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THE CHALLENGES OF THE MOROCCAN SOCIETY – MUHAMMED ZEFZAF’S “DROUGHT” AND MOROCCO TODAY

Original scientific paper

UDC 821.411.21.09(64) Zefzaf M.

<https://doi.org/10.18485/kkonline.2022.13.13.3>

This paper deals with some of the most acute challenges for the Moroccan society. It is based on a short story titled *Drought*, by the Moroccan author Muhammed Zefzaf (d. 2001), analyzed from today’s perspective. Zefzaf often wrote about social issues and the life in poor and marginalized strata of society, and this paper is the first result of a broader research in which his works are analyzed and put into today’s context.

The author of this paper has performed five field trips to Morocco since 2015, interviewed numerous residents of this country, and the results of this research are combined with the analysis of Zefzaf’s work in order to present a picture of the development of certain segments of Moroccan society.

Keywords: Morocco, Moroccan literature, short story, drought, climate change, Amazigh, poverty

1. Introduction

The Kingdom of Morocco is a country of rich history, diverse cultural heritage, and stunning biodiversity. This is a country on two great seas, whose shores are adorned with wonderful beaches and imposing rocks against which the waves of the Atlantic Ocean crash with a deafening noise. This is a land of high mountains, cedar forests inhabited by Barbary macaques, spectacular canyons and waterfalls. This is also the land of the Sahara, nomads, brutal scorching Sun and grandiose palm trees that defiantly bathe in it. This is a country of beautiful cities – the red Marrakesh (ar. Marrākush), blue Chefchaouen (ar. Shawshāwan), charming Rabat (ar. al-Ribāt), dynamic Casablanca (ar. al-Dār al-Bayḍā’), scorching Zagora (ar. Zagūra), and the other beauties like Fez, Tangiers, Agadir, Asilah, Tetouan, Hoceima (ar. Fās, Ṭanja,

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Agadīr, Aṣīla, Taṭwān, al-Ḥusayma) etc. But, most important, Morocco is the country of people, Arabs and Imazighen¹.

With its beauties, Morocco began to attract more and more attention to itself, and before the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020, it reached Egypt's rank in terms of the annual number of foreign tourists, placing itself among the leaders in Africa when it comes to tourism. In other fields as well, this North African Kingdom aspires to a leadership position and works very hard to create its image as a leader. Accordingly, many ambitious projects have been launched, some of which could be characterized as gigantic, such as the African Bank building in the city of Sale² (ar. *Salā*) near Rabat, which will have 55 floors and be 250 meters high, and this will make it one of the tallest buildings in Africa (Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat). Also, the title of the largest theater in Africa, and in the Arab world as well, with its 47,000 square meters of surface, will be taken by the Grand Theater in Rabat (The Arab Weekly 2020). Then, when it comes to transport, Morocco is here too a leader, because in 2018, the first super high-speed train in Africa, al-Boraq³, was put into operation, connecting Tangier and Casablanca in two hours instead of the usual five (Businessinsider 2020).

However, behind this demonstration of the obvious development of the Moroccan economy, there is a different picture of Morocco, one that is often not visible to the eye of the average foreigner who, for one reason or another, finds himself in its territory. The author of this paper got to know this other Morocco relatively well, primarily through the fieldwork⁴ in Morocco itself, which was supplemented by the

¹ Imazighen is a plural form of the noun Amazigh. Amazigh is a member of the people representing the indigenous population of North-West Africa. Today, the Amazigh people are largely Arabized, but in countries like Morocco and Algeria, their identity remains preserved and, in certain parts of these countries, very pronounced. In parts of Morocco, their culture is dominant, which is most clearly seen through the use of the Amazigh language in everyday communication. The Amazigh language in Morocco also has the status of an official language. It received official status after Zefzaf's death, so today there is progress in that sense compared to the time when the Drought story was written. The other word being used to describe Amazigh people is Berber, but the term is considered somewhat derogatory, so this paper uses the terms Imazighen or Amazigh people (plural), Amazigh (singular) while the same word is used as an adjective as well.

² Officially named Mohammed VI Tower.

³ Ar. al-Burāq, a mythical creature, very important in Islamic tradition.

⁴ The field research included a number of interviews with Moroccan nationals, concerning socio-political issues and challenges of the Moroccan society. A large majority of interviewees (approximately 350 in total) were adult men, aged between 25 and 50, mostly urban population, of different social status, with levels of education varying from primary school to college graduates. The interviews were semi-structured, along with some unstructured ones, aiming to increase the flexibility of the conversation and result in more natural and realistic answers, which would possibly be difficult in a fully structured interview. The field research mostly took place in three Moroccan provinces. The largest number of interviews was performed in Rabat-Sale-Kenitra Province, followed by Casablanca-Settat, and Draa-Tafilalet provinces. Since the interviewees came from different regions of Morocco, the questions varied in relation to the issues that were in focus of a certain interview. Zifzaf's *Drought* deals with several important issues that still challenge the Moroccan society, such as poverty, social differences, the status of Imazighen or water shortages. Questions concerning poverty and social differences were more-less always included in the interviews, while the issues

volunteer work with children and adolescents from Dwar Jbala (Ar. Duwār Jibāla), a poor suburb of Sale, then by being introduced to the hard-core football fan scene of Casablanca or this city’s underground music scene etc. But also, the author had the opportunity to speak with a large number of Moroccan illegal migrants in Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, that is, with those who were desperately trying to escape from the other, mostly invisible, Morocco, beyond the society margin.

