

International Workshop
Plurality Contested:
Moroccan Cultural and Intellectual Production as the New Political

1-2 December 2023

University of Münster, RS 2, Schlaunstr. 2 (Hofgebäude)

The workshop focuses on the idea of Morocco “as a horizon of thought”, as Abdelkébir Khatibi defined the Maghreb. A site of cultural entanglements, diversity and plurality, Morocco is currently gaining a privileged position in area studies. The workshop aims to gain insight into recent research focusing on the way the country’s linguistic, cultural and social diversity is both affirmed and contested in cultural and intellectual production.

Morocco has received relatively little scholarly attention, at least in English-language academic studies, especially with regards to its cultural production. Among the reasons for the underestimation of the Maghreb in general is the fact that it is a region that can hardly be framed within the usual disciplinary boxes, such as the largely Mashreq-centred Arabic or Islamic Studies. Multicultural and multilingual, historically located at the crossroads between the Mediterranean, sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab Levant (not to mention the Atlantic routes), the Maghreb is a place of complex knots and relationships, of threads and traces that intersect, questioning and provoking the observers, and forcing them to deconstruct their epistemological paradigms.

Representing various disciplinary approaches, international scholars at different career stages based in Morocco, Europe and the US will present their work and discuss it with graduate and PhD students from the University of Münster. Invited speakers:

From Festivals and Sports to Arts and Crafts: The Power of Popular Culture in Morocco

Amina Boubia, International University of Rabat, Morocco

Rabat School of Thought: A Prelude to an Intellectual Edge

Mohammed Hashas, Luiss University of Rome, Italy / Leibniz-ZMO, Berlin, Germany

Moroccan Feminist Papers and the Building of the Women’s Rights Movement (1983-2004)

Martina Biondi, University of Macerata, Italy / University of Utrecht, Netherlands

Transcolonial Maghreb: The Question of Palestine in Moroccan Literature and Thought

Olivia C. Harrison, University of Southern California, USA

Moroccan Cinema: Globalization, Society, and the Politics of Representation

Jamal Bahmad, Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco

For further information, please contact the organisers, Dr Fernanda Fischione (SARAS Department, Sapienza University of Rome, fernanda.fischione@uniroma1.it) and Dr Barbara Winckler (Institute for Arabic & Islamic Studies, University of Münster, barbara.winckler@uni-muenster.de).

To attend the workshop remotely, please join us on Zoom via the following link: <https://www.zoom-x.de/j/64310839081> (all times are CET).

The workshop falls within the activities of TRANSECT, a project that has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 101027040. For more information on TRANSECT, please visit the website <https://www.transect.eu/>.

Abstracts & short bios

From Festivals and Sports to Arts and Crafts: The Power of Popular Culture in Morocco

Amina Boubia, International University of Rabat, Morocco

In this paper, I intend to update and widen the scope of previous research conducted on the power of popular culture in Morocco. As such, my analysis will take into account (without being limited to) the most recent developments in Morocco, and notably : 1) the growing importance of women's sports - following the achievement of Morocco's national football team at the women's world cup (among many other achievements) in the context the newly announced and upcoming *Moudawana* reform, 2) the recent announcements of international sports events to be held in Morocco (Africa Cup of Nations 2025, FIFA World cup 2030) in the wake of the latest world cup in Qatar, 3) and the debate around concrete and earthen buildings following the earthquake, in view of the reconstruction challenge ahead. Building on past fieldwork and research results (around music festivals and the so-called "zellige controversy" for instance), new evidence shows to what extent popular culture is being **consciously, cautiously, and consistently** mobilised in Morocco as part of an array of public policies. The first part of the paper is dedicated to demonstrating how popular culture elements are put forward as part of national PR strategies and public policies (be they cultural, sports, gender, diplomatic or disaster management policies). In the second part, I endeavour to show to what extent a politicised use of popular culture is impacting the actual leeway actors have in the sectors concerned by these policies. In sum, when popular culture meets policy, does it necessarily become less "popular" and more "polished"? Do policies strengthen or weaken popular culture, and do the actors involved enjoy less or more independence?

