

## Belgium's literary argan tree

The first wave of Moroccan migrants in Belgium, who mainly came from the Rif in northern Morocco, consisted largely of illiterate workers. Only a rare few were educated, like Larbi Khetouta, who immortalised his arrival in Brussels in 1964 in the anthology "Bruxelles la marocaine".

Despite the official end of immigration in 1974, Belgium remained attractive to students, intellectuals and some Moroccan political refugees. Writers such as Ali Serghini, with his novel "La nuit par défaut" (1987), and Issa Aït Belize, known for the "Le fils du péché" trilogy in the 2000s, are a testament to this attractiveness.

After the first novel by a second generation female writer, Leïla Houari, entitled "Zeïda de nulle part" (1985), many more stories were published in French: "À l'ombre des gouttes" (2000) by Saber Assal, "Ti t'appelle Aïcha, pas Jouzifine !" (2008) by Mina Oualdhadj, up until 2022 with "Santana" by the young Ines Lamallem, and "Le fou allié du Diable" by Rayane Bensaghir.

Slam and poetry are also represented, particularly by Manza and his collection entitled "Lis tes ratures" (2015), along with Nora Balile and her collection "Ventre étoilé" (2022).

Many poets write in Arabic, including Ahmed Hadraoui, Fatima Makhfi – who also publishes *zajal*, a form of poetry in an Arabic dialect – and Hussein Darraz, an author of poetry in Arabic and a few poems in Amazigh. The first novel in Arabic, with a plot set in Brussels, was "Pure éternité" (2009) by Allal Bourqia.

A publishing house, Lansman Éditeur, publishes French-language theatrical works by authors of Moroccan origin and offers translations of plays from Dutch, such as "Baba" (2015) by Dahlia Benamar, and from Arabic, like "Dounia" by Taha Adnan (2020).

In Flanders, following the first novel by Rachida Lamrabet in 2007, "Vrouwland" (Woman Country), names such as Naima Albdouni, Fikry El Azzouzi, Ish Ait Hamou, Nadia Dala, Aya Sabi and Mohamed Ouaamari are helping to enrich the Dutch language with their literary imagination.

Between French, Dutch and Arabic, the stories intermingle, weaving the tapestry of the Moroccan presence in Belgium. **Like an argan tree, Moroccan literature is thriving in Belgium, sowing the seeds of a flourishing cultural citizenship.** This is enriching the Belgian literary scene while broadening the horizon of Moroccan literature.