Muhammed Zefzaf (ar. Muḥammad Zifzāf, 1945 - 2001), one of the most widely read and respected Moroccan writers, particularly appreciated for his short stories, wrote a lot about that other Morocco. Zefzaf wrote in a language that was at the same time full of compassion and warmth, but also filled with brutal sharpness and honesty, not adapted to Western sensibility (Albakry 2005: 161). Since 2021 marked the 20th anniversary of the death of the famous Moroccan writer, and that while studying Moroccan culture and society (since 2015), the author encountered problems very similar to those Zefzaf wrote about, thought that it would be interesting to set up qualitative research in which his works would be observed from the aspect of today’s challenges.

This paper represents the result of the first part of that research and is based on the story *Drought* (Ar. *al-Jafāf*), first published in 1984. The story, like many Zefzaf’s stories⁵, is about people living on the margins of society and deals with social challenges and differences in Morocco. In the research, the original text in Arabic was used, while the part that concerns the challenges of contemporary Moroccan society is based on the field research conducted in Morocco in the period between 2015 and 2022, as well as on interviews with about thirty Moroccan citizens who found themselves in the territory of Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, through illegal migration, in the spring of 2019⁶. In addition, the paper uses relevant texts from international and local internet portals that deal with the problem of drought and climate change.

In line with the fact that most of the fieldwork in Morocco the author performed in urban areas of the country, in this research mostly stories from the urban setting are used. However, the author decided that *Drought*, a story from a rural environment, would be the basis of the work that is the first fruit of the abovementioned research,

such as the status of Imazighen or water shortages were discussed depending on the situation and the interlocutor.

⁵ Some of them referred to in this paper.

⁶ The interviews were a part of the Common Operations „Tuzi II 2019“, and „BIH 2019“, performed by Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF) and the interviewees were, among other things, asked about the reasons for leaving their homeland.

because from its first page to its last, it really delivers a powerful message without pause and in almost every sentence, dealing with several different important topics. There is also some authors personal connection to that story, due to the days spent in the Zagora region in southeastern Morocco, where the whole atmosphere is such that just being in this town, and particularly in the surrounding villages, unmistakably matches the atmosphere from the story.

Adding weight to this choice is the news coming out of Morocco in the first few months of 2022. There are numerous reports of severe drought that has hit this country, which is, as sources claim, a result of climate change and poor management of resources (Bellaouali, 2022). It is said that this is the biggest drought that has hit Morocco since the beginning of the eighties of the 20th century, which is the period Zefzaf too talks about, since the story was published in 1984. It is clear, therefore, that Morocco is struggling with the same problem it struggled with some forty years ago, and this is how Muhammed Zefzaf wrote about it.

2. The Storyline – Drought, Poverty and Violence

In the introduction, the author describes a scene from an unnamed village in Morocco, which is clearly affected by drought, as the first few sentences clearly indicate: “Fadma Tameslouht stopped under the shadow of a wall. She put her palm on her forehead and started looking at the dusty road winding across the bare plain. There is no grass or herbs”⁷ (Zefzaf 2017: 477). Also, we should pay attention to the fact that Zefzaf gives the full name and surname of the main heroine, which is not without reason, since it reveals to us that she is a woman that probably comes from an Amazigh family, as her surname Tameslouht⁸ is clearly of non-Arabic origin. In addition, Tameslouht is also the name of a small town located not far from Marrakesh, whose inhabitants have a permanent problem with a shortage of drinking water (Ayt Būḥaddū, 2020). Fadma is a woman who most of the time takes care of the children by herself, while her husband lives in the city (most likely Casablanca) where he earns money by selling peanuts and pumpkin seeds in cafes, and who only comes home “two or three times a year, when he returns to sleep with her so that she gives birth to more children” (Zefzaf 2017: 477-478). The story describes the moment when the husband returns home and is shocked by a catastrophic situation, that puts the life of

⁷ All parts of the story *Drought* used in this paper were translated from Arabic by the author.

