

The Doctor-Writer Experience of Intissar Haddiya: A Moroccan figure

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Abstract

Intissar Haddiya is a researcher and Professor of Nephrology in the faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, Oujda, Morocco. So far, she has published impactful works in her field of research. As a writer, I. Haddiya has published widely on social, cultural, and health issues in French in addition to some earlier promising endeavours in English as a student. Being an active citizen, she is highly engaged in community life through her key roles in several nephrology associations. In this interview, Professor I. Haddiya shares with the Anglophone reading community her writing experience and sources of inspiration, the intersection between being a writer and being a doctor, as well as her future literary projects. Her successful experience will most probably inspire emerging talents, particularly women.

Keywords: doctor-writer; Intissar Haddiya; Moroccan social novel; nephrologist; women writers

Introduction

French novelist Victor Hugo once wrote, ‘a writer is a world trapped in a person’. (Hugo 1877: 219). The so many worlds a writer can imagine and express in words reflect their formidable writing experience, be it a daring escapade from the colourlessness of the day or the dullness of the night, an expression of joy at the present moment, or a commitment to noble a cause, writing fiction creates a myriad of new possibilities of becoming. No wonder not all people are made writers as this journey needs a whole toolbox of adventurism but also what Russian novelist Anton Chekhov describes as the ability to show the readers the glint of moonlight on a broken glass (Chekhov (1886) 1954: 14).

Born in 1981, Intissar Haddiya grew up and pursued her studies in Rabat-Morocco. Becoming a doctor was a childhood dream coming true. This dream was fuelled by an American television series *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* which tells of the determination of a female doctor, a role played by the veteran actress Jane Seymour. Blown away by the actress’s strong will and her capacity to alleviate the patient’s pain, Dr Haddiya decided to enter medical school in 1998. She is currently a researcher and Professor of Nephrology in the faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy in Oujda, Morocco. As a writer, she has published widely on social, cultural, and health issues in French, including *Si Dieu Nous Prête Vie* (Saint Honoré, 2016), *Au Fil des Songes* (Saint Honoré, 2017), *L’Inconnue* (Saint Honoré, 2019), and *Trahison Pieuse* (Librinova, 2021). Her impact as a writer lies in her capacity to establish her career in an environment where it is hard to find a female doctor writer in Morocco or to come across Moroccan novels depicting new topics such as kidney transplantation and adoption. Dr. Haddiya is also highly committed to community life, as manifested in her key roles in several nephrology associations, including a kidney patient support association in the East of Morocco. Her impact as a nephrologist is manifested in her deep knowledge of kidney-related solutions and her critical contributions to specialised healthcare for kidney patients in the region. In this interview, this doctor-writer shares with the Anglophone reading community her writing experience and her sources of inspiration, the intersection between being a writer and being a doctor, as well as her future literary projects.

About the Author’s Writing Experience

Abdelhafid Jabri: Hello, Professor. As inspiration is intertwined with imagination, my first question would be what inspired you to become a fiction writer?

Intissar Haddiya: Hi, Mr Jabri. Scion of an educated family, I started my career as a writer at the age of 17. My first essays and short stories in English were published by Cambridge University Press in New York. For example, 'My Father' was published in their compendium of essays *In Our Own Words*.ⁱ It was a platform from which I described how my father shaped my personality. Being a well-trained psychologist and having unique accents set him apart from others. What is more, 'he is ambitious, intellectual, and moral. He helped me to shape my own goals and ideals in my life' (**Haddiya, 2005: 67**). Admittedly, the role of my mother was of equal importance in my upbringing because, in addition to her academic background as a psychologist and philosophy professor, her guidance and emotional support were a major force in my life.

My other main sources of inspiration have been reading and openness to different enriching professional experiences. To begin with, I was always a bookworm of world fiction. Amongst the great works that captured my imagination were Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Stefan Zweig's *Journey Into the Past*, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Secondly, being an open-minded woman who keeps learning from everyday challenges greatly helped me. While still a teenager, I explained in a letter to the editors of *In Our Words*, 'how reading essays written by students from all over the world taught [me] to appreciate the differences between cultures and to understand the ways in which cultures have different impacts over their people' (**Ibid: 66**).

Abdelhafid: You touched upon an essential point: the value of upbringing and self-determination in making a good writer. It also brings to the fore the question of writing as a meaningful act. Since writing means so much to every devoted writer, what does writing fiction, in particular, mean to you?

Intissar: That's a really great question. It means so much to me. I am lucky to have readers within and outside my professional milieu. My fellow doctors always read and interact with my publications and keep encouraging me. What also warms my heart is the substantial number of my medical students who take me as a model. In fact, their first endeavours in writing always fill my heart with joy. As far as my fiction writing is concerned, it mainly takes Morocco as a narrative context for my novels. This is because Moroccan society and culture are replete with exciting and unexplored themes worthy of being translated into fiction. This choice brings to mind the core values of my writing: Morocanness and universal values.ⁱⁱ My writings offer the readers the opportunity to imagine the suffering of people in situations applicable worldwide. In so doing, they also reflect Moroccan cultural identity incorporated into beliefs, customs, lifestyle, and the collective unconscious.

About the Author's Novels

Abdelhafid: Good! Let us talk about your novels. Your debut novel *Si Dieu Nous Prête Vie* depicts the daily suffering of hemodialysis patients. ⁱⁱⁱ After reading it, I felt there are intersections between the narrator and you, as the author. In what way has your profession as a nephrologist contributed to this work?

