The state in the thought of Morocco’s Islamist groups: A study of circumstances

This study is concerned with the subject of the state in the thought of Islamist groups in Morocco on the basis of it being a central issue of political society and one that has not ceased to be a matter of intellectual debate and political contention between the active political components of Moroccan political culture ever since the independence of the country in 1956 up until today. This research endeavours to discern the broad features and nature of the concept of ‘state’ within the context of the Islamist political legacy, as read and interpreted by various Islamist groups according to their various and different views and conceptions despite a shared and common sect, in the Maliki madhab, that has left its mark on all of them.

This study presupposes that the inception of contemporary Islamist groups goes back to the confluence of a number of interconnected factors, the most prominent of which is attributable to the once-increasing subjugation of Arab and Islamic regional states to direct Western colonial control as a result of the First World War in addition to the concomitant influx of what this brought of Western values. Not least among these was the inception of the Kamalist state in Turkey that formally overturned the Ottoman caliphate in 1924 and substituted it with a radical secular state of the first order – a move that served as a powerful impetus for the emergence of a number of Islamist organizations. Initially, these were directed towards changing the prevailing socio-political status quo by bringing it down and substituting other modalities in its place – ones that would correspond to the conceptions and visions of these groups.

This study is comprised of four parts. The first deals with the terms adopted and relied upon by the modern Islamist groups in Morocco, the most prominent of which was the ‘Justice and Goodness’ group (jama‘at al-‘adl wa al-‘ihsaan) that rejected the philosophical underpinnings of democracy from the standpoint that they deemed the Qur’anic principle of al-shura (mutual consultation) sufficient to reconciling the spiritual/moral and material needs of the human being. Another group that rose to prominence was the ‘Justice and Growth Party’ (hizb al-‘adaalah wa al-tanmiyah) that prevailed due to the possibility of existing effectively between al-shura and democracy and reconciling the two concepts as connoting essentially the same thing. In addition to these, the ‘Movement for the Sake of the [Muslim] Nation (ummah)’ (al-harakah min ajal al-ummah) came to prominence on the basis of its adherence to the dual principles of representation under a representative system (al-wasatiyyah) and political differences on the consideration that these spring from and are naturally in concert with Islamic law (al-shar’ al-islamiyyah). The second part is concerned with the political sources and the dialectic and problematic of ‘state’ and ‘caliphate’; while the third part focuses on the main points of political, economic and social reform in the discourse of Islamic groups. Lastly, the fourth part deals with the focal points of constitutional reform in the discourse of these organizations.

The study comes to the conclusion that the organizations and movements under consideration dealt with the state during their readings of it through their ideological suppositions at the level of the Islamic political legacy. This was on the consideration of the state as
constituting a ‘ruler’ or ruling body without being accorded the significance attributed to it as an institution. Its framework, in Morocco, approached that of a comprehensive institution for the nation and the ummah and as ‘ruler’, albeit with reservations for the centrality of the king within it. As for secondary differences between these groups, they revolved around recasting conception frameworks of the concept of ‘state’ in the context of the Islamic political legacy. In the case of the ‘Justice and Goodness’ group, influenced by its Sufi leader and guide, it sought to recast these concepts in accordance with a radical view predicated on an absolute form of interaction with Islamic history and textual bases – defending the comprehensiveness and completeness of Islam. This brought about the crystallization of the concept in an ideological form that at once sought to supersede liberal democracy, while maintaining reservations about it. The ‘Justice and Growth’ party and the ‘Movement for the Sake of the Ummah’ that – to a degree – vindicated the conciliatory views of al-Shatibi formulated a critical approach to the order that had given rise to the concept of democracy, and that was through ‘its inclusion in the category of legitimate-/Islamic-legal political research that incorporated a relative level of flexibility that rendered it capable of accepting both criticism and interpretation’ (p. 30).


The fact that this volume is now in its fourth edition comes in the context that the attention the thought of Ibn Khaldun still enjoys to date is indicative of its timeless character as well as its historical value. However, as the author has seen the matter since the 1960s, it is not possible that the thought of Ibn Khaldun can simply be considered of ‘historical value’ in the Arab world, as in the like of this world the thought of Ibn Khaldun is indispensable in accompanying the process of knowing the self and the standpoint from which it is possible to formulate a new historical consciousness.

