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Amazigh Orality in Contemporary Production

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Much has happened since the 1st volume of the *Journal of Amazigh Studies* came out in the spring of 2023. Indeed, several disasters hit North Africa last year, including floods in Libya, fires in Algeria, and a devastating earthquake in Morocco. We want to acknowledge the thousands of people who lost their lives and pay our respects to them and their families. Then, there are some disasters perpetrated intentionally by humans. The ongoing civil war in Sudan, after just one year, has resulted in the largest displacement crisis globally, with 8.5 million people forced from their homes and 6.5 million people internally displaced, while nearly five million people are on the verge of famine.\(^1\) The ongoing carnage in the Palestinian territories has shaken the world. We want to honor the forty-plus thousands of victims in this genocidal war, even as the number of victims continues to rise. In addition, this mass slaughter in Gaza is accompanied by an ecocide, that is, the deliberate destruction perpetrated on the ecosystem and biodiversity.

According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), a legacy of inequality and exclusion has made Indigenous Peoples more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and disasters. Indigenous communities are often the last to receive public investment in essential services and infrastructure, even as disasters are deepening these vulnerabilities and inequality.\(^2\) The earthquake in Morocco is an obvious example of this issue, as the Amazigh people from the High Atlas were especially hard hit. Indeed, the Amazigh people in the area are usually ignored and denied basic needs. Regions like Agadir and the Rif have protested against their conditions, and protesters have been punished with long prison sentences. Sanaa Akroud’s film *Myopia* (2020), which is reviewed in this issue, shows the isolation of some of these regions.

The photography content for this issue was taken by Ahnan Mouloud on the third day after the devastating earthquake and documents a village in the region of Taroudant in the High Atlas. In this region of Morocco, like other Amazigh regions in North Africa, Amazigh people situated in vulnerable and disaster-prone areas still speak Amazigh languages, and their tradition is still fundamentally oral, a fact that is also associated with their isolation.

This volume is dedicated to Amazigh orality, which is, again, a central feature of Amazigh indigenous knowledge and everyday life in North Africa and the diaspora. The oral legacy of Amazigh peoples, whether artistic, ecological, historical, or social, is the most salient vehicle for preserving and transmitting Amazigh knowledge and literature, encompassing music, poetry, and narrative. In the context of modern technology and increased dependence upon cyberspace, a hybridized mode of communication that combines written and oral features has emerged. As a result, many aspects of the Amazigh oral tradition, which previously found no place in literary circles and different environments, have now fully emerged in a new digital space. Paradoxically, a post-modern system and context have allowed a pre-modern and non-textual Amazigh culture,

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1. [https://www.unfpa.org/resources/one-year-war-sudan-april-12-2024](https://www.unfpa.org/resources/one-year-war-sudan-april-12-2024)
individuals, and groups to create new discourses and contexts. Within this new global and digital context, the Journal of Amazigh Studies devotes this second issue to the theme of orality. The articles in this volume engage Amazigh orality, with issues and examples drawn from (oral) literature, social media, and films.

**Articles**

The first article in this issue is about the Tuareg and Malian writer Zakiyatou Oualett Halatine. Cheryl Toman provides an insightful reading of the creative writing of Halatine, along with an analysis of her work from a woman’s perspective. Zakiyatou Oualett Halatine, Toman argues, is the lone literary voice of Northern Mali. Halatine infuses her texts with Tamasheq (a variety of Tuareg Amazigh) words and phrases, which are often untranslatable. Still, Halatine strives to share the oral stories and legends that define her desert people. Her texts, Toman argues, decolonize and rewrite Tuareg’s history from a woman’s perspective. Also concerning Amazigh literature, El Jarari and Belarbi analyze Mohamed Akounad’s Amazigh novel Tawargit d Imik (translated into French as Un Youyou dans la mosquée). The article examines how the main character, Imam Ssi Brahim, disrupts traditional norms by delivering religious sermons in Tamazight. In the imam’s attempt at connecting with his Amazigh audience, he challenges the established power dynamics and brings forth tensions between Islamic and Amazigh perspectives on social issues. The authors argue that Ssi Brahim’s use of Tamazight in religious discourse leads to a significant reclamation of Amazigh cultural heritage and challenges prevailing linguistic hierarchies within Moroccan society.

In her article, “Répertoire kabyle culturel immatériel ou comment (re) penser l’oralité : De la fixation écrite au numérique” Katia Bellal examines the role of new media and digital technologies, specifically YouTube, in preserving and promoting the visibility of Amazigh intangible cultural heritage from Kabylia. Bellal offers a chronological background that explains the importance of social media for a tradition that colonialization, Arabization, and repression have so impacted. Social media enabled the renewal of rituals such as Yennayer, as well as the emergence of erotic and licentious oral poetry, which used to be reserved for private settings. In addition, Bellal argues that Kabyle social media challenges social taboos and boundaries between men and women (dance, singing, etc.), changes that all have welcomed.