⁸ The prefix “ta” is feminine grammatical gender prefix in Amazigh language and it very common in toponyms in Morocco. The examples are numerous: Taroudant, Tagounite, Tamegroute, Tameslouht, Tamezmoute, Taghbalte etc.

his family literally into question. After talking to his wife, "the husband swore that he would get two or three barrels of water, regardless of the price and in any way" (Zefzaf 2017: 479). He manages to get water and deliver it in a truck, together with two soldiers who "steal water from the barracks and sell it on the market, the black market" (Zefzaf 2017: 481). This moment of culmination in the story is presented with mixed feelings of the main protagonists. The husband "sits on the ground and stares into space, with his back against the corral" (Zefzaf 2017: 482). The children are happy and carefree, while Fadma expresses doubt and nervousness about the way the water was obtained. The last segment in the story describes the arrival of a gendarmerie jeep, followed by a scene of violence in which one of the two gendarmes physically attacks the husband. Zefzaf ends the story with a question mark after the gendarme asked Fadma's husband: "Say, where is the water" (Zefzaf 2017: 484)

The story is only seven pages long, and, accordingly, the action is very straightforward. Despite the small volume of the story, the writer manages to cover several aspects of the challenges of Moroccan society, and by expressing it in simple language, he additionally emphasizes the harsh picture that is presented to the reader. The harshness of the drought and its gruesome consequences are the central motifs, and here, a few examples that, in author's opinion, are the most intense, are singled out.

Apart from the fact that, as stated above, on the first page the reader learns that Fadma lives alone with her children, the reader is informed that the main heroine's life and the lives of her children depend entirely on her cousin's help: "If it wasn't for Raqush, Fadma Tameslouht and her the children would die", and "if Rakush hadn't been her sister, she wouldn't have given her a sip of water" (Zefzaf 2017: 477). On the following page, another description of the land is shown from the main character's point of view: "The land before her eyes was bare, dry and cracked⁹ and the land became like a stone slab" (Zefzaf 2017: 478). Another, very simply written, but in its simplicity very brutal description, also from Fadma's point of view: "She kept watching the dirt road. Lean and weak, the animal apparitions barely move. They are waiting for the moment they will die" (Zefzaf 2017: 479).

The overall sense of anguish is contributed by the lines that talk about poverty, even outside the context of drought as a central motif. For example: "...one of her sons is quarreling with his brother who snatched from him a roll of rags, made for them by Fadma Tameslouht, when they asked her to buy them a ball" (Zefzaf 2017:

⁹ Ar. *Kānat al-Arḍ amām 'aynayhā jadba wa qāhila wa mutahafira.*

477). Also interesting are the sentences that talk about the clothes the children wore: “They didn't have trousers. They had wide *qashabiyas*¹⁰, open on the left shoulder”. “The *qashabiyas* are dirty and torn at some edges” (Zefzaf 2017: 480).

This sentence is also interesting because of the type of clothes the children are wearing, i.e., the fact that it is traditional Amazigh clothing. Namely, the writer weaves the Amazigh identity of the inhabitants of the drought-stricken region through the entire story. He does this in a discreet way, as is the case with the *qashabiyas*, as well as by using Amazigh personal names, but also by including a short dialogue in the Amazigh language, between Fadma and her son.

3. The Amazigh People

The question of Amazigh rights has a very important place in Morocco, since it is a country with the largest number of native speakers of Amazigh language, about ten million (Sadiqi, 2011:34), while there are studies which claim that as much as 45% of Moroccan population speak one of Amazigh language dialects (El Aissati 2005:60). At the same time, Morocco as a country inherits a strong Arab identity, further emphasized by the fact that the ruling dynasty is directly descended from the Prophet Muhammad. Consequently, most of the Amazigh people, who are the indigenous population of Morocco, have been successfully Arabized. This was particularly the case in the bigger cities and was clearly obvious during numerous interviews conducted in Morocco, Serbia, and Montenegro, in the period between 2015 and 2020. Statistics on the percentage of people of Berber descent in Morocco vary, but generally sources agree that between 70 and 80% of the country's population is of Amazigh descent.

However, when it comes to languages, many Moroccans do not speak the Amazigh language at all, and the most people the author has had the opportunity to talk to on the subject have made it clear that they are ethnically Arab, not Amazigh. A smaller number stated that they considered themselves Arabs of Amazigh origin, while a clear minority identified themselves as Amazigh and they were the only ones who knew the Amazigh language. Here, it should be noted that most interviewees came from larger cities such as Rabat, Casablanca, Marrakesh etc., and that the Amazigh population lives mostly in the interior, in rural areas (Sadiqi, 2011, 34), although there are cities that nurture the Amazigh culture, and in which the Amazigh language is dominantly spoken, such as Agadir, Hoceima, Nador (Ar. Al-Nāzūr), etc. Also, there are places like the town of Zagora, where the influence of Amazigh culture

¹⁰ Qashabiya – a type of traditional Amazigh clothing worn in parts of Morocco and Algeria.

is obvious, and many of its residents do speak Amazigh language, but the language dominantly used in everyday communication is Moroccan Arabic.