Thus, in light of what the Arab has witnessed of social, political and economic crises, Arab thought has remained incapable of comprehending these; and this is traceable to the problem of culture and its inability to express itself in the Arab countries on account of its being a problem of being cut off and unable to reconnect with itself and the rich legacy it represents in the face of the dominant mode of progress imposed by the culture of Western civilization. Herein, manifests the problematic that vacillates between a need to return to cultural authenticity (al-asaalah) or the religious heritage, on the one hand, and to renew Arab thought, on the other. In this context, the need to reread Ibn Khaldun is heightened in order to accelerate the process of the Arab coming to know himself and to return to the indigenous point of departure that will enable to him to reformulate a historical consciousness anew that will ‘keep pace with the concepts of today in the spheres of sociology and anthropology – the very spheres for which the work of Ibn Khaldun served as a basis’.


This work revolves around the person of Sultan Qaboos bin Sa‘id, Sultan of Oman, and is the product of an author who followed the doings and events of his rule over nearly three decades of observations of a ruler who has been in power for over 45 years. The book strives
to throw light on the sultan’s personality, his ideas and the positions that have been characterized by wisdom in navigating a tricky passage in a vital region that is undeniably a central axis in the global economy in addition to the challenges and threats arising from ambitions and strife.

The author details the calls of the sultan, which came early on and anticipated future trends, in warning about the dangers of extremism and takfiri movements and that such would negatively impact the security and stability of the region as well as national unity in the countries of the Arab Gulf. Also detailed is the struggle of the Omani leadership to take decisions that sprang from the free will of the people and national interests in the form of a sort of independent decisions that might not necessarily be compatible with prevailing Gulf society, but which nevertheless permitted the sultanate to play the role of an intermediary as in the case of its position with regard to the ongoing war in Yemen, for example, or in its relations with Iran.

On the internal front, the author talks about the ‘doses of democracy’ that go back to the steps taken by Qaboos in the first few months after he took control in the sultanate in July 1971, when he affirmed his commitment to working towards securing just and democratic government in the sultanate within the framework of Omani reality, inclusive of its social customs and traditions and whatever did not conflict with the teachings of Islam. This led to the establishment of a consultative Shura council, which, in practice, went back to the traditions and practices of secularists attributed of a society predicated on what is termed in local parlance as the principle of al-salabah (literally, an ear of corn), where the inhabitants of a village, neighbourhood, clan or tribe meet in a local centre to discuss their daily lives and needs in order to deal with them.


This book endeavours to analyze the Soviet–American struggle over Iran and its repercussions for their international relations and developments inside Iran. This is in the wake of the Cold War that had its origins in 1941, despite the victors of the Second World War looking forward to a new era of peace that would draw on the NATO Pact drafted by Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt and signed in August that year, a pact subsequently supported by 26 nations including the former USSR at the United Nations conference of 1945. The author covers the Soviet incursion into Iran in 1941 in order to use it as a passageway for its supply lines and to expand the influence of the Soviets and their allies. Subsequently, he details the Azerbaijan crisis of 1946, and the failure of the USSR to honour its commitment to withdraw its forces from Iranian territories as Britain had done concomitant with Joseph Stalin’s attempt to engineer a breakaway state in the north of Iran known as the People’s Republic of Azerbaijan. Also covered is the pressure brought to bear by the Americans on the USSR to withdraw from Iran in 1946 and the escalation of the Cold War with the announcement of the Truman Doctrine to counter spreading communist influence and curtail Soviet expansion. The author also brings to light US efforts such as the attempt to convince Iran to nullify its oil agreements with the USSR in October 1947.


The author of this work endeavours to uncover evidence and indicators of the existence of a tacit reconciliation between Iran and the United States that reached the point of joint
cooperation in many instances with regard to international matters, not the least of which was the Iran–Iraq War, in which the author seeks to demonstrate a confluence of influence between the two countries in the war and its outcomes.

The author examines the thinking on the part of both sides lying behind whatever pertains to the Arab region in general and Iraq in particular. He seeks to demonstrate the mutual interests, even if there are differences of opinion, and characterizes the initiatives and general conceptual approach to the region, wherein Iranian interests generally factor and where the US also maintains an initiative for a ‘Greater Middle East’ representing the imposition of its economic and military hegemony over the region.

The author sees that the avowed ‘hostility’ between Washington and Tehran misleads some of the Arabs to cling tightly to alliance with the United States and its military bases in the region, much as this also drives the G-8 industrial nations to increased cooperation with the United States in order to protect economic interests in the region and so as to maintain the supply of oil to their factories. Similarly, the author sees that Iran achieves a number of goals by promoting the Palestinian case, the most significant of which is pressuring the United States to allow it a sphere to strengthen its influence in the region, as well as to obtain acknowledgement of the Arab countries – especially those of the Arab Gulf. This is through Iranian leadership in promoting the most important central issue of the states of the region. Nevertheless, the author also points to questions and doubts over the degree of cooperation of both sides, and among these are American moves against the Iranian nuclear programme and what corresponds to these among Iranian counteractions against American interests.


