



## Mobilizing Morocco: Recent works on society and state

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## REVIEW ESSAY

## Mobilizing Morocco: Recent works on society and state

**Imperial rule and the politics of nationalism: Anti-colonial protest in the French empire**, by Adria Lawrence, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2013, \$34.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781107640757

**Politique et mouvements sociaux au Maroc: La révolution désamorcée?**, by Frédéric Vairel, Paris, Sciences Po., 2014, 26.00 euro (paperback), ISBN 2724615956

**Making Morocco: Colonial intervention and the politics of identity**, by Jonathan Wyrzten, Ithica, Cornell University Press, 2015, \$27.95 (paperback), ISBN 1501700235

Social scientific scholarship on the Kingdom of Morocco has long focused on elite and institutional facets of politics. Challenging Huntington's (1968) claim that monarchs are incapable of accommodating social and economic change – and are therefore doomed to extinction – scholars have leveraged the case of Morocco to illustrate the unique advantages of monarchism vis-à-vis processes of state formation and political consolidation, arguing that the Alawi monarchy's cultural legitimacy, flexibility in the face of political challenge, and ability to fragment opposition elites while appearing 'above the fray' of political competition has rendered Kings Hassan II (1961–1991) and Mohammed IV (1999 – present) two of the most resilient rulers in the region (Waterbury, 1970; Anderson, 1991; for a review of these arguments, see Lucas, 2004). As Middle East social science turned towards the possibilities and limits of political liberalization in the 1990s, debates likewise centred on the role of the monarch in facilitating or forestalling multiparty competition, and on the effects of the monarchical regime type on the behaviour of opposition elites (Lust-Okar, 2006; Lust and Jamal, 2002; Storm, 2007; Yom, 2012).

Finally, come the Arab Uprisings of 2011, scholars pointed to an obvious point of divergence: presidential republics (Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Libya) fell in the face of mass protests or descended into civil war, while monarchies (Morocco, Jordan, Bahrain) survived the protest wave with little reconfiguration of political power (Lawrence, 2017). King Mohammed VI and Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi's multivalent approach to containing the Moroccan February 20<sup>th</sup> movement – a cocktail of swift labour concessions, minimal violence against demonstrators, the much-publicized constitutional referendum and ensuing legislative election – has been hailed as a textbook recipe for avoiding revolution. Moroccan

institutions have indeed shown remarkable endurance. The particular dynamics of elite legitimization, control, and compromise present in the Kingdom certainly deserve thorough exploration.

And yet a country is never just a King and his *makhzen*. A number of excellent recent studies, including the three books under review in this article, have expanded the conceptual and empirical focus of Morocco scholarship. Two of these works explicitly develop Bourdieu's notion of *the field*, or *le champ* – the conceptual territory of political action and reaction, an object of inquiry that extends beyond formal institutions and elite strategies to account for the ways in which citizens and organizations inexorably shape (and are shaped by) their state. All demonstrate an important anti-functionalist approach to understanding political order, unpacking the difference between institutional endurance and intractability, and uncovering contingency where teleological narratives of political development have taken root. These books complement and advance existing Morocco literature by locating evolving institutions within a diverse and mobilized polity.

### Colonial Morocco: Logics of power and resistance

Jonathan Wyrzten's *Making Morocco: Colonial Intervention and the Politics of Identity* poses an ambitious question: how did nearly five decades of European colonial intervention transform Moroccan identity? Wyrzten offers neither an institutional history nor a subaltern one, but rather a rich account of how contestation over the classificatory schemes of colonial rule shaped both the colonial state and the modern Moroccan polity. Centring four key dimensions of Moroccan identity – religion, ethnicity, territory, and the role of the Alawid monarchy – and using a wide array of archival sources – ranging from Berber poetry to nationalist newspapers of the 1930s – Wyrzten traces how identity categories were leveraged and challenged by diverse European and Moroccan actors within the colonial political field.