In any case, Zefzaf's heroes in *Drought* are Amazigh people from the rural parts of the country, and by discreetly emphasizing their ethnic identity, the writer probably wants to point out the subordinate position of the indigenous population in Morocco. This solution can be seen as a coincidence or simply as a natural thing, since the plot of the story is set in a rural environment, which is often inhabited by Amazigh, but the outcome of the story speaks in favor of the fact that the Amazigh identity is still purposefully highlighted. Namely, the gendarme who physically attacks Fadma's husband, accusing him of "stealing state water from the military barrack, where is the barrel?", addresses him with "Berber, you son of a dog!" (Zefzaf 2017: 484):

- *Yā Shilh, yā ibn al-kalb! Tasriq mā' al-dawla, min al-thukna al-'askariyya, ayna al-barmīl?*

The word *Shilh*, which is used here, is the one that is often used for the Amazigh people from the central and southern parts of Morocco. However, among them there are those who reject this very name and consider it offensive, since the root *sh / h* in Arabic, is used to describe a type of armed robbery. This opinion is not widespread among Imazighen, but even if this word *per se*, in the linguistic sense, does not have a negative connotation, it is without a doubt highlighted by the very emphasis of placing one's ethnicity in the same sentence with a grave insult.

This spontaneous way of informing the reader about the Amazigh origin of the main heroes is also found in Mohammed Choukri's famous autobiography *For Bread Alone* where he very early, on the first page, and then again on the fifth, introduces a short dialogue in Amazigh language, between himself and his mother¹¹, while in *Drought* also, Fadma addresses her son Amazigh language in one situation. In both cases, this issue is not the central motive, but Zefzaf and Choukri found a simple and perfect way to weave it into the text.

The status of Amazigh people and their language today is somewhat different compared to the period when this story was written. After gaining independence, the attitude of the state was mostly indifferent towards the Amazigh people and there

¹¹ The dialogue lines are written in Amazigh language and then the Arabic translation is given in brackets. Interestingly, the English version of this book (translated by Paul Bowles) is not the literal translation and, in this case, for example, it only gives the translation to English and does not mention that these lines were originally written in both Amazigh and Arabic.

were no initiatives that would deal with the protection of their culture, language and identity in general (Willis 2014: 212). For example, the Constitution from 1962 mentioned nothing about Amazigh identity or language (El Aissati 2005:62). Moreover, the decades after gaining independence were a period of Arabization of Moroccan society, which, for example, in the case of the bilingual education system (French and Arabic), meant that it gradually switched completely to the Arabic language. So, not only was there no mention of education in Amazigh, but education in French was also abolished. Primary and secondary education was fully Arabized in 1990 (Sadiqi).

Not long after, the situation began to change, and the Amazigh organizations showed initiative, which was formalized through the signing of the Agadir Charter on August 5, 1991. The Agadir Charter, among other things, states that the Amazigh language should be recognized in the Moroccan Constitution as a national language, along with Arabic, and should be included in the education system (Agadir Charter 1991). The situation improved towards the end of the reign of Hassan II (reign period: 1961 - 1999) and in the early years of his son's reign (Mohammed VI) who is still the king of Morocco, in September 2003, the Amazigh language entered the education system (Sadiqi 2011: 33). Nevertheless, it took nearly a decade for Amazigh to become the official language of the Kingdom of Morocco, alongside Arabic, which was confirmed in article five of the 2011 Constitution of Morocco. The same article of the Constitution adds that the stages in the formalization of this decision will be determined by law, which was done seven years later - in 2018.

It is evident, therefore, that much has been done to improve the status of Amazigh people compared to the period when *Drought* was written. However, the words of activists who deal with the Amazigh rights, as well as individual members of the Amazigh community, with whom the author of this paper had numerous informal conversations during the period spent in Morocco, speak in favor of the fact that there is still a lot of room for development. Critics believe that the changes in the status of Amazigh people are mostly cosmetic in nature, and that discrimination continues at all levels, including the education system. One of the controversial issues is, for example, the use of the Neo-Tifinagh (Ar. Tīfināgh) alphabet as the official Amazigh script in Morocco.

The contentiousness of this decision lies in the fact that this script, although it has its roots in the traditional Amazigh script, is not the script used by the Amazigh people during the period when their language was not in official use. It is a new script for them, which consequently limits the opportunities for education in their language.

In any case, the Tifinagh has a very characteristic and recognizable shape, so it has a very strong symbolic value and is often used in Morocco for that purpose. Inscriptions with the names of many institutions are written in Arabic, French and Amazigh, including the board in front of the Embassy of the Republic of Serbia in Rabat, but the overall impression is that the strength of the Tifinagh as a symbol of Amazigh identity has achieved greater success than the efforts to improve the status of Amazigh people actually and fundamentally. However, it is certain that the first steps have been taken, which is surely a positive sign and can give the indigenous people of Morocco a reason for mild optimism.

