Contemporary Moroccan Thought

On Philosophy, Theology, Society, and Culture

Edited by

Mohammed Hashas

BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

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Foreword: Writing as Critical Intellectual Gratitude

Although this was a collective effort, a personal note from the editor on the genealogy of the idea behind the project may help for intellectual history purposes. The task of editors is not at all a mere collection of chapters for publication. Editors ideally aim for scholarly cooperation and investigation of new and under-researched fields of study. An editorial work is undertaken when time and effort are collected and invested so as to shed light on a certain issue that a scholar would take years or decades to fully investigate. This must be clearly stated at a time when the university is no longer in good shape worldwide, especially in some contexts where global intellectual history is not represented; market thinking has invaded the scholarly role, and this should alarm us all given its future repercussions. As the editor, I have faced many challenges in bringing this project to light, and without the valuable contributions of my co-authors, it may not have seen the light of day at all, or it may have taken a decade or more to be achieved in a different format. This particular volume holds a special place among the volumes I have edited to map modern and contemporary Arab and Islamic thought with a focus on philosophical and theological studies, as well as cultural studies – and my interdisciplinary background in these scholarly traditions in various university institutions has undoubtedly been very helpful.

Two major aims stand behind the realization of this unprecedented and ambitious volume: (1) intellectual gratitude, and (2) scholarly need. I trust that all the contributors who have joined this enterprise share these two aims, which is why they endorsed the project so enthusiastically when I contacted them many years ago.

First, this feeling of intellectual gratitude goes back to my early high school years (1999–2000) in Taourirt City in eastern Morocco, when my elder brother, Hicham, introduced me to the booklets published by *Manshūrāt al-Zaman* [Time Publications], written by prominent Moroccan scholars and writers. The first booklets I read then were written by Mahdi Elmandjra, Hassan Aourid, Mohammed Noureddine Affaya, and Malika al-Assimi. Through this early immersion, I also came to know of Mohammed Abed al-Jabri and his *Mawāqif* [Positions] booklets, which would later have an important influence on me. These booklets introduced me to great themes, such as modernity and tradition, secularism, liberalism, human rights, and renewal and reformation, but it took me years while at university to understand these themes and read them in more in-depth texts. The high school library where my father worked

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as a bursar, and in which we had our residence, also helped me combine my studies in the English language with my interest in philosophical-theological issues in Arab-Islam scholarship, which was a side passion. We had philosophy classes in high school, but they were not enough, or at least they did not make much of an impression on me then.

For the first formative six years I spent at Mohammed I University in Oujda, in the east of Morocco, first in literary and cultural graduate studies, then in colonial and postcolonial postgraduate studies, all within the Department of English, I opened up to global thinking on the issues above. I realised the affinity that postcolonial and decolonial Arab scholars had with critical Euro-American, Indian, and Latin American scholars and thinkers on these crucial themes. During this immersion, there was very little in the university curricula covering Moroccan thought, apart from a few texts written in French by Moroccan writers, such as Tahar Benjelloun, Driss Chraibi, Mohammed Khair Eddine, Fatéma Mernissi, and Mahdi Elmandjra. The faculty's expertise and task lay more in introducing us to the literatures and cultures written in the English language – for English Studies Department requirements – than in what was written in Arabic. Nevertheless, I tried on my own to read works in Arabic that could satiate my thirst for what local scholars and thinkers had to say about major local and global issues. While it was gratifying to read Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Albert Mimi, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Léopold Senghor, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Antonio Gramsci, Bill Aschcroft, Robert Young, Noam Chomsky, Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, as well as new figures like Kenneth White and his geopoetics project, I keenly felt the lack of texts on and by local scholars and thinkers. I thus had to keep doing the homework myself. I would realise the wealth of these formative six years when I arrived in Rome and sojourned through various universities and research institutions in western Europe afterwards, beginning in 2008.

Although the university curriculum was relatively broad, considering the classics we had to read, I found it still lacked a local component. My university in the east of Morocco was more globalist in thought than localist, and I had to find a balance: what do Moroccan thinkers and scholars think of, say, liberty, modernity, religion and philosophy, international relations, imperialism, and other such issues? I was curious to know. It was after two years at the university that a group of three professors would most meet my broader intellectual needs: Khalid Hajji, Mustapha El Mourabit, and Mohammed Ameziane; the first two have remained my senior friends and intellectual companions ever since. They belonged to three departments, English Studies, Biology Studies, and Islamic Studies, respectively. They were behind the formation and dissemination of a

