

Moroccan Other-Archives: History and Citizenship after State Violence

By Brahim El Guabli. New York City: Fordham University Press, 2023. 272 pp.

Hardcover ISBN 9781531501440, Softcover ISBN 9781531501457,

EPUB ISBN 9781531501464.

Brahim El Guabli's 2023 book *Moroccan Other-Archives: History and Citizenship after State Violence* weaves an intricate narrative of the diverse cultures of Morocco, exploring a rich cultural landscape that includes Berber, Arab, and Jewish peoples and the Amazigh, Arabic, Hebrew, and French languages.

El Guabli is an assistant professor of Arabic studies and comparative literature at Williams College. In five chapters across 272 pages, he meticulously explores the experiences of three marginalized groups—Berbers/Amazighen, Jews, and political prisoners—in Morocco between 1956 and 1999, a critical period after Morocco attained independence from France. El Guabli explores the complex strategies that postcolonial societies employ to confront historical silences and exclusions. Central to this work are lost or absent archives, particularly those missing from official records and histories. El Guabli discloses how a lack of documented histories for marginalized groups in Morocco impacts both individual and collective memory in the country and poses challenges for researchers striving to reconstruct historical narratives in the absence of conventional archival resources. His work also underscores the powerful impact of memory and trauma on marginalized communities' narratives.

El Guabli employs a multidisciplinary approach to tell these groups' stories, drawing from anthropology, history, social science, and literary studies. He uses the term "other-archive" to encompass those sources he uses to describe these communities, including written documents, artifacts, and eyewitness memory. For El Guabli, other-archives constitute memories (documentary or oral) of minority and marginalized communities whose histories were erased by authorities intent on wiping away "other people" and silencing their communities. As he illustrates, other-archives can help meaningfully construct historical narratives when traditional archival sources are absent and provide a counterbalance to mainstream historical narratives, affording space for voicing experiences and viewpoints that mainstream narratives marginalize (intentionally or through negligence). Other-archives can also bridge gaps between an unresolved past and the present as they enable societies to grapple with the consequences of injustices inflicted upon excluded groups.

Moroccan Other-Archives can be considered part of the literature on memory studies, as it draws on eyewitness experience (that of others and the author) and firsthand experiences interacting with archives. El Guabli is the first scholar to apply

the concept of “lost archives” to Morocco and to consider how official authority and discourse play a role in hiding such archives in that country. His book is one of only a few to address the issue of archives in the Middle East, especially the archives of minority peoples in the region. Other examples include work by Khaled Fahmi,¹ who revisits an important period of recent Egyptian history, and Omnia El Shakry,² who examines issues around accessing archives for historical research. In particular, El Shakry addresses the challenges of accessing Iraqi state documents seized by US forces during the 2003 invasion and, more broadly, how political upheaval and instability in the Middle East mediate access control by governments (e.g., a requirement for security clearance to access documents not typically granted to researchers). Like other areas in the Middle East, historians in Morocco lack access to their own people’s archives and are often compelled to focus on precolonial periods because more contemporary records do not exist or have access barriers. The book is valuable because it sheds a clear light on previously unnoticed influence on the generation of historical knowledge, addressing not only the missing or overlooked groups of marginalized people but also the missing or inaccessible documentation of such periods.

This book is written primarily for scholars, archivists, and specialists. It documents the need to give attention to other-archives and advocates for both digitization and open access. El Guabli encourages archivists to digitize indexes and minority archives for greater access. It also allows advocates teaching present foreign languages to those interested in learning about other cultures. On one point, El Guabli might have provided more in-depth information about the history of post-colonial archives in Morocco, which were only opened in 2013.

Overall, however, *Moroccan Other-Archives* is a thorough and thought-provoking exploration of the process to reconstruct marginalized narratives in the absence of conventional archival resources. By shedding light on suppressed histories and advocating for alternative archival preservation and access methods, El Guabli offers valuable insights into the complexities of postcolonial historical research. I hope other scholars will follow his example and share their own collected other-archives to add further voice to those who have been silenced.

© Laila Hussein Moustafa

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

NOTES

¹ Khaled Fahmy, *Mehmed Ali: From Ottoman Governor to Ruler of Egypt* (London, UK: Oneworld, 2012).

² Omnia El Shakry, “‘History Without Documents’: The Vexed Archives of Decolonization in the Middle East,” *American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (2015): 920–34, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/120.3.920>.