

**The World History and Us
An Introductory Note on the Present
Collection of Papers**

Abdou Filali-Ansary

History of Philosophy and Ideas in Muslim Contexts
London, UK

Abdelahad Sebti

Université Mohammed V de Rabat

When readers of *Hespéris-Tamuda* will have access to and peruse the content of this issue, it will be plain that today's world is going through one important episode of a fast evolving world history. By a pure coincidence, the aim that was set for this issue, namely to raise the interest of historians in our part of the world for world history as a complex of research themes with great potential, has been (tragically) illustrated. At the start of the pandemic, one could imagine being in a science fiction movie or in a novel; later, the challenge generated an unprecedented configuration of phenomena, from the quarantine of millions of people worldwide, air travel and economic activities which have been ground to a halt, to a (much deeper than usual) oil crisis, and a great uncertainty regarding the origin and the prospects for controlling the new virus. Undoubtedly, it is a situation where a great many institutions created by humans during their long history are shaken to their bases.

The present pandemic is linked to globalization, and it is meanwhile one of the glaring corollaries of this phenomenon. The collection of papers offered in this issue can be rendered as a start of a turn, whereby works and reflections will have to question the present in the light of the past and prospects for the future, where the past is, even more than before, "another country."

The aim of this collection of articles on *World History and Us* is to introduce colleagues in our area (Morocco, the Maghreb and areas to the South and East Mediterranean where standard Arabic and French are commonly used in academic discourse) to the remarkable development that world history as a new discipline has undergone in a matter of decades. At the same time, the idea was to point to areas where research may shed new light on local or national issues to which colleagues have dedicated much attention recently, sometimes by highlighting examples where new perspectives were reached through approaches of World History. From the outset, it was suggested that the overall objectives were:

- To offer a tentative overview of the field and the main turns it brought to understanding historical processes;

- To initiate a discussion about epistemological assumptions the new discipline was thought to presume;
- To assess the impact of the new approaches on the ways histories of the region were written.

The included contributions did approach the subject from different angles, beginning by introductions to the main works which have become “classics” of the genre, to critical remarks meant to maintain awareness of limits to ‘unbridled’ hopes (or ‘great expectations’ such as settling scores with ‘orientalism’). It also includes contributions which offer various examples of how the new approaches change or expand our understanding of various historical processes.

At the end of this relatively succinct panorama, it becomes clear that Moroccan historiography seems to proceed in its ways in a manifest indifference towards world history. Several levels of explanation could be suggested. One could invoke the influence of French school and its late opening to international research. In addition to this is the dominance in Morocco of a national, even nationalist history, the renewal of which is itself handicapped by the inflation of a local problematic history. Non-Moroccan history is reduced to the ups and downs of relations with sub-Saharan Africa, Western Europe and the Ottoman Empire. By a curious paradox, Moroccan universities have little expertise in fields related to the history of the Machrek, and even of the Maghreb. So many shortcomings whose overcoming should require an institutional support which, for the moment, is missing.

In what ways will world history attract attention in the future? There is a particular direction, where significant changes can occur, where changes can be significant, and may have some decisive consequences. Narrations produced by historians give individuals their feeling of who they are and at least partially inspire visions of paths to explore. The reader will find in this dossier a study on initiatives taken in the field of history teaching and the production of a new historical awareness in certain countries of the North. Among the many projects that one can think of, comes first the idea of a fruitful articulation between research initiatives and educational programs designed for the younger generations. Such an articulation could help to widen the field of historical consciousness and to disseminate one of the best ways to understand the dynamics that work human societies in their great diversity.