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widely read Arabic language magazine in the 1990s and early 2000s, *al-Munʿaṭaf* [The Turning Point, or the Angle], to which prominent Moroccan and Arab thinkers contributed, such as Abdellah Saaf, Mehdi Elmandjra, Abdelwahhab al-Massiri, and Mounir Shafiq. The journal and its network provided much of what I, among other students, was looking for: Arab-Islamic thought in conversation with both the classical Arabic tradition and the modern Euro-American tradition. The works of Edward Said, for instance, were recommended to us during the second year of the university, and we would study him more critically again in the postgraduate programme of postcolonial studies. Muhammad Iqbal, Ali Izetbigovic, Abderrahmane Taha [also Taha Abderrahmane], among others, were also introduced to us in this early period, outside curriculum obligations. Meanwhile, I made my other own local discoveries: I was reading the philosophy texts that Mohammed Sabila and Abdessalam Benabdelali were publishing for philosophy department students in Rabat as *Dafātir Falsafiyya* [Philosophic Papers, *Cahiers philosophiques*].

Second, since my coincidental arrival in Rome for higher studies – through a scholarship from the European Commission for Education – I have enlarged my perspective for understanding the modern intellectual history of the "Islamicate." The latter can now also be said to include Western Europe and North America, where scholarship on this tradition is prolific, and to which scholars from the region are contributing either as "new" Euro-Americans through parental immigration, or through "intellectual" choice and exile. With time, I gradually discovered that there are still significant gaps and much room for research, especially in modern Arab-Islamic scholarship. In reading the major anthologies on modern Arab-Islamic intellectual history, one often finds the same prominent scholars and thinkers being introduced in a few chapters, with no follow-up in full monographs or dedicated anthologies. Modern Maghrib intellectual history in particular remains unexplored in the English language, or in any other widely used European language. And the study of the Mashriq, which is often the focus, owing to political and geostrategic reasons, is not in ideal condition either. For example, there are still no anthologies or monographs on philosophers such as the Syrian Tayyib Tizini, the Egyptian Hassan Hanafi, the Lebanese Nassif Nassar and Ali Harb, the Algerian Malek Bennabi, or the Tunisian Abu Yaʿrib al-Marzouqi. As to anthologies that examine more broadly defined thought in particular areas (e.g. Tunisia, Egypt, or Syria), there is also nothing available. Needless to say, there are such works in the Arabic language; but even in Arabic, they are not comprehensive and inclusive of various disciplines that reflect systematic thought and intellectual dynamics and diversity – as this volume on Moroccan thought is.

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The decade since the "Arab Spring" protests has seen a few more publications on the Maghrib, especially on women, youth, and religious and ethnic minorities, mostly on the Jews and the Amazigh (Berbers). Modern intellectual history as contributed to by philosophers, theologians, and writers in various fields of the humanities, however, remains unexplored.

For instance, al-Jabri is a must-read for any scholar of Arab and Islamic scholarship, since he critically, and at times also controversially, revisits the formative period of Arab as well as Islamic thinking in philosophy, theology, legal theory, language, Sufism, ethics, and politics, and proposes a pathway for the future, away from current predicaments. Nonetheless, there had been no collective volume on him in English until 2018 – when I initiated the idea. The same applies to most scholar-thinkers that this current volume covers, with the exception of a few volumes that have appeared in English only in the last decade – on Fatéma Mernissi, Abderrahmane Taha, and Abdelkébir Khatibi. If we extend this observation region-wide, we can say the same thing about Algerian thought, Tunisian thought, Egyptian thought, Syrian thought, Palestinian thought, and so on.

Not to put too fine a point on it here, but there are three major reasons why these "thoughts" have not yet been written about in the global *lingua franca* (i.e. English). First, the Arab thinkers write in Arabic, and the Arab scholars that write about them also often write in Arabic, and they do not see it as their task to write in other languages – unless they belong to other departments or participate in collective projects with foreigners where other languages are used. Those who are interested in this thought, then, are free to write on it in any other language they know; it is the task of non-Arab scholars if they are curious to know more about the thought of the region, beyond its political predicaments and economic resources. Second, the Maghrib is francophone, while the Mashriq is mostly anglophone, when it comes to the use of a second foreign language after Arabic, as a result of the modern colonial linguistic heritage. This has affected the birth of comprehensive collective works in English, French, and Spanish, although there is now a change in the Maghrib where a new generation of scholars is using English more and more. Third, the region speaks, and it is especially up to its local scholars who master foreign languages to introduce them to the world; creativity and difference lie in details, in nuances, and the locals are the most able to distinguish them and convey them. And by the locals I mean any scholars who know and master the language of the context studied, be they citizens of these lands or foreign scholars who know the land, the language, and the nuances. However, since the "foreign locals" may care less about such nuances, for various reasons, it becomes then the responsibility of the "native locals" to carry out the task. This is a form of

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intellectual gratitude to the land and its thinkers who bear its tradition critically, a tradition that is not an island in the world; rather, it is a tradition in conversation with global issues and ideas. Because of life responsibilities and time and space dimensions, there are certain aspects that "foreign locals" may not, or may never, be able to fully grasp and engage with as would the "native locals." More importantly, traditions are alive and lived, and the "objectivity" of the "foreign local" scholars may hinder them from seeing the importance of certain nuances that the locals do see and focus on.