Through a detailed account of French and Spanish territorial expansion into Berber-dominated lands, Wyrzten shows that colonial Berber policy was multifaceted and at times contradictory; authorities sought to incorporate Berbers as colonial subjects while maintaining strict classificatory ethnic divisions enshrined through customary law and education policy. (It bears mentioning that colonial berber policy – like 'divide and rule' schemes implemented elsewhere in the empire – has had far-reaching consequences for contemporary debates over the recognition of Berber culture and the Amazigh language.) In turn, members of the *istiqlal* movement countered the colonial classificatory scheme with a unifying vision of Moroccan identity based on Arabo-Islamic heritage, a formulation with important implications for two other identity groups analysed in *Making Morocco*: Jews and women. Though the bulk of Wyrzten's book is chapterized according to its own classificatory logic – tackling Berber, nationalist, Jewish, and gender questions in parallel historical studies – the richest contributions emerge from the author's unpacking of the *intersections* of these identity contests: for example, how the efforts of Zionist organizations to mobilize Moroccan Jews exposed ambiguities within the vision of Moroccan political community advanced by the nationalist

movement; or how, in the immediate post-independence period, a conservative patriarchal codification of family law (once again) inscribed gender division as a site upon which the Islamic credentials of King and elites could be demonstrated.

*Making Morocco's* final chapters address the institution of the Alawi monarchy and the Sultan Mohammed V's prerogatives in negotiating the independence movement and facilitating post-independence state building. While developing a contingent historical argument for the monarchy's endurance through the ruptures of colonization and decolonization, Wyrzten also emphasizes how the *symbolic resources* of the monarchy became available to different political forces – the French administration, Berber opponents, the nationalist movement – who strategically invoked the monarch's legitimacy to bolster their own claims to sovereignty. The reader is thus offered a new conceptualization of Morocco's central political force; the monarchy as not just an institution or an actor, but a symbolic system akin to that of Islam or colonial modernism, the social boundaries and purpose of which are contested.

The inherent contingency of mobilizing political identity forms the central theme of Adria Lawrence's *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism: Anti-Colonial Protest in the French Empire*. Lawrence tackles the teleological vision of nationalist mobilization common to social scientific narratives of decolonization, where nationalism is viewed as an 'organic' response to foreign domination and actors reflexively mobilize to achieve modern political order in the form of the sovereign territorial nation state. By highlighting the plurality and diversity of popular responses to colonial rule, both within Morocco and throughout the French empire, Lawrence dispels the anachronistic grafting of latter-day analytic categories (the *national* movement) onto actors that sought to reform, rather than replace, colonial administrations. This theoretical intervention generates a host of new empirical questions that Lawrence's chapters seek to answer: how and why did nationalism ultimately supplant reformism as a motivating principle for anti-colonial agitation? What factors account for variation in temporal and geographic onset of nationalist protest?

*Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism* masterfully leverages multiple scales of historical analysis, drawing out complementary comparisons that are cross-national, sub-national, and temporal. Lawrence begins with a case study of Moroccan anti-colonial protest demonstrating that reformist challenges of the early 1930s presented an *alternative* to separation from French authority, rather than a form of proto-nationalism. Early reformers sought to democratize colonial rule, seeking reforms including equalization of tax and land policies, a unified code of justice, and greater educational opportunity. Rather than a bounded national identity, reformists invoked universalist ideals of civic equality, appealing in particular to French leftists with whom they found common ideological cause.

Importantly, Lawrence locates the onset of *nationalist* mobilization in the frustration of these demands for greater equality of colonial subjects. Opening the scope of inquiry to French colonial zones in West Africa and Southeast Asia, Lawrence shows that where French authorities extended offers of greater equality – that is, where colonial subjects were offered French citizenship – nationalist movements did not emerge in the decade following these extensions. Lawrence

thus positions nationalist mobilization as a contingent outcome born of *interactions* between authorities and subject populations, rather than a reflection of essential characteristics or commitments of the polity.