Amina Boubia is a political science professor at Rabat International University's College of Social Sciences, specialising in culture and politics in the MENA region. Her current research concentrates on popular culture, sports and gender issues. She earned her PhD in political science from Sciences Po Paris in 2014 as a PhD fellow of the Heinrich Böll Foundation. Her dissertation explored the political dynamics around music festivals in Morocco. She also holds a degree in intercultural communication from Saarland University. Prior to joining UIR, Amina worked in philanthropy, journalism, research, as well as in the events sector, in Paris and London. From 2014 to 2017 she was a Research associate at Sciences Po's Centre for International Studies (CERI). Amina has contributed to a host of scientific conferences in various countries and languages. Her publications include an article in the *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* entitled "Music, politics, and 'organic artists' during the Arab Spring: Contention vs status quo in Tunisia and Morocco", and a piece on "'Artivism' in the Arab world: A major driving force towards democracy" in the *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook*.

Rabat School of Thought: A Prelude to an Intellectual Edge

Mohammed Hashas (حصاحص), Luiss University of Rome, Italy / Leibniz-ZMO, Berlin, Germany

Do contemporary Moroccans think? And how do they think? This chapter, a summary of a quarter of a century of reading and reflecting on Moroccan intellectual productions, introduces what is called here "Rabat school" – a geo-cultural label that is classical in Arabic scholarship, and a term used by the philosopher Taha Abderrahmane (b. 1944). First, seeing that this type of work is unprecedented in its theme and scope of coverage, important methodological questions are raised and clarified. Second,

the place of contemporary Moroccan thought, or “Rabat school,” is contextualized within contemporary Arabic scholarship. Third, the distinction between the “moderns” and “contemporaries” is explained by listing some major fields of study and their influential scholars and thinkers. Fourth, these previous parts are further explained by means of an intellectual sketch of Moroccan historiography narratives, to illustrate the classical as well as modern and contemporary genealogies of what is meant by contemporary Moroccan thought, and “Rabat school.” Critical studies of these narratives are presented, too, from firsthand sources. Fifth, in the light of the precedent scholarly narratives and tendencies, the major sources as well as markers of “Moroccanness” are outlined, with a focus on what is termed here “Arabity” and “Amazighity” narratives. Sixth, the chapter introduces a novel typology of Moroccan intellectual history, away from the common religious vs. secular, traditional vs. modern, or conservative vs. liberal. This typology is “near-far-other” thought distinction, each of which is first described, then elucidated through the intellectual projects of some of the most prominent philosophers and scholars of contemporary Morocco from different disciplines – with a focus on philosophic and theologic thought. Overall, the chapter shows that contemporary Moroccan thought produced since the 1950s and 1960s has made of its geographic edge a vibrant plural intellectual space, and has managed to stir vital questions not only within Arab-Islamic scholarship but within modern scholarship of especially the “Global South” at large; it examines major themes like the tradition, modernity, space, time, existence, liberty, liberation, freedom, equality, justice, technology, the social media, self, other, pluralization, difference, tomorrowness, and the global world order. Differently put, the intellectual movement, diversity, and plurality of “Rabat school” has appeared as a vibrant “intellectual edge” of the zones it belongs to – named as as Arabicate, Amazighicate, Islamicate, Mediterraneanate, Africanate, and Atlanticate. (Because of time limitations, I will focus on Parts I, II, and VI)

N.B. This chapter is going to appear in *The Handbook of Contemporary Moroccan Thought: On Philosophy, Theology, Society, and Culture*, edited by M. Hashas, Brill, “February” 2024.

