

Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences, Dhar El Mahraz, Fez, Morocco



Sociological, Cultural, and Philosophical
Studies Laboratory



The Moroccan Association
of Film Critics

organise an

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE MOROCCAN CINEMA CHALLENGES AND PROMISES



Conference coordinator:

Said Chemlal

Keynote speakers



In English

Florence Martin

Goucher college,
USA



In Arabic

Hamid Tbatou

FPO, Ibn Zohr
University, Morocco



18 - 20 December, 2025

BACKGROUND

Moroccan cinema or cinema in Morocco dates back to Sultan Moulay Abdelaziz, who managed, with the tutoring of Gabriel Veyre, one of the Lumière Brothers' technicians, to stand behind the camera and shoot his harem as early as 1901. During the 1940s, the self-educated Mohamed Osfour started making amateur but purely independent films. Starting from 1956, other filmmakers subsequently embarked on directing their works, funded and produced either by the Cinema Centre (CCM) or independently. The kingdom has almost been a mecca for gigantic production companies and, hence, has been a location for the shooting of variegated international blockbusters, including some made by renowned filmmakers, such as Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock, Martin Scorsese, Pier Paolo Pasolini, David Lean, Ridley Scott, Bernardo Bertolucci, to name but a few.

With a filmography of around five hundred feature films, Moroccan cinema is nowadays considered one of the leading filmic experiences in Africa, alongside Egypt and South Africa. It is promising, yet it still faces many challenges. Therefore, its trajectory has often been a topic for discussion. In the 1980s, Morocco officially started funding national films, following the French paradigm: *l'avance sur recettes*. The process of state funding, however, has all the time been engendering controversy over fostering quantity and/or quality. Despite the fact that Morocco currently produces more than twenty feature films a year, it is hard to associate national filmmaking with a set of specific aesthetic or technical features. That is why some Moroccan researchers prefer the label of "cinema in Morocco" to "Moroccan cinema."

Distribution is another challenge that Moroccan cinema has always been exposed to. During the earlier decades, national films struggled to get screened in movie theatres at a time when distributors favoured American, Indian, or Egyptian works. To fill the void, the CCM organised film caravans, with the aim of increasing the films' national visibility, mainly in rural areas. In the same vein, *la Fédération nationale des ciné-clubs* (the national federation of ciné-clubs) did its best to promote national films. Be that as it may, Moroccan films tend to recently hit the national box offices, sometimes top-ranking foreign films. This occurs at a time when the number of movie theatres has drastically decreased: there were 247 in 1987 while there exists only 25 in 2025. Except for Nabil Ayouch's gradually-functioning "aflamin.com," there is no state-owned online-streaming platform that can archive films and promote their accessibility. Piracy, which first hit Mohamed Abderrahman Tazi's *al-Babth 'an Zawj Mrati* (*Looking for My Wife's Husband*, 1993) in the mid-1990s, has usually been one of the issues that Moroccan cinema suffers from.

Despite these challenges, Moroccan cinema shows great promises, including state funding, which guarantees the production of at least twenty features a year. The CCM also funds film festivals, which spread almost over all parts of the country and cover different themes. While a large number of movie theatres are out of business, these festivals—around one hundred in number—fit the bill. Marrakech Film Festival attracts the attention of film stars from all over the globe and hence serves as a cinematic niche marketing for the kingdom.

Another promise follows from the international visibility that Moroccan films have been recently enjoying. Filmmakers, such as Nabil Ayouch, Faouzi Bensaïdi, Yasmine Kassari, Hicham Lasri, Tala Hadid, Meryem Benm'Barek, Maryam Touzani, Sofia Alaoui, Asmae El Moudir, among others, have brought Moroccan films to the world stage, as most of them have secured their intermittent participation in A-list film festivals, including Cannes, Berlinale, and Sundance.

This visibility is also highlighted in the Anglophone academic writings tackling Moroccan filmmaking. Kevin Dwyer's *Beyond Casablanca: M.A. Tazi and the Adventure of Moroccan Cinema* (2004) paved the way for more books on Moroccan cinema, including Sandra Carter (2009); Valérie K. Orlando (2011); Peter Limbrick (2020); Will Higbee, Florence Martin, and Jamal Bahmad (2020); Florence Martin (2024); Kevin Dwyer (2025); Lucy McNair and Yahya Laayouni (2025). Added to this is a wealth of articles and book chapters that are published locally and internationally both by national and foreign researchers. The Anglophone publications are an addition to the existing Arabic, French, or Spanish books, whether written by Moroccans or foreigners.

Following the 2011 reformed constitution, Morocco finally recognized Tamazight as an official language, alongside Arabic, while it gives a special mention to Hassani (Sahrawi) and Jewish components. This recognition has contributed to the emergence of Amazigh-speaking films, say, Mohamed Amin Benamraoui's *Adios Carmen (Goodbye Carmen, 2013)*, which have contributed to Moroccan cinema's visibility far afield. The CCM began funding documentaries about the Moroccan Sahara in late 2014 and organising a film festival devoted to these films in Laayoune that began in 2015. The representation of Moroccan Jews has been part of some film narratives even before 2011.

National film productions have tackled a wide range of themes, including, but not limited to: gender, identity, space, Self-Other encounters, religion, sex, and politics. After King Mohamed VI's ascension to the throne in 1999, and mainly when Nouredine Saïl was the rector of the CCM (2003-2014), filmmakers enjoyed more freedom of expression while censorship was largely relaxed. Yet, the banning of Nabil Ayouch's *Zin li Fik (Much Loved, 2015)* and the cutting of some "offensive scenes" during some film festivals seem to have turned the clock back decades.

Contributors are expected to tackle any of these topics (either **as a challenge, a promise, or both**), including, but not limited to:

- Production and/or transnational co-production
- Distribution (national and international)
- State funding
- Film festivals and/or ciné-clubs
- Piracy
- Taboos and/or censorship
- Diasporic and/or migrant cinema
- Transnational cinema
- Independent cinema
- International visibility
- Amazigh-speaking cinema
- Video and Amateur filmmaking
- Urban/rural space
- Gender representations
- Women's cinema
- Spectatorship
- Film Studies at Moroccan universities
- Film criticism and publications
- Digital transformation and the future of filmmaking
- Sound and Music
- Film genres
- Film and literature
- Documentary filmmaking

DEADLINES

Abstract submission deadline: **May 18, 2025**

Acceptance notification: **June 08, 2025**

First draft submission deadline: **November 16, 2025**

Conference date: **December 18-20, 2025**

Final contributions submission: **February 28, 2026**

Final contributions should be less than 7000 words; more guidelines will be communicated later. Contributions will be blindly peer-reviewed.

The publication will be released in 2027.

The abstracts and short biographies (both less than 400 words) must be in **English, French, Arabic, or Tamazight** and submitted in doc. or docx. format, electronically, (only 1 file), to: cultural.studies.fez@hotmail.com.

CONTACT

For more information, please contact: **Said Chemlal**: said.chemlal@usmba.ac.ma

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Mohamed Abarkan, USMBA, Fez.

Azlarabe Alaoui Lamharzi, ENSAM, UMV, Rabat.

Jamal Bahmad, UMV, Rabat.

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Hamid Tbatou, FPO, Ibn Zohr University, Ouarzazate.

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Ph.D Students : Mohamed Reda Guennoun, Abdeghni Dahman, Salah Chig , Hamid El-Mabrouky, Anouar Makhoulouf, Youness Attou, Nawar Afkir , Safae Ihabritane.