4. Rural vs. Urban

In addition to the status of Amazigh people, the story points out the differences between life in rural and urban areas. Zefzaf does not write about it too extensively, but more than enough to draw attention to it. For example, Fadma's husband's inner dialogue on the sixth page of the story stands out: "He raises his eyes to the sky, it was completely clean. And in Casablanca the sky was also clear and blue. But they have everything there, even water in the pools. He saw them swimming, drinking wine and eating sandwiches, and men hugging women and laughing" (Zefzaf 2017: 482).

From a 21st century perspective, it is important to highlight a few things here. Over the past decades, Morocco has worked very hard to reduce the level of poverty. The results are such that the level of poverty has drastically decreased, and that the gross social product per capita has almost doubled (The World Bank 2018: 1). However, despite these encouraging figures, there is an increase in the subjective level of poverty, i.e., the percentage of people who consider themselves poor. Compared to 2007, 41.8% of Moroccans considered themselves poor, and in 2014, that percentage was 45.1%. (The World Bank 2018: 2). However, when only the population from rural areas is considered, this percentage is as high as 54.3% (The World Bank 2018: 2), which means that more than half of Moroccans from rural areas consider themselves poor, and for residents of rural areas under the age of 25, this the percentage went as high as 57.6% (The World Bank 2018:3).

The development of Morocco in some aspects cannot be disputed, and the spectacular projects mentioned in the introduction of this paper stand as a powerful symbol of this development. In that sense, today's Morocco is in many ways more developed compared to the Morocco of Zefzaf's time. But if we take the poor strata of society, the ones Zefzaf wrote about the most, the gap between the rich and the poor

seems to be widening. In *Drought*, emphasis was placed on the difference between the quality of life in the city and the countryside, but it should be noted that the situation within the city itself is often very problematic. After all, Zefzaf wrote more about life in the poor neighborhoods of the city, and in this story, he possibly wanted to point out that there is another level of this problem of inequality. And even though the poorer city neighborhoods are still very much a cause for concern, the statistics, as seen above, do suggest that the percentage of poor people in rural areas is clearly very high. Apart from poverty as such, rural life in Morocco bears different set of issues, some of them presented in *Drought*, such as migration to the city, as a result of poverty, in order to provide for family, which is a widespread phenomenon in this country. In his other works, Zefzaf, in example, also pays attention to the position of women in Moroccan society, and, in that aspect, a particularly good example is *A Long Hand*¹², a deeply saddening and, at times, disturbing story, which is also set in a rural region of Morocco. Another example is *The Medical Center*¹³, a story in which Zefzaf tells the story about providing health care in a rural area, while brilliantly and vividly, in only few sentences, or even words, pointing out to a series of other underlying issues.

Several decades after Zefzaf's *Drought*, the author of this paper had plenty of opportunities to observe persistence and seriousness of the problem of social inequality. As an illustration to this statement, the author himself had an interesting conversation, in the suburbs of Sale, Dwar Jbala, with a teenager, aged between 15 and 17, who asked the author about his reasons for visiting Morocco. The author replied describing his love of the Moroccan culture, language, cuisine, people, climate, and expressed his wish to study and get to know Morocco. The boy reacted with a friendly look, but, at the same time, a look full of disappointment and frustration, as he said, paraphrasing: *I don't know why anyone would come to Morocco, we all dream of escaping from here*. Although it is not directly related to the conversation that took place on the morning of July 13, 2018, it is illustrative of the social differences in Morocco that on the same day, only in the evening, the author had the opportunity to attend the Diamond League Meeting in athletics, where some from the world's best athletes took part. The organization of such an event is neither simple nor cheap and it really stands in striking contrast to the conversation led that same morning.¹⁴

¹² Ar. *Yad ʿawīla*

¹³ Ar. *Al-Markaz al-ṣiḥḥī*

¹⁴ The list of other cities where the Diamond League meetings were organized in 2018 perhaps gives the most vivid description of the economic requirements for organizing such an event: Doha, Shanghai, Eugene, Rome, Oslo, Stockholm, Paris, Lausanne, Monaco, London, Birmingham, Zurich and Brussels.

A conversation with a teenager, although not insignificant by any chance, cannot be relevant on its own to create a broader picture of social differences in Morocco. However, the social inequality comes up very often as a topic in conversation with Moroccans. The problems that Moroccans of the most diverse levels of education often point to are usually in some way related to the economic conditions, that is, the absence of perspective and prospects for a dignified and secure life. This often results in numerous dangerous attempts of mostly young Moroccans to illegally migrate to the countries of the European Union, either by sea or by taking the so-called Balkan route that mainly leads them through Serbia.¹⁵

The issue of illegal migration is very broad and must include the analysis of a whole set of reasons, political, social and economic circumstances and, as such, it goes beyond the scope of this paper. However, what can be concluded is that despite numerous indicators of Morocco's development, this country has a serious problem with social differences, where a large number of people live excluded, and on the margins, and that, both subjectively, and based on some statistical indicators, that gap grew even bigger. Also, something that deserves a separate study, and which will only be mentioned here, are things like the very poor state of the health system, as well as the education system, which results in a high percentage of the illiterate population. These are all elements, which, together with the challenges concerning the rights of the Amazigh people, and human rights in general, certainly have a negative effect on the state of Moroccan society.