Mohammed Hashas [“ḥaṣ-ḥāṣ”] (PhD, Habil.) is a Lecturer in the Department of Political Science at Luiss University of Rome; he is also a Research Fellow affiliate to Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) in Berlin (2020-present). His research areas are modern intellectual history of the Arab-Islamic world, Islam in/and Europe, and modern/contemporary Moroccan thought. Hashas has been a visiting research fellow in Copenhagen, Tilburg, Berlin, Oxford, and a non-resident fellow in Winchester in Virginia. Hashas published *The Idea of European Islam* (2019), *Intercultural Geopoetics* (2017), and led the edition of *Pluralism in Islamic Contexts* (2021), *Islamic Ethics and the Trusteeship Paradigm: Taha Abderrahmane’s Philosophy in Comparative Perspectives* (2020), *Islam, State and Modernity: Mohammed Abed al-Jabri and the Future of the Arab World* (2018), *Imams in Western Europe* (2018), besides various journal articles and book chapters. Hashas is currently finishing the editing of the first *Handbook of Contemporary Moroccan Thought*, for Brill 2024 (c. pp. 700). He contributes opinion essays in Arabic and English on religion, politics, philosophy, theology, and society in the Arab world (they are collected at his private website: www.mohammedhashas.com).

Selected Readings for the workshop:

1. “Critique and Change: Al-Jabri in Contemporary Arab Thought,” in *Islam, State, and Modernity: Mohammed Abed al-Jabri and the Future of the Arab World*, eds. Zaid Eyadat, Francesca M. Corrao, and Mohammed Hashas (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 1-21.
2. “Taha Abderrahmane’s Trusteeship Paradigm: Spiritual Modernity and the Islamic Contribution to the Formation of a Renewed Universal Civilization of Ethos,” *Oriente Moderno* 95 (2015), 67-105.
3. “The Political Theology of Taha Abderrahmane: Religion, Secularism, and Trusteeship,” in *Islamic Political Theology*, eds. Massimo Campanini and Marco di Donato (New York and London: Lexington Books, 2021), 113-133.

Essays – related to Moroccan thought:

1. Who Was [Mohamed Waqidi](#)? Redefining Epistemology from the Southern Shore, Resetdoc, 08 August 2021.
2. A Tribute to the Late Modernist Moroccan Philosopher [Mohammed Sabila](#), Resetdoc, 28 July 2021.
3. [Fatema Mernissi](#): The Pride of Islamic Feminism in Modern Times, Resetdoc, 30 Nov. 15.
4. [Mohammed Abed al Jabri](#): the Future of the Arab World? Resetdoc, 27 December 2014.
5. [Islamic Philosophy I](#): Past and Present Conditions for Existence ad Difference, 23 Sept. 2014.
6. [Islamic Philosophy II](#): The Moderns and Contemporaries in Search for a New Paradigm, 23 Sept. 2014.
7. [Islamic Philosophy III](#): The Question of Ethics: Taha Abderrahmane's Praxeology and Trusteeship Paradigm, 23 Sept. 2014.

Moroccan Feminist Papers and the Building of the Women's Rights Movement (1983-2004)

Martina Biondi, University of Macerata, Italy / University of Utrecht, Netherlands

Based on my Ph.D. thesis entitled “The Moroccan Years of Lead: Women’s political activism, Left and memory,” this talk aims to retrace the origins of the Moroccan women’s rights movement. The contribution will look at the birth of the female press in post-colonial Morocco as a premises for the flourishing of the feminist papers and a feminist awareness in the Eighties. While it will be seen as an expression of the Moroccan civil society’s challenge to the regime during the so-called Years of Lead (1965-1995), the women’s rights movement emerged in the Eighties in response to the Left parties’ failed pledges to include women’s problems in their political agendas. The publication of the first feminist Moroccan journal, *Thamaniyya Mars* (1983-1992), named after the international women’s day in 1983, was a crucial sign of the need for some Lefties militants of the *Organization de l’action démocratique et populaire* to lift women’s issues from political marginalization. Latifa Jbaldi, a former political prisoner and a Left militant, launched the journal and championed a homonym movement that wanted to be autonomous, popular, democratic, and unified. While the *8 Mars* movement structured itself as the *Union de l’Action feminine* (UAF) in 1987, two years earlier, some Socialist militants from the *Union socialiste des forces populaires* had established autonomous *Association démocratique des femmes du Maroc* (ADFM). After participating in Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, it lunched the monthly journal *Nisa’ al Maghrib: Lisan al-jama’iyya al-dimuqratiyya li-nisa’ al-Maghrib* (1986-1988). The two papers were crucial in shaping feminist argumentations for a social and political change. They dealt with women’s health and welfare, labor and education and help to unite forces around the common goal of changing of the Code of Personal Status (*Mudawwana*), considered the primary source of discrimination against the Moroccan women. As it will be illustrated, the movement of women’s rights achieved solid cohesion with the success of a first mass mobilization which gathered a million signatures to amend the *Mudawwana* in early Nineties. The first revision of the Code in 1993, as well as its abrogation and rewriting in 2004, following the *Printemps de l’égalité* campaign, arguably represent pivotal moments in women’s contribution to Moroccan nation-building.

