



Edmund Burke III, *The Ethnographic State: France and the Invention of Moroccan Islam*, (California: University of California Press, 2014), 273p.

In his book *The Ethnographic State: France and the Invention of Moroccan Islam*, Burke offers, as his wont, a deft and acute handling of the basic material of the historian's craft – the archive – to provide a persuasive account of his thesis that Moroccan history is closely bound up with French colonial ethnography and that to understand Morocco's present, one needs to revisit the pivotal period of its history: the protectorate.

Burke narrates in a captivating style the relation between information gathering and political power and shows how the administrative core of the French colonial rule was built around knowledge-producing institutions and how the French colonial bureaucracy was “data intensive”. On this reading, colonial knowledge functioned as a means by which to order Morocco and make it understood so that effective colonial policies would be informed on solid, empirical grounds. He shows how recording and documenting Morocco was a way to bolster the feelings of the colonial power. In a word, Burke shows how, at least with respect to the conceptual approach, France sought to establish and consolidate its rule in Morocco through the accumulation of information about Morocco's people and places. There were, of course, a lot of discontinuities between this overall scheme and what happened on the ground, which was the site of political manoeuvring that Burke renders in a breath-taking way. Nonetheless, Burke maintains that “the creation of the ethnographic state was the greatest achievement of the French protectorate.” The question to ask here is whether direct colonial rule in Algeria hampered the establishment of an ethnographic state in Morocco although it constituted the source of ethnographic knowledge in Morocco.

In his introductory chapter, “The Invention of Moroccan Islam”, the author shows how Moroccan Islam has come into being through colonial

ethnography. He refers to what he describes as an iconic moment “Hubert Lyautey, first resident - general of the French protectorate in Morocco (1912 – 25), holds the stirrup for Moulay Youssef as he mounts his horse on the occasion of his accession to the throne in 1912 as the first sultan of the French protectorate” (p. 1). The political underpinnings of this symbolic ritualistic act are elucidated by Burke: “the historical continuity of the French, the authority of the Sultan, the continuity between Morocco’s ‘deep past’ and the protectorate. However, I’d like to argue that the picture Burke offers is centred on Lyautey and the Sultan with Lyautey dictating how the picture is to be interpreted. I’d have liked to know who else was in the picture and how they interpreted that symbolic act. As Foucault teaches us, power “is diffuse rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed, constitute agents rather than being deployed by them” (Gaventa, John (2003) *Power after Lukes: A Review of the Literature*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.: 1). It’d appear that Burke offers a top down picture of power. The players in the power struggle did not in any way wield the same power, but I think a picture zooming onto these players might have been more persuasive. This is something Burke did in *The Prelude* where he gives “the Moroccan side of the Moroccan question”. It should be noted that Moroccan Islam was discovered in Algeria through Zawiyas and Brotherhoods since 1846.

From Burke’s perspective, “Far from being of great antiquity, ‘Moroccan Islam’ has a history - one that is deeply entwined with French colonial ethnography” (p.1). The phrase “invention of Moroccan Islam” is most appropriate here. Indeed as Madani tells us “the major characteristic of the invention of tradition is that it borrows its constitutive elements from history and makes use of fragments of the past more or less fantasmatic in the service of social and political innovation” (Madani, Mohamed (2006). *Le paysage politique marocain*. Rabat: Dar El Qalam, 18). Indeed, since the publication of Hobbsbawm and Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition*, where invented tradition is defined as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual and symbolic nature, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations” (Hobbsbawm, E. and Terence Ranger, (Eds). (1983). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 1-2), a number of scholars working on Morocco have taken up the invention of tradition with respect to the monarchy and Moroccan Islam. A case in point is Elaine Combs Schilling who points out that “Morocco is an old and durable nation, one that constantly has transformed itself in addressing an ever-changing world but also one that has maintained domains of continuity so that, to

some degree, it has met transformation on its own terms” Combs Schilling, E. (1989). *Sacred Performances: Islam, Sexuality and Sacrifice*. New York: Columbia University Press (p. ii). As for Burke, he deploys the invention of tradition to assert something different, “that ‘Moroccan Islam’ far from being an unchanging survival of the past, was neither a core Islamic civilisational value nor an expression of Moroccan tradition. Rather, it was a product of the historical encounter between Morocco and the French colonial rule in the period 1900-1923”. The picture drawn, as I pointed out above, gives the French centre stage. Hobbsbawm, in his later work, revisited his early work and pointed out that the word invention is unfortunate and that he should have used re-invention, for tradition is not invented from nothing. It builds on elements of what used to exist. It should be noted here that Abderrahman Ibn Zaydan (1878-1946), the historian who accepted the function of vice-director of the military school of Dâr al-Bayda in Meknes after the installation of the French protectorate, wrote an interesting compilation of those traditions ‘*al iz wal sawla fi ma’alimi nothumi al dawla*’ and offered it to Lyautey.

