

Princeton University

HONORS FACULTY MEMBERS
RECEIVING EMERITUS STATUS



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The biographical sketches were written by staff and colleagues in the departments of those honored.

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ABDELLAH HAMMOUDI



Abdellah Hammoudi, professor of anthropology, will advance to emeritus status on July 1, 2016.

Abdellah was born in humble circumstances in rural Morocco, the youngest son in a large family. He was educated in Morocco and Paris (licenses in sociology and philosophy from the Mohammed V University in Rabat, maîtrise and doctorate in anthropology from the Sorbonne and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris). Even before completing his Ph.D., his exceptional gifts as an analyst of mixed cultural worlds earned him national and international renown. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Abdellah held consultancies with the Ministry of Agriculture in Morocco, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and the World Bank (among other agencies), advising on issues of rural and urban development across North Africa, while simultaneously advancing through the professorial ranks in the Department of Social Sciences at Mohammed V University.

Publishing widely in English and French throughout those years, Abdellah wrote extensively on themes related to his research on development, political economy, civil society, authority, legitimacy, democracy, and religious experience — themes at once practical and theoretical, and central to the modernization of anthropology as a world discipline. Steeped in the scholarly literatures of several traditions, and immersed in the multicultural experience of his ethnographic sites in Morocco, Abdellah developed a distinctive approach to the generativity of cultural difference — indeed, to differences of all kinds. In the context of an ascendant identity politics within anthropology and the humanities generally, Abdellah has always eschewed any easy identifications, whether for himself or for others.

This idea of culture as a formation across difference (rather than difference itself) permeates his scholarship. His book *La Victime et ses Masques* (Editions du Seuil, 1988) was a transformative ethnographic reinterpretation of a Moroccan ritual tradition involving seemingly opposite movements toward sacrifice and bacchanal;

Abdellah showed their mutually corollary relation. Translated as *The Victim and Its Masks*, this book was an instant classic. Academic visits at New York University, University of California–Los Angeles, and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in the late 1980s reflect the breadth of his recognition as a profoundly original scholar. During this same period, he held fellowships in the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study, and at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin.

Abdellah came to Princeton first as a visiting professor of anthropology, in 1989, joining the permanent faculty in 1991. He served for over ten years as director of Princeton’s Institute for the Transregional Study of the Contemporary Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia (1994–2005). His publications in this period demonstrate the extraordinary acuity of his field ethnography and, at the same time, his deepening engagement with questions central both to our understanding of the Maghreb as a cultural region, and to issues fundamental to anthropology and the human sciences. At Princeton in the 1990s, he published *Master and Disciple: The Cultural Foundations of Moroccan Authoritarianism* (University of Chicago Press, 1997, which, like *The Victim and Its Masks*, was widely translated); this, too, has become a classic account. He wrote extensively on issues of monarchy, authority, political change, and Islam in North Africa not just as issues of regional importance, but also as points of departure for rethinking the relationship between politics and religion, and difference and cooperation. His work in this period culminated in an extraordinary project of commitment and experimentation, as he undertook the hajj as a personal and ethnographic journey. *Une Saison à la Mecque* (Seuil, 2005) was the result — a transcendently beautiful book, and an anthropological and literary masterpiece. Published in English as *A Season in Mecca*, the book was honored by the Lettres Ulysses Prize for the Arts of Reportage, among its other international honors. This book, too, has now been widely translated. Abdellah subsequently spent a year as the Kothari Chair in Democracy at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in India, studying Hindi and Hinduism.

Abdellah’s most recent work continues to braid the long threads of his concerns with culture as a way of living with difference, and, accordingly, as foundational to research, teaching, and collegial life. He writes eloquently on anthropological practice. *Being There*

(University of California Press, 2009), coedited with Princeton's John Borneman, is a celebrated collection of essays on fieldwork as subjective and ethical encounter. He continues to write and lecture, most memorably for Princeton colleagues, perhaps, in his departmental lecture on "Giving and Receiving Yeast, or How to Keep Opposed Identities Together" (2011). In recent memory, most graduate students in anthropology will have had the good fortune of encountering Abdellah in their first semester, as he often taught the opening semester of the pro-seminar, as well as courses on sacrifice and French social theory. No matter where they found Abdellah, from him, they learned to read slowly, closely, curiously, and generously — and collegially.

Abdellah's career took him all over the world. Yet he retained a deep investment in his home and nationality, which led him to develop what he calls a "double-edged critique": critical of both Moroccan society and the West. The authenticity of this critique within the Arab world required that he personally share the fate of those about whom he wrote, thus he refused French or American citizenship or dual citizenship. In negotiating these various locations, he is far more than observer or analyst (though he is both of these). He cultivates in himself a deliberately thin skin, allowing the external world to enter him rather than steeling himself from it. This thin skin is his great gift — a gift repaid in the extraordinary sensitivity of his ethnography, teaching, and collegial relations. In his research, Abdellah explores everything phenomenologically, paying attention to the fine psychic and sociological details of encounters with the external world in ritual sacrifice, in religious pilgrimage, and in the development of authoritarian political form that has characterized the Middle East of the last century. He is a Moroccan subject, not just in relation to the sovereign but more fundamentally, in relation to Islam and his life experience of crossing cultures, classes, and institutional contexts. Consistent with that experience, he defends other people's ability to change and make change on behalf of others. Abdellah's personal experience gives him a singular voice borne of his ability to think simultaneously in multiple languages. He is fluent in three languages (Arabic, French, and English) and speaks two others (Spanish and Berber). In Arabic he engages the community into which he was born and the larger Middle East, in French his childhood education in a Catholic missionary school and the intellectual community of

his anthropological training, and in English the community of which Princeton is a part. Most of Abdellah's writing is in French and Arabic, and his voice in these languages is equal parts direct and poetic. In the spoken word, his English is multivoiced. For example, when he gives a talk in English, unlike in Arabic or French, he usually has written it out. But then he never reads out loud his English text; rather, he summarizes in his mind what he has written, and then in an oral register speaks a version of this written text. What goes on in the process is a series of mysterious, nondiscrete cognitive and perceptive operations, moving back and forth from written to oral and from Arabic and French to English. This is Abdellah's voice.