I first drafted this project in 2011, during a one-year PhD visiting fellowship at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Because of various engagements, I had to postpone the project, but I have continued revising it and seeking contributors for it since then. Meanwhile, I have led the co-editing of the first two volumes on two Moroccan philosophers that are widely read in the Arab world and beyond: al-Jabri and Taha, mentioned earlier. From 2016, I contacted most of the current contributors and asked them if they were available to contribute to this larger collective enterprise, and they all applauded the step and committed themselves to it. I then committed to the project in February 2019 and made a few other contacts to cover some more figures and themes, for which I received contributions in the Arabic language, which we had to translate. Without these contributors, and some others that wished to contribute but were prevented by constraints, this project could not have succeeded, now some five years since the official start. While most of the contributors were contacted on the basis of their topical expertise, a few others were generous in their additional efforts to cover intellectuals or themes that deserved coverage and to be included in light of their impact and influence on the intellectual and public sphere in Morocco and beyond.

I do hope that this volume, like the previous two volumes on al-Jabri and Taha, inspires a new generation to write about scholars and thinkers of the Maghrib, the Mashriq, and Global South at large, and enrich the international library with their insights. I also hope that time will allow me to further enrich this series of Moroccan and Arab intellectual history, though I should say that it is a challenge to carry out such a task in certain academic contexts that see in the Arab world only its political crises and economic opportunities. It is an ethical responsibility to make erudite and visionary intellectual voices heard worldwide, when intellectual hegemony is sometimes silent about political injustices and ignores ideas coming from the edges (i.e. "extremities") (*al-aṭrāf*) – edges that are not margins, but vibrant spaces outside the dominant centre.

Mohammed al-Shaykh [also al-Cheikh], a professor of philosophy at Hassan II University of Casablanca, published a rich volume in 2008 entitled

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Kitāb al-Ḥikma al-ʿArabiyya: Dalīl al-Turāth al-ʿArabī ilā l-ʿĀlamiyya [The Book of Arab Wisdom: A Guide to the Universality of the Arab Tradition]. The aim of al-Shaykh was to trace what Arab thinkers – i.e. thinkers who write in Arabic, irrespective of their ethnicity or faith – from various disciplines said about thirteen major themes: the human being, the other, friendship, foreignness, solitude, mimicry, anxiety, senses, reading, writing, translation, fame, and death. He says in the introduction that his aim is to sketch out a guide of philosophic thinking covering major and minor thinkers that the past Arab civilization wrote about. Rather than contenting himself with the most common philosophers, theologians, jurists, Sufis, and writers, he explored less-known writers and their ideas about these major universal themes written either in treatises, or sometimes in one or two volumes. Many of the writers and scholars he quotes wrote entire books, and sometimes two to four volumes on these themes. Al-Shaykh finds it intellectually unfair and unethical that some contemporary philosophers of Europe, for example, Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva, write, respectively, on friendship and foreignness and refer to none of the Arab classics on the theme. While he says that these philosophers share their responsibility in this *irrecognizance*, he more emphatically blames the Arab scholars for not having globalized (*ʿawlama*) their tradition, for not having translated their classics and re-promulgated them in foreign languages to share their universalist insights with the global community. It is in the same line of thinking that this project stands.

In sum, this volume aims to share the thoughts and thinking paradigms of what is referred to here as the "Rabat school," which is situated on the boundaries (or edges) of multiple geographies and intellectual traditions – substantially Arabicate and Islamicate, Amazighicate included, but also Mediterraneanate, Atlanticate, Africanate, Asianate, and Americanate. This collective work is an ode of intellectual gratitude to a vibrant tradition that is in conversation with the world; it is far from being encyclopaedic; and it is not mere praise; it is a critical introduction that sheds further light on limitations and insights. It is an unprecedented work that, it is to be hoped, will lead to further and more critical studies by the next generation of scholars.

Mohammed Hashas
محمد حصحاص
Rome, March 2024

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