## Social mobilization: Opportunities and impacts

The latter half of *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism* turns toward theorizing the opportunity structure facing anti-colonial activists. As Lawrence points out, the task of generating falsifiable hypotheses about political opportunity – as opposed to searching *post hoc* for ‘opportunities’ to explain outbreaks – requires narrowing the conceptual scope of ‘opportunity’ *ex ante*. Building on McAdam’s (1982) insight that social movements respond to events that make authority vulnerable, Lawrence argues that disruptions in colonial authority signalled to potential anti-colonial movers that the possibility of independence had increased, and that the likelihood of coercive response had fallen.

Again surveying the breadth of French empire, Lawrence shows that World War II did not trigger anti-colonial mobilization throughout the empire; rather, mobilization occurred in colonies that were invaded by foreign forces. Returning to the case of Morocco and leveraging a rich database of anti-colonial protests spanning 1934–1956, Lawrence shows that disruptions in colonial authority were associated with spikes in mobilization. More interesting still, Lawrence demonstrates that the evolving strength of imperial authority influenced the *types* of protest that were most prevalent; store closings, a more passive form of resistance, were more common during periods of stable colonial rule, while public demonstrations occurred mainly in the context of disruption. Fluctuations in imperial authority thus influenced not only the *incidence* of anti-colonial mobilization but the strategies and organizational forms used by activists.

Historically speaking, Frédéric Vairel’s *Politique et mouvements sociaux au Maroc: La révolution désamorcée?* begins where Lawrence’s analysis concludes. Vairel develops a sweeping yet exquisitely detailed history of contestation and dissent in post-independence Morocco, tracing the evolution of ‘contentious space’ in relation to the arena of institutional politics. Theoretically, *Politique et mouvements sociaux au Maroc* offers a corrective to works that have positioned associational space within authoritarian regimes as either wholesale co-opted – and therefore unworthy of serious inquiry – or as carbon copies of the Toquevillian ‘civil societies’ thought to generate and buttress democratic rule. Importantly, Vairel unpacks how attempts to reform and reconstitute Moroccan political space from the 1990s onward influenced the prerogatives and strategies of militants, taking care to disentangle Moroccan *alternance* from a linear notion of political democratization.

Vairel’s empirical work begins with a review of the ‘years of lead,’ the period of political consolidation under King Hassan II characterized by widespread state violence against dissidence. Lasting from Moroccan independence through the late 1980s, the years of lead mark the beginning of many of the ‘activist careers’ analysed in this book. Vairel’s interviews reveal the social effects of torture, forced disappearances, and kangaroo trials on families and on the social networks within which victims were embedded: heavy recourse to coercion pushes dissidence into

clandestine organization; militants rely on local committees and cellular organization to resist obliteration.

Vairel then turns to analysis of three important movements and their crystallization as political and associational actors from in late 1990s and early 2000s: the women's movement supporting the 1999 National Plan for the Integration of Women in Development; the Islamist movement resisting this same Plan; and the human rights movement demanding an end to civic violations and accountability for abuses enduring during the years of lead. To varying degrees, these organizational efforts rely on social networks and solidarities forged through the years of lead – the comparative paucity of pre-existing networks undergirding the pro-Plan women's movement, through this logic, helps to explain the relative weakness of their mobilizing efforts.

Departing from Wyrzten's all-encompassing concept of the 'colonial political field,' Vairel invokes le *champ politique* in a delimited sense to refer to actors (or aspiring ones) in electoral and institutional politics. The sharp boundaries of 'politics' as such highlight a central dilemma for activists revisited throughout the core chapters: whether and how to engage with political institutions and – in related terms – whether the goal of activist work should be to overthrow the regime or to tame its excesses. More than academic distinctions, these debates map directly onto associational strategies, including groups' willingness to engage in street protests as opposed to 'elite' forms of influence based on 'expertise' and appeals to benevolent authority.

