



Jonathan Wyrzten.- *Making Morocco: Colonial Intervention and the Politics of Identity* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2015), 334 p.

In Moroccan historiography, the sociocultural roots of what constituted the national identity of modern Morocco are located in the precolonial period and especially the nineteenth-century (see especially the influential work of Abdallah Laroui, *Les origines sociales et culturelles du nationalisme marocain, 1830-1912*, Paris: Maspero, 1977). Until recently, research on the colonial period was largely neglected, with the exception of histories on the emergence and development of the nationalist movement and the monarchy in the making of modern Morocco. In the nationalist writing of Moroccan history, key moments are recounted: the Berber dahir of 1930, the formation of the Istiqlal; and the emergence of Mohammed Ben Youssef (future Mohammed V) as a national leader and champion of independence, from his endorsement of the independence movement, his speech in Tangier in 1947, to his exile and return. Implicit in this narrative is that Morocco after independence was but a continuation of the precolonial state, and that colonial intervention was but a glitch, albeit a deeply damaging one, in the longer trajectory, which dates back to the origins of the Alawid dynasty in the seventeenth-century if not earlier, of Morocco's long history. Those who take a critical view of the post-independence monarchy, have traced the antecedents to authoritarianism in the precolonial system: the *Makhzen*, the sufi system, or the segmentary structure of Moroccan politics (e.g., Mohamed Tozy, Abdallah Hammoudi, John Waterbury, Ernest Gellner).

While not explicitly challenging the insights of these and other scholars who place emphasis on precolonial structures for understanding contemporary Moroccan politics and society, Jonathan Wyrzten, in this incisively argued book, shifts our attention to the French protectorate as the crucial period for comprehending the political landscape after independence; he begins by

asking two interconnected questions: how did Moroccan identity come to be defined, and how did the dynasty survive the period of colonialism and decolonization, in contrast to other examples from the Middle East and North Africa. While the enduring symbolic power of the monarchy was clearly rooted in the political culture of the precolonial past, as Mohamed Tozy convincingly argues (*Monarchie et Islam politique au Maroc*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1999), Wyrzten makes the case for transformations that were squarely centered in the colonial period. The title, “Making Morocco” draws from a condescending remark by the resident-general Lyautey, but Wyrzten uses it to challenge the idea that the making of Morocco was solely the outcome of the French protectorate authorities: “The making of Morocco also involved a constellation of Moroccan actors: the Alawid sultan, the nominal ruler; an urban Arabic-speaking elite that was beginning to mobilize popular support and to make claims about the trajectories of state and nation-building; and, less obviously, groups including Berbers and Jews whose marginal ethnic or religious position in society put them at the crux of identity struggles” (4). Untypically, Wyrzten brings gender into the discussion, focusing on women in the changing politics of identity. By bringing religion, ethnicity, and gender to the center of inquiry, Wyrzten complicates the standard narrative of nationalism and state-building in Morocco.

In the yet largely undertheorized subject of Colonial Morocco, Wyrzten develops a new vocabulary. He draws from and expands on Bourdieu’s concept of “field” (*champ*), referring to what he dubs a “colonial political field,” a threefold concept comprising space, organizing forces, and competition (11-12). He also draws from James Scott’s concept of “legibility” (James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), which he applies to the colonial political field: “In Morocco, a protectorate imaginary drew together legitimation and legibility strategies that constituted preservationist, ethnographic, and developmentalist modes of rule” (23). Wyrzten’s also builds on earlier work of Edmund Burke who analyzed how a “Moroccan vulgate” developed out of notions that French ethnographers had earlier derived from colonial Algeria, inventing a “Moroccan Islam,” which was to shape colonial rule of the protectorate (Burke uses “gospel” rather than “vulgate” in his later writings [Edmund Burke III, *The Ethnographic State: France and the Invention of Moroccan Islam*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014, (79))]. In bringing into focus the ways in which identity was politicized among diverse actors, Wyrzten analyzes how nationalists created a kind of “counter-vulgate” to the protectorate’s classificatory logics that divided Morocco into a set of political binaries.

This general theoretical framework and method of analysis has allowed Wyrzten to reinterpret the history of Morocco in the twentieth-century. He not only provides new insights on some of the key moments in the standard nationalist narrative, but also includes actors that have been excluded in histories of the protectorate. Each chapter engages with a different dimension of the colonial political field. He begins by examining the process, between 1907-34, in which the state was able to attain an unprecedented degree of military control. This was achieved in part by “reinventing the Jaysh,” in effect, through deploying Moroccan troops from Berber speaking regions in the colonial army. From the expansion of territoriality, Wyrzten turns to how the logics of “legitimation and legibility” were represented. This is elaborated in a very close reading of how the protectorate was represented in the International Colonial Exposition in Paris in 1931, which segues into a discussion of the logic of the protectorate system and the preservation of the Alawid dynasty and the institutions of the *makhzen* that served to legitimate colonial rule. Yet the colonial authorities were not simply perpetuating the institutions and structures of the pre-colonial monarchy and *makhzen*, but rather, appropriated their symbolic logics and invented new traditions to legitimize the protectorate, constructing what he aptly calls the “neo-Makhzen” (80-81).