Martina Biondi holds a PhD in History and Institutions of Africa from the University of Perugia (July 2023). She is an Adjunct Professor in History and institutions of Islamic countries at the University of Macerata. From 2024, she will be a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of History of the University of Utrecht. Dr Biondi has conducted research in Morocco and France, and in 2021-2022 she was a visiting researcher at the Faculté Histoire et Civilisation of the University of Casablanca and a Resident researcher at the Fondation al-Saoud in Casablanca. She studied at the Universities of Bologna, Manchester, and Macerata, where she graduated in 2019 in Foreign languages and cultures

with a thesis on Moroccan writer Layla Abu Zayd and her autobiographical writings (awarded with the 2022 Anna Vanzan prize by the Italian Society of Women Historians). Her research interests include gender history, history of care and public health, and political and solidarity networks in and beyond North Africa. She is a member of *Africa & Orienti* review Editorial office. Her publications have recently appeared in *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, and *Middle East Topics & Arguments*.

Transcolonial Maghreb: The Question of Palestine in Moroccan Literature and Thought

Olivia C. Harrison, University of Southern California, USA

Derived from the Arabic root designating the cardinal direction “west,” the proper name *al-maghrib* (Morocco, but also, by metonymic expansion, the westernmost region of the Arabophone world) crystallizes the paradoxes of a field long considered to be a branch of Francophone studies, and an exotic, if not marginal, outpost of Arabic literature. Recent work on Arabic and Tamazight cultural production and transnational and transregional links tying Morocco to its wider cultural and political environment has done much to complicate the vertical axis privileged in postcolonial studies, triangulating Morocco’s fraught ties with France and Spain through the horizontal vectors that crisscross the region. This paper zooms in on one particular vector of transcolonial solidarity: Palestine. Against the treatment of Palestine as a news item or policy matter, it shows that the question of Palestine has played a cardinal role in what Abdellatif Laâbi called “cultural decolonization”: a radical rethinking of the forms, languages, and political priorities of literary and cultural production in the aftermath of colonization. I focus in this paper on three sets of texts that engage Palestine in the task of cultural decolonization: the Francophone journal *Souffles* and its Arabic-language companion journal *Anfas*, which deployed Palestine as a rallying cry, and exemplum, in the foundation of a postcolonial national culture (1966-1971); the writings of Abdelkebir Khatibi, which articulate Palestine as “horizon of thinking” for postcolonial Morocco (the 1974 polemic *Vomito blanco*, the 1977 essay “Le Maghreb comme horizon de pensée,” and an epistolary exchange with Jewish Egyptian psychoanalyst Jacques Hassoun, *Le même livre*, published in 1985); and Edmond Amran El Maleh’s writings on Palestine (the 1982 novel *Mille ans, un jour* and several essays published in the 1970s and 1980s), which trace the colonial roots of Jewish exile and implicate Jewish Moroccans in the colonization of Palestinians by the Israeli state. This decades-long engagement with the Palestinian question, which, far from being resolved, reveals the persistence of colonialism in the present, has shifted over the years, and now encompasses what is commonly dubbed the “migrant crisis.” I conclude my talk by discussing the work of the contemporary Moroccan artist Bouchra Khalili, who engages the archives of decolonization, including Palestine, in a broader reflection on the “continuum of resistance” that ties Morocco to the current Palestinian and migrant questions. These texts demonstrate the centrality of Palestine in Moroccan cultural production, and the continued relevance, and indeed urgency, of bringing the Palestinian question to bear on cultural decolonization in Morocco, the Maghreb, and the decolonizing world at large.