So, in a few sentences, Zefzaf indicates the difference in the quality of life between the city and the countryside. He possibly wants to show what that difference looks like from the point of view of a rural resident. From there, the city certainly seems like a glittering, colorful, lure that offers an opportunity for a better life. However, that glamor is reserved only for certain layers of the city's population, while the hero of Zefzaf's *Drought*, Fadma's husband, says the following about his work in

¹⁵ During the spring of 2019, the author interviewed several dozen illegal migrants, most of whom were from Algeria and Morocco, near the border crossing between Montenegro and Albania. These were mostly younger men, who set out on this dangerous journey in search of a better life. The level of frustration and exasperation with the living conditions was high enough for them to buy a plane ticket to Turkey, and there, upon arrival, throw away their passports and illegally continue on foot to Albania, Montenegro and further to Bosnia and Herzegovina or Serbia, in order to continue their journey to the countries of Western Europe. There are also many who choose a different route and try to reach the European Union by sea or by illegally entering the territory of Ceuta or Melilla - the two Spanish exclaves in North Africa, which are the territories that Morocco also historically claims. For example, in May 2021, the columns of mainstream media were filled for several days by the spectacular entry of about six thousand migrants, who swam to Ceuta (CNN 2021). Such a mass migration in just one day/attempt was also a consequence of diplomatic tensions between Spain and Morocco, but that cannot deny the fact that six thousand people, of which about 1,500 are minors, decided to take such a desperate step.

the city: "As for me, my feet got torn from walking, from cafe to cafe, and from running while fleeing from the auxiliary forces, who many times took me to the station under boots and kicks" (Zefzaf 2017: 479).

5. The Drought as a Growing Problem

Finally, in the following lines, the problem of the drought itself is looked into, which, as a central symbol of social insecurity in this story, generates a whole series of challenges that were discussed on the previous pages. Compared to the period when this story was written, today, the campaign to prevent, or at least control, climate change is much more active and certainly a larger number of ordinary people, as well as those in leadership positions, are more aware of this problem. As part of this global issue, the current topic of the drought in Morocco should be considered, because today it represents a much more serious problem than it used to be in the eighties of the 20th century, when Zefzaf used it as inspiration for the story. As evidence for such an assertion, the author uses the definition of the United Nations, which considers a water shortage to be the situation when the annual available water per capita falls below the level of 1000m³ (United Nations), combined with the fact that in Morocco the amount of available water is 600m³, and that in the 1960s it was 2600m³ per capita. Certainly, the entire problem cannot be blamed on climate change, since the population of Morocco has also increased many times over, but that does not change the fact that the situation in Morocco today is far more serious than it was a few decades ago. There are several other factors that contribute to Morocco being affected by drought, some of which will be mentioned here.

There are many regions in Morocco that are often affected by drought and water shortages, and one of them is the region of the city of Zagora in the southeastern part of the country. Zagora is located almost on the edge of the desert and is characterized by an extremely hot climate. In previous years, especially in 2017 and 2018, residents from this area organized protests due to chronic water shortages. For more than a decade, the only tap water available to the inhabitants of Zagora was salty and, as such, unsuitable for drinking (Zaireg 2017). However, in 2017, the supply of that water too was interrupted for three months (Nunnally 2018), which led to protests by angry citizens, and consequently to the arrest of 23 people. However, clearly aware of the problem, the Moroccan government has acutely tried to solve it by drilling public wells, about 200m deep (Nunnally 2018), which, together with water purification projects, improved the situation and, for example, Zagora town today has drinkable tap water.

Still, this year the agriculture in that region was severely hit by the drought and the date harvest in autumn is expected to be very weak in comparison to earlier times.¹⁶

This, certainly big, problem for the inhabitants of Morocco is multi-layered. The first and most obvious reason is climate change. Since the abovementioned sixties of the 20th century, the average temperature has increased by one degree Celsius, and it is expected to increase by another 1.5 degrees at the national level by 2050, while it will be even higher in the scorching interior of the country (Nunnally 2018). Morocco is aware of this problem and invests a great effort and lots of resources into the fight against climate change. According to the Climate Change Performance Index, an independent study that publishes its results annually, in 2022 Morocco is among the top five countries with the best results in the world.