This book contains a large number of British documents obtained by the author through the British National Archives, dealing with the first five years of the reign of the late King Hussein of Jordan and the threats he faced at the level of rule under his relations with Britain and the repercussions of events resulting from Israeli hostilities and the rising tide of Arab nationalism. As the author notes, these documents were unavailable until the beginning of the 1980s when they were finally declassified and become available to researchers.

The author confirms that the period covered in the book from 1953 when King Hussein assumed the throne until 1957 was a highly precarious period for the leadership in Jordan. The documents that constitute the primary sources for the views expressed in the book are drawn primarily from correspondence that was classified for 30 years, and some of which was slated to remain classified for even half a century as British authorities deemed them to carry secrets sensitive even for that period of time. As the author notes, most of the most significant of these documents were in the form of exchanges between British ambassadors and officials in the countries of the Arab East, and especially those between the British ambassador to Jordan and the high officials in the British government. The vast majority of these pertained to Jordanian affairs during 1953–57 and evaluations of the situation at the time as well as projections for the future from the British point of view.

The book contains important information for researchers concerned with the development of political events in Jordan during these first five years of the rule of King Hussein, his installation on the throne of the Hashemite kingdom, British plans for the growth of Israel and the view of the British authorities towards the Jordanian nationalist trend in addition to Hussein’s decision to oust General Ghulub, the formation of the Nablusi government and the ‘Tri-Partite
Aggression’ (against Egypt in the Suez Canal War), as well as other landmark moments. Among these are considerations of the positions of political parties vis-à-vis the Nakbah and the defeat of Arab armies in 1948–49 as well as their repercussions in political life in Jordan and on the course of the Arab–Israeli conflict.


The author of this book stresses the role carved out for intellectuals and their social responsibilities in periods of tyranny and autocratic rule on the assumption that culture is a political force and a form of public work. He sees that culture and politics are two areas that permit joint work, seeking to manifest that which is political in culture. Salih asserts that it is the duty of intellectuals to be involved in politics at all times, especially in difficult and bloody ones, when they should not hesitate to level clear criticism at the authorities who exercise impunity and which engage in extralegal arrests, torture, violence, discrimination, killing, forced exile, defamation, extremism and racism.

The author sees the worst of all possible circumstances in the intellectual who – on the basis of his assumption that his proper sphere of work is in ‘thought’ or ‘the arts’ – refuses to ‘dirty himself in politics or its affairs’. He calls intellectuals to break down the barrier of fear of authority given the depths to which the citizen and human being have brought in most of the Arab countries, subject to physical violations and assault for even the simplest move to seek his rights for a dignified existence.


This book is the fourth and final instalment in ‘The Arabs and Modernity’ project published by the Centre for Arab Unity Studies over the previous nine years – and including the previously published works *From Reform to the Nahdah (Awakening); From the Nahdah to Modernity*; and *Criticism of the Cultural Legacy (al-Turaath)* – focusing on the question of the Western view of the cultural and historical legacy of the Arab-Islamic sphere from the 19th century to the present. As the author stringently insists, there is a strong connection between this work and the preceding ones, especially *Criticism of the Cultural Legacy*, from the standpoint that both – if from different angles – revolve around the selfsame dialectic in the consciousness of the Arab: the distinction between ‘I’ and ‘the other’.

This work is an attempt to read and present a vast amount of contemporary Arab writings focusing on the question of the Western view of the collective, historical Arab-Islamic cultural legacy from the 19th century up to today. It takes up the question of the Arabs and the matter of their heritage – *al-turaath* – and the Western cultural dialectics with a connection to the formation of an Arab-Islamic ‘I’ according to a view that transitioned from a point of record to one of acknowledgement to criticism in parallel with the transitions of Arab discourse itself from the period of reform through the Nahdah (awakening) up into post-modernity. The dose of criticism increased and intensified with the positing of Modernity of some sort of ‘universal human being’ who would exemplify the entire world and for whom it would broker no alternative individual or culture other than that of modernity itself.
What the book intends of criticism of Western heritage and culture is attributable to the vanguard of contemporary Arab thinkers who practised a sort of dichotomous critique of the ‘I’ and ‘the other’ at one and the selfsame time. The goal of these was not that the idea of Arab cultural authenticity (al-asaalah) or the Arab identity and the heritage embodied in the Arab ‘I’ should prevail. No more was it related to the aim of vindicating Western culture as the authoritative point of reference. Thus, the primary figures of this trend were neither completely Westernized nor purely traditionalists, but rather they attempted to combine and co-opt both trends in the single cultural project of ‘modernity’, which should not have been viewed as a ready-made model suitable for copying or import. Rather, ‘modernity’ was a universal historical project adopted by different cultures and societies out of local content deemed beneficial as well as all societies. The book proceeds along two axes of Western culture, which are Orientalism and Eurocentrism, as well as what they had of influence on the relation between Europe, the West and ‘the other’, and – in particular – ‘the Arab other’, and this is especially in light of what these represented for the Arab modernists.