Unsurprisingly, differences emerge *within* the movements under examination, driving further pluralization of associational space as actors navigate different degrees of proximity to power. While the most electorally successful Islamist faction, the PJD, accepts ideological preconditions for electoral participation, other Islamists – namely the popular *Justice et Bienfaisance* – choose not to recognize the Monarch as the 'Commander of the Faithful,' and thus remain banned (if functionally tolerated). In parallel, human rights defenders diverge in their judgment of how institutional collaboration may facilitate their aims, as demonstrated by responses to the *l'Instance équité et réconciliation* (IER). Despite the presence of high-profile human rights advocates within the commission, the AMDH – often judged the more militant of Morocco's national human rights associations – criticizes the proceedings for omitting discussion of torture and prohibiting the naming of abusers, and holds parallel hearings to dispute 'the state's monopoly on describing the history of repression' (pg. 296).

Despite these diverse trajectories, Vairel develops a unifying characterization for Moroccan contentious space: that of *autolimitation*. Growing out of a lineage of severe repression and facing political opportunities of uncertain magnitude, Morocco's militants self-consciously limit their repertoires and public grievances to avoid confrontation with the regime. Such behaviours are further structured, Vairel argues, through encounters with international funders, who impress upon militants the 'professionalizing' and 'de-politicizing' grammar of civil society aid. Autolimitation is visible in the pervasion of the sit-in as a favoured form of collective action during this period; in the PJD's decision to limit the number of seats it contested during elections in 2002 (also discussed at length in Willis 2004);

and, as argued in a final chapter, in the conspicuous absence of calls for full regime change in the context of the 2011 February 20<sup>th</sup> movement. Indeed, Vairel notes that many of the organizers developed their own protest practices through the types of associational practices highlighted in this book. Rather than a copycat protest referencing Tahrir Square or Sidi Bouzid, Morocco's youth protest movement is therefore framed as a thoroughly *Moroccan* movement, epitomizing both the vitality and the limitations of Moroccan activism.

## Further research

These books expand and enrich our understanding of state-society relations and the exercise of power in twentieth century Morocco. They also demonstrate the richness of the Moroccan political field as grounds for social inquiry: Morocco's dense associational landscape, its position in the crosswinds of international influence, and its profound sub-national diversity all make Morocco an important case for diverse future research agendas.

Questions of social class play an important supporting role in the books under review in this essay, in particular structuring the ability of potential activists to militate against the colonial state (Wytzen, Lawrence) and post-colonial Moroccan authorities (Vairel). Yet more work on this topic remains to be done. In light of voluminous research on labour unions in neighbouring Tunisia and Egypt, for example, Moroccan trade unionism is under-studied. As elsewhere in the region, themes of labour corporatism, syndical pluralism, and the gap between unionized and informal workers all bear directly on the distribution of fiscal returns to Morocco's impressive economic growth over the past decade (Buehler, 2015). Studies of the organizational sociology of Morocco's syndicates, perhaps mirroring Yousfi's (2015) monograph on the Tunisian UGTT, would further identify the role that Moroccan unions play as channels of representation for working class interests in the Kingdom. New 'classes' may be furthermore inscribed in the lexicon of class politics, as scholars continue to examine the emergence of unemployed graduates as a major social force in Morocco and beyond (Bogaert & Emperador, 2011).

Scholars may furthermore focus on sites of interaction between international and domestic actors in the Moroccan economic sphere, posing questions like those advanced in Snider's (2017) essay: who governs and directs the copious streams of aid, investment, and tourism revenue that flow through Morocco's borders, and to what ends? Cammett's (2007) study of business collective action provides an important model for studying the domestic implications of international engagement.

Finally, researchers who wish to remain focused on institutions and their durability may adopt a micro approach to understanding technologies of power maintenance. Such research may take cues from Beatrice Hibou's (2011) excellent body of work on authoritarianism in Tunisia, where mundane functions of governance (tax collection, generation of social statistics) are mined for insights into power relations and the construction of

a 'governable' polity. Such avenues of research, though they may seem obscure in comparison with the operations of parliament, further complicate the dichotomy between studying the 'state' and studying 'society' in a country historically marked by profound social control.

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