What Morocco is proud of when it comes to the fight against climate change is its progress in the field of renewable energy. For example, in the southern region of Tarfaya, Morocco built the largest wind farm in Africa, with total of 131 wind turbines (Hochberg 2016:9). But even more impressive is the fact that the concentrated solar power plant *Nur* in the region of the city of Ouarzazate (ar. Warzāzāt) is the largest power plant of this type in the world. This massive project in an area relatively close to the desert aims to turn the power of the sun, into a tool for the production of renewable energy, with large capacities for export. It sounds nice, but there is also a negative aspect here, which indicates the complexity of the situation. Namely, the technology used for this type of energy production uses large amounts of water, which is heated by sunlight and converted into electricity (Alami 2021). Critics consider the fact that a country suffering from a shortage of water uses, ironically, water to produce electricity, to be very controversial. According to Muhammad al-Tazarouti, a Greenpeace activist, by exporting electricity produced in Ouarzazate, Morocco is essentially exporting water, taking it away from local communities (2021). Analyzing the situation with the *Nur* power plant, one gets the impression that Morocco is in a vicious circle in which one problem generates another, but the great effort this country is making to resolve the issue is certainly commendable.¹⁷

¹⁶ Interview with Zagora resident, August 2022.

¹⁷ Moroccan agriculture is also in that vicious circle, as one of its main elements. Again Zagora is used as an example, since it is a region known for the production of dates and, more recently, watermelons. As for the date palm trees, they are used to an extremely dry climate, but according to the statements of several residents of this region, the date production, a major source of income for many locals, is also struggling heavily. That alone is a serious problem, but then the watermelon production comes as another shock since the watermelon consists of over 90% water and must be watered abundantly. Watermelons from Zagora have a reputation to be the best in Morocco, which the author was told on several occasions when visiting that part of the country. As a result, there was a big jump in production, in order to respond to the increasing demand, in Morocco itself, but also in Europe (Nunnally 2018). A big jump in production, logically, results

Different aspects of the fight against drought are parts of a serious problem that Morocco is witnessing in this very dry year in North-West Africa. This year's statistics regarding Morocco's climate are, month after month, consistently negative. Already in February, it was written about how 64% less rain than average fell at the beginning of 2022 (Eljechtimi 2022). Winter, the period when Morocco receives the highest amount of rain (Climate Change Knowledge Portal), announced an extremely difficult year, and more bad news followed. Thus, in April, the Moroccan media announced a record low wheat production, even 70% lower compared to last year (Rahhou 2022). Based on this, it can be concluded that the problem that Zefzaf wrote about forty years ago remains current and represents one of the most serious challenges for Moroccan society today.

6. Final Observations

What is undoubtedly much more important than simply stating that Morocco has the same problems it had almost half a century ago, is the question of whether something is being done to overcome these difficulties. According to the al-Monitor portal, which quotes Youssef Brouzyine from the Department for the Middle East and North Africa at the Institute of Water Management¹⁸, Morocco has invested heavily in the construction of dams since the 1960s and *currently, Morocco has 149 large dams*, and to also build *twenty water desalination plants* (Radouai 2022). These ambitious projects, if they are successfully completed, will certainly help in overcoming the problem, but it should also be noted that some experts, among others in the above-mentioned text of the al-Monitor portal, warn that desalination systems are destroying the marine ecosystem. Again, these are topics that go beyond the scope of this work and require expert analysis. Here it was important to mention it in the context of pointing out the complexity of the situation once again.¹⁹

in ever-increasing water consumption and, once again, in the region that suffers from water shortages, perhaps more than any other region of Morocco. Large watermelons, full of water, vividly describe the absurdity of the situation, but the issue with agriculture in general is such that it does not leave many ways to solve it. A large share of available water in Morocco is used for irrigation, as much as 90% (Nunnally 2019). The first thing that comes to mind is the reduction of that percentage, but in this way, the agriculture on which the majority of the population depends, especially in the rural parts of the country, is endangered. It is clear that in this way the problem is not fundamentally solved, but instead, only another, no less harmful, type of problem is created.

¹⁸ The International Institute for Water Management is an international organization with offices around the world.

¹⁹ With the words of Nizar Baraka, the Moroccan Minister of Equipment and Water, from part of the statement quoted on the Middle East portal (Alsharq al-Awsat), The Moroccan government plans to build 20 more dams by the end of 2027, it can be concluded that the leadership of this the country is more than aware of the problem and is really making efforts to deal with it. The question, which remains open, is to what extent they manage to keep the drought problem under control, because despite the efforts of the authorities, it is also evident that the issue, which has existed for decades, seems increasingly serious. However, we cannot

