rich culture and civilization. Through Moroccan history, Morocco hosted many people coming from East (Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Jews and Arabs), South (Sub-Saharan Africans) and North (Romans, Vandals, Andalusians (including Moors and Jews)). All those civilizations have had an impact on the social structure of Morocco. It conceived various forms of beliefs, from paganism, Judaism, and Christianity to Islam.

Modern Moroccan literature began in the 1930s. Two main factors gave Morocco a pulse toward the development of modern Moroccan literature. Morocco, as a French and Spanish protectorate left Moroccan intellectuals the opportunity to exchange and to produce literary works freely enjoying the contact of other Arabic literature and Europe. During the 1950s and 1960s, Morocco was a refuge and artistic centre and attracted writers as Paul Bowles, Tennessee Williams, Brion Gysin, William S. Burroughs and Jack Kerouac. Moroccan literature flourished with writers such as Mohamed Choukri, Driss Chraïbi, Mohamed Zafzaf and Driss El Khouri.

In the 1960s, a group of writers founded a group called "Souffles" (Breaths) that initially was prohibited but later in 1972 gave impetus to the poetry and modern romantic works of many Moroccan writers. The Years of Lead saw government crackdowns on free speech and political dissent, which led many Moroccan writers and intellectuals into prison, exile or silence. Tahar Ben Jelloun, probably Morocco's best known contemporary novelist, left for France when it was announced that the teaching of philosophy was going to be Arabized. He has become an established French novelist, winning the Prix Goncourt, while criticising the French racist treatment of immigrants from France's former North African colonies. Also achieving international acclaim is Laila Lalami, winner of the Caine Prize for African Writing. Lalami emigrated to the US to complete her studies, and since 2001 has written the popular political blog MoorishGirl, which offers a corrective Maghrebi perspective on US reporting of Middle Eastern news.

Government repression of political dissent in Morocco has dropped sharply since the mid-1990s. A new generation of writers has emerged, including the strikingly caustic female novelist Leila Abouzeid, one of the few writers to use Arabic. Contemporary poetry is centred on the Bait Al'Shir (House of Poetry), directed by poet Mohammed Bennis, who (like many post-war Arabic poets) began his career in correspondence with Syrian poet Adonis. Poet Wafa'a Lamrani is the organisation's general secretary. Poet and translator Hassan Najmi was the longtime president of the Moroccan Union of Writers, and another key figure in inspiring a new generation.

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