The triumph of the major revolutions of liberation, such as the French and American revolutions, rendered democracy a basic principle that ought to be defended. The United States – as a global power – took up the defence of democracy and working towards disseminating it across the world along with the spread of systems of democratic governance. American conviction in the universality of their principles and their self-assurances in exceptionalism only increased in the ‘victory’ of the West over the former Soviet Union during the Cold War and what this permitted of increased American latitude in the freedom of action in the face of or in contravention to the restrictions of international law. The US adopted policies and strategies of intervention in the international affairs of sovereign states on the pretext of the absence of democracy in the various models and systems of rule within them. This ultimately resulted in waging destructive and ‘preemptive wars’ without resort to the United Nations’ Security Council – even leading, as in the case of Iraq, to the occupation of countries, the fragmentation of their societies and the displacement of millions of people. From this standpoint, the book seeks to determine the effects of these initiatives to ‘spread democracy’ in the annals of international law in order to determine the scope and depth of these and their nature. This is in the service of attempting to uncover the new legal precedents and bases that may have appeared as a result of these radical developments that have played havoc with global society and its concepts in order to arrive at general principles that theoretically govern democracy in international law and track the repercussion of such in global politics.

The book divides this subject into three main sections. The first details the concept of democracy from the standpoint of international law in order to clarify its nature and legal bases – to the extent that such exist along with the veracity of the claims that such has become a legitimate right among the rights of peoples and the sole legitimate source of international legality. The second part deals with the extent of legality in utilizing force to impose democracy or defend it. Finally, the third part takes up the study of the ramifications of the spread of democracy and the military interventions that have been undertaken in order to
impose it by force and what this has entailed, including the occupation of a number of sovereign states and the imposition of entirely unprecedented circumstances in international law. The book affirms that democracy is a universal value and global society welcomes progress in the march of democracy and its spread across the world. However, there exists no international duty or prerogative with regard to democracy wherein there is no definition for this or a legal basis for this specifying or conferring legitimacy on the use of force to impose democracy. Likewise, there is no universal consensus on the use of force as a means to achieve progress in the march of democracy, which previous experiences have demonstrated is not a ‘product’ ready for import into a given country or imposition from the outside – to say nothing of the destructive repercussions for the states and societies that were occupied and fragmented as a result of using ‘force’ to ‘impose democracy’.


This book provides a new and revisited reading of the causes of the First World War that broke out in July 1914 as prepared by a group of researchers, historians and specialists concerned with the Arab view of events and edited by Tunisian researcher Rashid Khashanah. These cover the various Arab circumstances and situations that prevailed at the time of the secret British negotiations with France and Czarist Russia taking place in order to divide up former Ottoman territories, and particularly the Arab statelets at the same time that parallel negotiations were taking place with al-Sharif Husayn. British–French negotiations led to the Sykes–Picot Agreement in London on 16 May 1916, which inevitably had far reaching repercussions on the Arab world.

The book is comprised of eight chapters. The first chapter, by Sayar al-Jamil, takes up the situation in Iraq and Syria during the First World War. The second chapter, by ‘Ali Muhafazah, deals with the socio-political and economic and cultural effects of the war on Palestine and Jordan. Sayar al-Jamil continues the research in the third chapter on the situation in the Levant with the demise of the Ottoman empire and the division of the region into four countries: Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan, with Iraq remaining unified. In the fifth chapter, ‘Ali ‘Afifi and ‘Ali Ghazi shed light on the conscription of more than 1 million Egyptians during the war in order to constitute a labour force of human capital at a time when the population of the entire country was on the order of 14 million persons. In the fifth chapter, Ahmad Ibrahim Abu Shawk takes up the repercussions of the First World War on Sudan and the policy of repression adopted by Great Britain against resistance movements in all regions of the country. ‘Abd al-Majid al-Jamal covers the Libyan situation in the sixth chapter and the victory of Libyan nationalist resistance at the outset of the war. In the seventh chapter, Faisal al-Sharif deals with intense involvement of the Tunisian population in the First World War and the declining socio-cultural circumstances in the country. In the eighth chapter, Wahaybah Qutush details the conscription of Algerians into the French army during the war and their being exposed to prejudice and discrimination and even used as ‘human shields’ for French troops. In the same chapter, Muhammad Bakrawi details the forced conscription of Moroccans and their dispatch to the front lines in France throughout the war.