In his article, Hugh Roberts offers a detailed examination of the relationship between the state and society in independent Algeria. This work, never published before, emerged from his interest in state intervention and local politics and the interface between them in Kabylia. His work is based on data obtained during his fieldwork between 1972 and 1976 in the communes of Aïn el-Hammam, Beni Yenni, and Tassaft. Roberts also visited the villages of Ath Mislayen, Tassaft Ouguemoun, Agouni Ahmed, Taourirt Mimoun, Tizgirt, Darna, and Ath Waaban. His observations concerning the traditional political institutions of the society of Djurdjura, notably the nature and role of the sfuf, formed the starting point of his critique of the theories of Ernest Gellner and Pierre Bourdieu.

In his essay “La condition féminine en Algérie et sa transcription filmique chez Nadia Zouaoui” Adel Saïd examines Nadia Zouaoui’s films, Le Voyage de Nadia and L’Islam de mon enfance, as sites of reflection on the reality of Kabyle and Algerian women. He views the two films as a reconstruction of the fragmented memory of the post-colonial period through the director’s
collections of testimonies. In so doing, he questions tradition, religion, and state through the two films to illustrate the necessity of Algerian women's equal participation in society to achieve internal changes in attitudes and perceptions.

**Book review**
Mallory Nischan’s review of the novel *The Night Will Have Its Say* by the Amazigh Libyan author Ibrahim al-Koni provides a detailed summary of the story depicting the famed encounter between the Amazigh warrior queen Dihya and the Umayyad General Hassan ibn Nu’man. Nischan captures the importance of al-Koni’s emphasis on Dihya's strength as a woman and how his portrayal connects to the significance of women in the Amazigh tradition before the Arab-Islamic invasions of North Africa. Nischan also recognizes the author’s focus on orality as a defining aspect of Amazigh culture in the retelling and understanding Dihya's story.

**Film reviews**
Hend Sadi’s review of Malik Bourkache’s documentary *AẒAR* praises its portrayal of three older women in Djurdjura’s foothills—Kissa, a farmer and seamstress; Dehbiya, a potter; and Cabḥa, a weaver—showcased through their crafts with minimal family or male presence. The review emphasizes the film’s profound humanity, authentically capturing the women’s narratives and traditional skills and resonating with audiences in Algeria and France for its heartfelt depiction of a vanishing way of life. Bourkache’s minimalist approach, filming alone without a script, enhances the intimate and genuine portrayal of these women and their enduring spirit.

In his review of *Myopia*, a feature film by Sana Akroud, Yahya Laayouni examines the sociology, psychology, and physiology of Fatem’s character, an Amazigh pregnant woman from a marginalized village in the High Atlas of Morocco. The film portrays her journey in search of an eyeglass shop in the city of Casablanca to repair the glasses of the *fqih*, the only literate person who can read a letter from her immigrant husband. Through her unexpected encounters with the police, human rights activists, and journalists, Laayouni sheds light on the patriarchal, structural, and political disenfranchisement of Amazigh women. In his analysis, Laayouni rereads and critically reviews the film, projecting Fatem’s enduring journey onto the challenges faced by Sanaa Akroud, an Amazigh filmmaker herself, during the making of this film.

Nabil Boudraa’s review of *Argu*, which means “dream” in Kabyle, opposes the beauty of the mountainous landscapes and the village’s traditions that have become oppressive. The main character, Koukou, the dreamer, embodies the opposition to these traditions, but his non-compliance is considered intolerable, and the village elders decide to lock him up. Women also fall victim to these tyrannical customs. Boudraa highlights the potential for freedom and positive renaissance embodied by Koukou.

**Aẓeṭṭa**
In her presentation of Hawad’s poetry, Hélène Claudot-Hawad highlights the fire and blood at the heart of Hawad’s desert. This extract from a long and unpublished poem speaks of the last breath of the wounded Mother Earth, whose body is dismembered and scattered. It is, explains Claudot-Hawad, a chaotic scene reminiscent of the end of the world. This poem reflects the situation of the current Tuareg world, an apocalyptic scene of silence, wind, and vertigo created by those with power over vulnerable lives. And thus, the inhabitants of the desert have become
undesirable and homeless. Their very survival is at stake, laments Hawad. Despite the bullets and the destruction, a vision emerges, that of the defeated who refuses the defeat.

Also published here is Arezki Boudif’s translation into Kabyle of Chapter 19 of John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, translated as *Iguza n Wurfan*. This chapter describes Tom Joad’s experiences and reflections on social injustice and the plight of migrant workers during the Great Depression. The translation aptly captures the hardships faced by the Joad family and their fellow migrants and their struggle against exploitation and adversity. Boudif’s Kabyle rendition emphasizes resilience, solidarity, and the quest for dignity amidst economic hardship and social inequality, themes that are familiar to a Kabyle readership.

Finally, we are pleased to conclude this editorial on a positive note. We want to salute the publication of another Amazigh journal in the United States, *Tamazgha Studies Journal* (https://www.tamazghastudiesjournal.org/articles-fall2023-issue-01-article12), edited by Brahim El Guabli, Katarzyna Pieprzak, and Aomar Boum. We wish the journal and its team much success. In addition, we want to mention the first Amazigh Studies Series from Georgetown University Press (https://press.georgetown.edu/Book-Series). In these dark times, these are promising signs as Amazigh studies are on the move.

**Editorial Board**