Olivia C. Harrison is Associate Professor of French and Comparative Literature at the University of Southern California. Her research focuses on postcolonial North African, Middle Eastern, and French literature and film, with a particular emphasis on transcolonial affiliations between writers and intellectuals from the Global South. Her publications include *Natives against Nativism: Antiracism and Indigenous Critique in Postcolonial France* (University of Minnesota Press, 2023), *Transcolonial Maghreb: Imagining Palestine in the Era of Decolonization* (Stanford University Press, 2016), and essays

on Maghrebi literature, Beur and banlieue cultural production, and postcolonial theory. With Teresa Villa-Ignacio, she is the editor of *Souffles-Anfas: A Critical Anthology from the Moroccan Journal of Culture and Politics* (Stanford University Press, 2016) and translator of Hocine Tandjaoui's poem, *Clamor/Clameur* (Litmus Press, 2021).

Moroccan Cinema: Globalization, Society, and the Politics of Representation

Jamal Bahmad, Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco

This paper provides a critical survey of Moroccan filmic production since the 1990s when this North African cinema took off in response to a variety of factors. I will argue that globalization coupled with industrial transformations led to a revolution in the national film production scene. Moroccan cinema not only began to become widely available to the national public, but also started travelling far and wide in international film festivals and foreign markets. Production sources also diversified in response to the interest that this cinema started garnering both at home and abroad. The paper will put these transformations in context before moving to explore how the films translated some deep changes in Moroccan society as it moved out of the reign of King Hassan II (1961-1999) into a new era under Mohammed VI in the new century. Whether Morocco-based or shuttling between Morocco and another western country, Moroccan filmmakers questioned their society and broke taboos about religion, sex, and race. These changes made cinema the primary mirror of Moroccan society and a forum for negotiating political, social, and cultural change. The 21st century brought its own benefits and challenges beginning with the increasing freedom of speech and funding opportunities for filmmakers, on the one hand, and the threats posed by the rise of political Islam and the aftermath of the 2011 street uprisings, on the other. Moroccan cinema has negotiated these rapid changes by tackling key issues in society and the public sphere. Despite the arrival of Islamists to government after 2011 and the rise of film censorship and conservative identity politics, the filmmakers have found ways to continue acting as major cultural and political actors in the country. Culture is a battlefield in Morocco, and the culture wars have seen filmmakers become both heroes and villains in the muddy waters of a post-2011 society. The paper will conclude with an account of the distribution and exhibition situation of Moroccan cinema today in the age of digital disruption.

Jamal Bahmad is Associate Professor of Film and Cultural Studies in the Department of English at Mohammed V University in Rabat. He obtained his PhD from the University of Stirling in the UK in 2014 with a dissertation on contemporary Moroccan urban cinema. The dissertation won the Best PhD Thesis Prize of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies in 2015. He subsequently held a British Academy postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Leeds and, prior to that, was a Research Fellow at Philipps-Universität Marburg (Germany). Bahmad was most recently a research fellow at the University of Exeter on the AHRC-funded project: "Transnational Moroccan Cinema." He specialises and has published widely in the field of North African cultural studies with a focus on cinema, youth cultures, cities, literature, and memory. He co-edited a special issue of *French Cultural Studies* (SAGE, August 2017) on trash cultures in the Francophone world. Bahmad is also the co-editor of a special issue of *The Moroccan Cultural Studies Journal* on Moroccan cinema (November 2017). He is also the co-editor of *English Language Teaching in Moroccan Higher Education* (Springer, UK 2020). In addition to working on his first monograph on Moroccan cinema and globalisation, Bahmad recently co-authored *Moroccan Cinema Uncut: Decentred Voices, Transnational Perspectives* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020) with Will Higbee and Florence Martin.