In the beginning of the article, it is stated that *Drought* sends a powerful message in virtually every sentence regarding some of the most painful problems of Moroccan society. The author's goal was to share Zefzaf's message by selecting and analyzing, according to his choice, the most impressive parts of the story, but also to place that story in the present day. Compared to the eighties of the 20th century, Morocco has really experienced a transformation. Today, the structure of one of the tallest buildings in Africa is finished and the tower has its outline. At the location where the building is located, in 2019, there was nothing to see that would indicate the spectacular nature of this project. In 2022, the Tower of the African Bank, or, as it is officially called, the Tower of Mohamed VI, already dominates the panorama of Rabat and Sale.²⁰ In general, Rabat in 2022 is much more "made up" and more "beautiful" than it was, say, in 2019, at least in its more "visible" parts.²¹ The developed Rabat here plays a part of Casablanca in Zefzaf's *Drought*, where people have water in pools, drink wine and eat sandwiches, which is, in its simplicity, an excellent metaphor, and could be compared with perhaps the favorite street food of today's Rabat – tacos. In any case, Rabat certainly is a shiny bait that lures many inhabitants of rural areas. The infrastructural development in big city, as a result of economic growth, was criticized and even, in a witty way, mocked in Zefzaf's story *Everyday Problem* (Ar. Mushkila kul yawm)

The contrast to the overall impression of content and progress is created by the large number of beggars. Among them, a beggar, possibly from sub-Saharan Africa, stands out. He is perhaps in his thirties, with atrophied muscles in his legs, that are somehow intertwined with the hands which he uses to move. He has been there for years, on the plateau in the Old Town, at the intersection of the Boulevard of Mohammed V and Souika Street (ar. Suwayqa). All these people stand as a symbol of life in a different, much less smiling Rabat, which does not enjoy the benefits of economic progress. There is a great story by Zefzaf about a physically handicapped

know how serious this problem would have been if nothing had been done about it. Therefore, answering that question is not among the goals of this paper, and certainly, dealing with climate change, water desalination and other areas relevant to solving problems like those that Morocco has, is far beyond author's competences.

²⁰ The aesthetics of the building itself, it's fitting or not fitting into the panorama of the Moroccan capital and its poorer sister city, and in general the need for such an enormous building to exist in such a place, are all topics for serious discussion. But its value as a symbol that testifies to Morocco's economic power is undisputable.

²¹ The walls of the Old Town were renovated, new decorative lighting was installed, sidewalks, lawns, many shops in its interior were reconstructed. On the other side, towards the Bouregreg river, the walls are also decorated, and the new lights were put. The renovated quay is full of smiling people who, along with their children enjoy in various entertainment options this part of the city has to offer.

beggar titled *The Small Child Stroller* (Ar. 'Arabat al-aṭfāl al-ṣaghīra) which could be perfectly placed in today's Rabat, even though it was written several decades earlier.

The period of the year in which these lines were written is the mid July 2022, a few days after Eid al-Adha, and Rabat had not yet fully recovered that colorful rhythm that it normally has. Because, like Fadma's husband, many people have returned to their homes, and it will not be until some seven, ten, or more days after Eid that they will start arriving back, returning to their jobs. Despite the progress mentioned so many times, it should be noted that this society still suffers from some of the same ailments that it suffered from during Zefzaf's time. The *Eid migration* was mentioned here to make a symbolic parallel with the story. The husband of Fadma Tameslouht in Zefzaf's *Drought* would certainly belong to this large group of both men and women that live an everyday struggle, far from their homes and fighting to provide for their families.

The issue of social differences is a real and persistent problem, somewhat like the problem of drought, and it does not seem to be diminishing. It is sometimes symbolized by a completely different type of migration, the illegal one. It is not just a matter of statistics and number of young people who leave Morocco illegally in search of a better life, but also the fact that they are ready for almost anything, even to literally put their own lives in danger, to reach their goal. As a Moroccan music band Hoba Hoba Spirit, who often sing about social issues, nicely put it: "Either I get there and gather with my brothers, or we roll over here and sleep with the fish"²². The illegal migrations are today a very popular way of dealing with problems for many young Moroccans, but in case of *Drought*, the illegal aspect of struggle to survive is embodied in stealing water from military. The need to steal the most basic things such as water is certainly another extreme manifestation of despair, and unfortunately, the water problem is very much real in today's Morocco as well.

Finally, the status of Amazigh people is a field where it can be stated that visible progress has been achieved in the previous decades. With such sensitive issues, there will always be those who are dissatisfied, and it does not mean that their dissatisfaction is unfounded. The question of to what extent the status of the Amazigh people is actually improving, and to what extent these changes are only superficial and cosmetic, will be answered with time. The declaration of the Berber language as an

²² Moroccan Arabic: *Imma nwṣṣl tmma u ntzaḥm ma' l-khūt, imma ntgalbū hnāya u na` sū ma' l-ḥūt*. The song is titled *L'hrig*, meaning *illegal migration*.

official language in Morocco represents a solid foundation for further progress, but the more palpable results are still hoped-for.

The overall impression is that *Drought*, like many other stories by Zefzaf, is an outstanding time capsule in which this Moroccan writer masterfully packed some of the most unpleasant issues that plagued Moroccan society at the time. Its opening, forty years later, was a fascinating experience that not only provided an insight into the situation at that time, but also set clear initial parameters for the analysis of Morocco's improvement.

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