



THEORIES AND SOCIAL MECHANISMS

Essays in Honour of Mohamed Cherkaoui

Edited by
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This *Festschrift* has been prepared to celebrate the life and work of Professor Mohamed Cherkaoui (b. 1945). It provides 37 articles contributed by leading sociologists and social scientists, whose essays explore and evaluate aspects of his many contributions to the understanding of contemporary society in both France itself and at a more global level, as well as his insights into some of the central geopolitical issues of the 21st century.

Mohamed Cherkaoui has played a key role in the development of sociology both in France and beyond its borders since the publication in the 1970s of his early work on education and social mobility. During a period when the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu and his acolytes were already on the way to becoming a dominant paradigm, Cherkaoui—much like his master, Raymond Boudon—was able to show that certain of the key assumptions of this new paradigm were in fact contradicted by the evidence. As a sophisticated innovator in the statistical analysis of educational data (techniques largely ignored by the Bourdieusian approach) Cherkaoui's careful unpicking of the key dimensions of educational attainment and social mobility exploded many of the myths about the class basis of schooling in modern France propagated by

Bourdieu and others. Indeed so authoritative was Cherkaoui's analysis of the French education system that he was invited in 1986 to write a general introduction to its analysis for the highly respected *Que sais-je* series, where it still remains the standard work on its subject—now in its eighth edition.

As a French sociologist but one with an internationalist background, the Moroccan-born Cherkaoui has also been instrumental in developing new sociological approaches and insights based on careful study of classical sociology which have gained a world-wide audience. His work on Émile Durkheim, Tocqueville and Max Weber, has brought new insights into several domains of sociological research, and in a way that focuses them on contemporary issues of sociological explanation. In fact, as Gianluca Manzo emphasizes in his introductory essay on the published work of Cherkaoui he has remained a “theorist of the middle-range” in the image both of Robert K. Merton, and of his mentor and “master”, Raymond Boudon. As a result, Cherkaoui's focus on the explanation of, for example, unintended consequences, social mechanisms and emergent phenomena place his work at the centre of contemporary sociological research. A tireless promoter

of sociology as a scientific and academic discipline, Mohamed Cherkaoui was a leading member and chair of the editorial board of the leading French sociology journal, the *Revue Française de Sociologie*, and the director of the GEMAS research group that was founded by Raymond Boudon.

In recent years Professor Cherkaoui has devoted considerable attention to the geopolitical situation of the region where he was born, North Africa, applying sociological theories and analyses to some

of the most pressing issues of the day, which include the rise of radical Islam, the conflicts between the Maghreb states, and the problems and challenges raised by modernising social and political institutions such as the university, especially in Morocco.

The essays collected together in the two volumes of this Festschrift are divided into two main themes: *Theories* and *Social Mechanisms*. These represent the leitmotifs of Cherkaoui's contribution to social thought during his career.

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