Intissar: There is a strong link between my profession as a doctor and my literary career as a writer. The doctor-writer experience is quite rich because the real suffering I see daily is a springboard for my inspiration. Thus, the fictitious characters I construct result from this real-life experience. That being said, human history is full of concrete examples of doctors who were also writers, two of whom are Anton Chekhov and Arthur Conan Doyle. In fact, I see the medical and writing practices as complementary rather than unrelated because both are noble, profound, and human-focused. Furthermore, both practices give us a clear idea about the true nature of humans' interaction with their society. This can be observed in my French novel *Si Dieu Nous Prête Vie*, which is an endeavour to make the voice of dialysis patients heard. It takes the readers on a journey where they explore the high value of kidney donation and transplantation as life-saving initiatives.

Abdelhafid: The hope this novel carries outweighs the suffering it communicates. What I have also remarked is that your other novel *L'Inconnue*, which also reflects the same impact of your medical profession, highlights the value of humanity in social relationships over other considerations. ^{iv} Is not that an invitation to stress what we, humans, have in common in a world of constant unease?

Intissar: Well. As for the infusion of the medical career into this novel, it can be felt towards the end of the story. It also reconfirms what has been said earlier. Besides being a social novel, *L'Inconnue* talks about the mystery of an unexpected encounter, a history enamelled by a unique affection between the main characters from different horizons. This also reveals that solid relationships exist beyond family, religious and social contact zones; they exist in the larger realm of humanity. This message is sent across via the theme of child adoption as one of the noblest manifestations of human morality. What further characterises this fiction work is the series of unexpected events occurring to the adopted child, contributing thus to its overall catching nature.

Abdelhafid: In your novels, I can see the move from one social cause to the other. This leads us to your third one *Trahison Pieuse*, which revolves around the condition of women in Morocco. ^v Does your being a woman help or hinder your writing experience?

Intissar: I would express it this way: although I talk about Moroccan women and their daily concerns in this novel, I do not think about my gender when writing. Except for the overwhelming time-intensive responsibilities in my life, being a woman does not, in fact, hinder my writing experience but rather enriches it. The real hindrance is depriving a woman of her chance for education. Women are like fountains; the more space they have, the more resourceful and inspiring they become. Unfortunately, the few female writers here and elsewhere can explain the unsatisfactory rates of girls' education. Such barriers usually lead to narrow outlooks on the future and social problems, some of which I describe in my works.

About the Author's Future Projects

Abdelhafid: This is quite enriching! Let's talk about the dissemination of your literary experience. I could notice that addressing the francophone reading community has dominated your books. Have you thought about targeting the Anglophone community as well?

Intissar: That is a good point! As you've said, most of my works are in French, but French is not a foreign language in Morocco. Together with Moroccan Arabic, we have learned it since childhood; we see it everywhere and every day and many Moroccan people speak it fluently. Henceforth, writing fiction in French is somehow 'ordinary' for someone raised in Morocco. Regarding my future plans to use other languages, such as Arabic or English, everything surely happens in its own time. But for the time being, my highest priority is to get my work translated from French into English.

Abdelhafid: I have heard that a new book of yours would be published. Could you tell us something about it?

Intissar: Yes, it would. The book is the fruit of many years of study. It was a dissertation I defended to get my PhD doctorate, titled *La Responsabilité Sociale en Santé: Quelle Application en Afrique? Exemple de la Prise en Charge de la Maladie Rénale*. It revolves around social responsibility in healthcare in ten African countries from the main five regions of the continent and proposes the best ways for kidney disease management. Alphabetically, these countries are Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Mauritania, Mali, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tunisia and Zambia. The book is based on questionnaires addressed to different stakeholders and on the evaluation of their different experiences. I am hopeful that national decision-makers will find this work enlightening and resourceful.

Furthermore, one may notice that the social concern links my doctoral dissertation, my fiction writing, my profession, and my social commitment because I strongly believe they are inseparable.

Abdelhafid: That's true, and most importantly finding a link between all these aspects brings more focus. I am grateful for interviewing with you, Professor. Do you have any last words for future writers?

Intissar: Thank you, Mr Jabri. I would like to address my message to future writers in general and female talents in particular: Always stay diligent, virtuous and self-confident as they are the three keys to success in your career as a writer.

Abdelhafid Jabri is a doctoral student in the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Mohammed I University, Oujda, Morocco. His research interests focus on moral and environmental philosophy in literature but also on their applications in higher education. His doctoral thesis examines environmental ethics in two environmental novels. Jabri is also a French-English translator and an emerging writer of poetry. Some of his scholarly and creative works were published in Moroccan, British and American journals.

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Endnotes

ⁱ This essay can be found at:

https://books.google.co.ma/books?id=hstDYCedl8C&printsec=frontcover&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=intissar%20haddiya&f=false

ⁱⁱ Moroccaness: From Moroccan nationality, it means the reflection of the Moroccan identity on one's writing.

ⁱⁱⁱ This novel can be found at: https://www.amazon.com/Dieu-nous-pr%C3%AAt-e-vie-French/dp/2407001451/ref=sr_1_2?crd=17UFJWPEE44RS&keywords=haddiya&qid=1672934028&srefix=haddiya%2Caps%2C271&sr=8-2

^{iv} This novel can be found at: https://www.amazon.com/LINCONNUE-French-INTISSAR-HADDIYA/dp/2407012763/ref=sr_1_1?crd=17UFJWPEE44RS&keywords=haddiya&qid=1672934005&srefix=haddiya%2Caps%2C271&sr=8-1

^v This novel can be found at: https://www.amazon.com/Trahison-pieuse-French-Intissar-Haddiya-ebook/dp/B093SXBZ6C/ref=sr_1_4?crd=17UFJWPEE44RS&keywords=haddiya&qid=1672934028&srefix=haddiya%2Caps%2C271&sr=8-4