The first two chapters lay the groundwork for an understanding of the logics of legitimacy of colonial rule, following Burke’s paradigm of the Moroccan vulgate. The following chapters shift to the interactions of Moroccans with the expanding colonial state. Chapters three and four focus on the resistance to the expansion of colonial rule among the Tamazight speaking populations of the Atlas Mountains and the Rif, examining how their collective identity was renegotiated amid changing circumstances resulting from colonial intervention. In a particularly innovative use of an oral archive of Middle and High Atlas Tamazight poetry, Wyrzten analyzes the way in which non-elite men and women collectively resisted the expansion of colonial rule. One of the important dimensions reflected in this poetry was the conscription of tribesmen from the Atlas into the colonial army. The poems show ambivalence toward their participation in the colonial military campaigns, yet pride in their importance for the French. Much better known in Moroccan historiography is Abd el-Krim’s movement of resistance in the Rif. Wyrzten revisits the Rif Republic through the lens of how an autonomous anti-colonial political field was constructed, and departing from other detailed accounts of the war in the Rif, recovers the voices of non-state actors from poems of rural men and women. Though Abd el-Krim is appropriated as an important symbol of national liberation in Moroccan nationalist discourse, Wyrzten points out that the collective experience of resistance and autonomous

state formation of the Rif Republic also reinforced a separate Rif identity that was to remain, and that was to play out after independence.

The nationalist definition of Moroccan identity was centered on an urban based and elite Arabo-Islamic culture and the Alawid monarchy, both of which are discursively connected to the precolonial period. Wyrzten, however, does not take this definition at face value but rather argues that it was a contingent outcome of the colonial political field. The book begins with nationalist protests in 1930 against the Berber dahir, and chapter 5 resumes again with the dahir, and the Latif prayer of protests against the decree. The Berber dahir, that sought to further sever juridically the Berbers from Islam, symbolically was the crucial event that mobilized the nationalist movement on its road toward unity and Moroccan independence. Wyrzten, however, problematizes this historical turn in the 1930s to show how urban nationalists were framing a dominant nationalist discourse that was to counter the colonial state's ethnic and religious classifications that differentiated between Arabs and Berbers. The nationalists mobilized protests calling for national unity based on a common history of Islam and Arabization, and coopting the Islamic monarchy that had been promoted by the French to legitimate the protectorate, in their construction of a national identity. Ironically, as Wyrzten shows, the emphasis on the Arabo-Islamic heritage, tended to exclude from the Moroccan collective identity both Berbers and Jews. For as Wyrzten demonstrates in his chapter on Morocco's Jewish question, the ambiguous position of Moroccan Jews as subjects of the sultan, brings into sharp relief the boundaries of the nationalists' imagining of a unified Arabo-Islamic national community. As a number of scholars have shown (Mohammed Kenbib, *Juifs et musulmans au Maroc, 1859-1948*, Rabat: Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, 1994; Yaron Tsur, *A Torn Community: The Jews of Morocco and Nationalism, 1943-1954* [in Hebrew], Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2001; Mohammed Hatimi, "Al-Jamā'āt al-Yahūdiyya al-Maghribiya wa-'l-Khiyār al-Ša'b bayna Nidā' al-Šahyūniyya wa-Rihān al-Maghrib al-Mustaqil, 1947-1961," Doctorat d'Etat diss., Faculté des Lettres, Sais-Fès, 2007.), Jews were caught between competing identities: assimilation to France and French culture, Zionism, and Moroccan nationalism.

Rarely discussed in studies of Moroccan nationalism, national identity, and state formation is gender. Drawing comparatively from research on colonial states and gender, Wyrzten demonstrates in the Moroccan case how gender differentiation, in legal and educational policies, were used to maintain social boundaries and to stabilize, rather than transform, the status of Moroccan women. Moroccan nationalists in the 1930s used the women's question to critique colonial Arab-Berber policies, by emphasizing the inequality of women under Berber customary law, compared to the *shari'a*. Mohammed al-Fassi, called for the advancement of Moroccan women within

an Arabo-Islamic framework. In the late 1940s, the nationalists shifted their focus more to the question of women’s education, and Mohammed V began to use women’s advancement to define Moroccan identity. Wyrzten offers glimpses of how Moroccan women participated in the identity politics during the protectorate period, pointing to the need for more research on the subject.

A thread that runs through the entire book is the position of the monarchy and the survival of the Alawid dynasty through colonization and decolonization, and this is the focus of the final two chapters. Wyrzten sees nothing inevitable in the survival of the monarchy, explaining how it was the outcome of historical contingencies in relation to the legitimizing logics of the protectorate system. In the transition of Sidi Mohammed ben Youssef from an obsequious figurehead and instrument of the French to a national and religious anti-colonial leader who led Morocco to independence –from Sultan to King as it is often expressed in the nationalist narrative– Wyrzten shows how Mohammed V exploited his position and symbolic power that had been created according to the legitimizing logics of the protectorate system to assert his role as national leader. This was to greatly influence how Moroccan national identity came to be defined, allowing the dynasty to dominate the Moroccan political field after independence.

That colonial rule, through its preservationist, ethnographic, and developmentalist policies was unwittingly crucial in forming the structure of the Moroccan political field after independence, is convincingly shown through its reinvention of the monarchy and the neo-Makhzan, its creation of a colonial army that relied on mainly Tamazight-speaking tribesmen that became the backbone of the Royal Armed Forces, and the politicization of Moroccan territorial boundaries which anticipated the irredentist claims to the Sahara. The deeply contested identity struggles on religion, ethnicity, and gender during the protectorate continue to challenge and transform the Arabo-Islamic identity that dominated the Moroccan political field after independence. The shift of the monarchy in the twenty-first century to a more pluralistic definition of Moroccan identity that recognizes Amazigh culture and language and the significance of Jews (despite the fact that only a remnant remains), and the officially sponsored reform of women’s rights, is understood in terms of continuity of the dualist policy to both preserve and modernize formulated by Lyautey in the first years of the Protectorate. This is a thesis that would suggest that Moroccan exceptionalism in the political field is much more closely tied to the legacy of colonialism than most scholars have been willing or able to acknowledge, for this would directly challenge nationalist assumptions about the meaning of Moroccan identity.

Daniel J. Schroeter
University of Minnesota