Furthermore, taking cue from Bernard Cohen, Burke elaborates on the Moroccan colonial archive which for him “reflected the social engineering consciousness of late colonialism, with its trust in social scientific research married to the goals of the state (now linked to a racially conscious narrative of the state” and was “created under the double sign of social sciences and high modernist imperialism” (p.4). The Moroccan colonial archive offered an inventory of the Moroccan social groups, cities, tribes, etc. produced between 1900 and 1930, but besides consisting of this mass of documents, it has constituted itself, as Foucault would say, “the law of what can be said” orchestrated by the various institutions meant to carry out France’s scientific imperialism that took on the role Derrida associates with the archons in his discussion of the etymology of archive in *Archive Fever*, whose archival discourse is the means by which they wield power through the setting up of what is allowed to be said and what is disallowed.

Chapter 7 is an instantiation of Burke’s mode of historicisation. He elaborates on the discontinuities between the political and academic forms of knowledge after the 1912 establishment of the protectorate. He tackles the question of why the Algerian colonial gospel was rejected between 1900 and 1904 and why its binaries and stereotypes except with respect to the Berbers were accepted after 1912. Before 1900, Burke tells us there was little knowledge of Morocco, so what the French did was to transfer the experience of Islam in colonial Algeria to Morocco. This proved to be mistaken as it happened with respect to the transfer of policy regarding Sufi Turuqs. Thus,

while the French managed to co-opt the Tijanis in Algeria, they failed to do so in Morocco. Another example is the failure of Ordega, the French minister in Tangier to press a reform through Sharif Wazan. The political conjuncture in 1904 with the entente cordiale brought about a major happening and a reductive set of orientalist stereotypes about Morocco coming together: Bled Siba, bled Makhzen; Arabs and Berbers; the nature of the Islamic state and the Sultan's authority; the role of Turuqs. Interestingly, the image of Morocco that was presented as variegated before 2004 solidified into reductionist stereotypes. Accordingly, one could note differences in the perspectives adopted by Doutté and Michaux-Bellaire before and after the establishment of the vulgate - a myth Moroccan history suffers from alongside the Lyautey legend as Burke points out in his review of Robin Bidwell's 'Morocco under Colonial rule'. Burke then notes the change in the representation of Morocco in the French colonial publications as a result of France's adoption of the Makhzen policy instead of the tribal policy.

In his discussion of Algeria, Hannoum notes a similar transformation. He asks the question why is it that in its early phase the colonial discourse did account (reference to Alexis de Tocqueville and Berbrugger among others) for the Algerian demographic and cultural diversity, albeit with racialised lenses. Why by the 1930s had the colonial discourse become more reductionist presenting a population made only of 2 races? Hannoum associates the shift with Ernest Renan's lecture on the nation at Sorbonne: "A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. There are two things which in reality are only one, that constitute this spiritual principle. One is the past; the other is the present." The tribal nature of Algeria prevented it from organising itself as a nation. This discourse created a tertiary relationship between Arabs and Berbers, on the one hand and between both and the French, on the other hand. (Hannoum, A. 2009. "Notes on the (Post) Colonial in the Maghreb". *Critique of Anthropology*, 29: 3, pp. 324 – 344).

I'd like to argue that while Burke's perspective is most interesting, I wonder about the pertinence of undertaking a similar study on the ways the Spanish tried to construct Morocco. The recent discovery of a Moroccan constitution by Ali Bey should indicate that there was a dynamic of constructing Morocco on the Spanish side.

The vulgate has been subject of critique by Moroccan nationalist historians who have highlighted the idea that Morocco's state did not come with the French. Thus, with respect to the conventional wisdom that the Sultan had authority only over one third of the territory, Germain Ayache

asserts in his article “La fonction d’arbitrage du makhzen”: “This account of Moroccan history, which is far too convenient and simple, was developed and popularised by French writers at just the right time to serve France’s colonial plans. By portraying Morocco, as a country which has never been quite conquered fully, since the conqueror, that is the Sultan was simultaneously brutal, grasping and impoverished, it could then be said that the colonising power would have to do everything.” (Ayache, G. (1979). “La fonction d’arbitrage du makhzen, *Etudes d’histoire marocaine*, SMER, Rabat, 1979, pp. 159 – 176). Against this line of thinking, Ayache pointed out that rebellions could be found elsewhere in other states, and because they were exceptional events, they attracted the commentaries of chroniclers. As for Burke, the interpretations offered of Morocco were partially right and partially wrong. This shows Burke’s position as someone who is dissatisfied with both the critiques of Orientalism as well as the stands of the researchers who uphold the dominant wisdom on Moroccan Islam. At one point Burke wonders about the reasons why researchers continue to adhere to the vulgate despite the fact that the institution and power relations that brought it about no longer exist. Has it to do with political manoeuvring associated with knowledge networks? It should be worthwhile to reflect on the conditions of possibility for breaking away from it.

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