

Culture, Migration, Memory and the Construction of Moroccan Self: A Reading into M'Barek Rabi's Novel West of the Mediterranean (2018)

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Abstract : For more than a decade, Morocco has been confronted with the issue of sub-Saharan immigration. The closure of European borders and the crises on the African continent have amplified the pressure on Morocco and therefore on Europe. The migration phenomenon seems to act fully on these borders. Indeed, Morocco's burgeoning role as a both transit hub and a destination for tens of thousands of sub-Saharan migrants has prompted a shift in Moroccan literature. Morocco's current reality is increasingly baked into the country's multifarious literary and cultural production, which have begun to encapsulate complex social and cultural dynamics of this migratory shift over past decades. In this vein, literary Moroccans have shifted their focus on Europe and Middle East to the importance and effects of sub-Saharan immigrants on the construction of Moroccan national Identity and Memory. In fact, this shift is driven and informed by cultural, social and historical changes that Morocco has experienced. This paper seeks to explore the effects of sub-Saharan immigration, whether settled or transient, on the individual and collective construction of Identity and Memory in Morocco. The underlying leitmotifs of this paper is to grasp and investigate the dynamics that mark the (dis)continuity of Moroccan self with the regards to cultural shifts the presence of sub-Saharan immigrants embody through their presence in the public realms. To attend to these shifts, this paper will focus M'barek Rabi's 2018 novel *Gharb al-mutawassit* (West of the Mediterranean). The novel delves deeply into this sub-Saharan literary shift. It claims that the ubiquitous presence of sub-Saharan African migrants and the discursive practices around their presence highlight the intricate ways in which the collective past is discursively etched on bodies and topographies of the Moroccan subject. In short, it emphasizes that the past is not mere remembrance of an event; instead, it survives, lives on, and is mediated through the subject positions of immigrants. The novel *Gharb al-mutawassit* deciphers a quest inside the complicated world of transgressive migration. It provides a look at the entangling webs of agents who trade on the fate of immigrants looking for a better life conditions beyond the constrains of geography, history and culture. Within this ambit, this paper seeks to investigate how Morocco has morphed from 'transit hub' into a destination. That is, a site wherein immigrants' experiences and memories are rewritten and sprout de novo under the rubric of ambiance and hope that Morocco seeks to provide by introducing modern legislative frameworks and policies that treat people equally.

Keywords : literature, transit migration, memory, identity, transculturality, mobility, self

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