

**BOOK REVIEW: Morocco: Challenges to Tradition and Modernity.**

By James Sater. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2010. xviii+172pp. ISBN: 9780415457095 (pbk).

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Published in Routledge's series The Contemporary Middle East, James Sater's book aims to survey the dynamics of change and the resilient structures of continuity in Morocco's recent history, contemporary politics, economy and foreign policy. The depth and breadth of coverage are enhanced by the author's many years of fieldwork experience and teaching in the country, as well as his extensive use of local scholarship (in French). His starting point in *Morocco: Challenges to Tradition and Modernity* is that the kingdom has witnessed tremendous change over the last fifteen years. Today it is "a relatively open country, often considered stable compared to its neighbours in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region" (xi). The integration of Morocco into the circuits of the global economy under neoliberal market reforms since 1983, the waning of King Hassan II's authoritarian rule in the 1990s, the accession of Mohammed VI to the throne in 1999, and the emergence of new social movements and mass protests led by the disenfranchised masses in recent years have been the main features and consequences of Morocco's long march to postcolonial modernity.

Chapter 1 introduces the main constituents of the Moroccan state system (or *Makhzen*, in local parlance) in recent decades: the ruling Alawi dynasty, Islam, elites, and political parties. The next chapter is a historical survey of the evolution of modern statehood in Morocco before, during and in the first years of independence from France and Spain in 1956. Although this chapter may seem an unnecessary review of the literature to those who are already familiar with this information, it remains a concise and original synthesis of the political history of postcolonial Morocco about which scholarship in English remains, per the author's own estimate, "still rare, even if the number is growing" (xi). Aptly titled "The Politics of Exclusion and Inclusion," Chapter 3 delves deeper into the struggle for power and survival between the monarchy, left-wing parties, Islamists and the military from 1961 to the present. The author is manifestly at home

dissecting the narratives and complex canvas of Morocco's long decades of postcolonial nation-building (1956-present) characterised as they have been by the brutal repression of dissent, institutionalisation of Islam and Arabism in political discourse, Arabisation of public education, endemic poverty, and the initially State-aided rise of political Islam to fill in the ideological vacuum left behind by the demise of the Left at the hands of King Hassan's police state between the 1960s and 1980s. Sater also explores the advent of alternative political powers in post-Cold War Morocco from NGOs to the Amazigh (Berber) and other rights-oriented movements, which have increasingly challenged the established order of things in what the author (following Mohamed Tozy) describes as Morocco's 'defused' political game (73). Chapter 4 is both a survey and a critique of Morocco's economic policies from the failed plans to modernise the agricultural and industrial sectors prior to the economic crisis of the late 1970s, the textbook implementation of the IMF's Structural Adjustment Program from 1983 onwards, to the regime's recent attempts to mitigate the socio-economic drawbacks of drastic neoliberalisation. Chapter 5 focuses on Morocco's foreign policy on the regional and international levels with a balanced and up-to-date overview of the Western Sahara question.

The few shortcomings of Sater's book seem to be partly due to the format of the Routledge series aimed at a general readership, a factor which limits the author's space for manoeuvre and scope of coverage regarding some dark areas of the socio-economic and political landscapes of contemporary Morocco. The book's second minor deficiency stems from the author's fixation on the analytical paradigms of political science and democratisation theories; his analysis of Islamism and the Amazigh movement, for example, could have been enhanced by a cultural studies perspective on the pivotal role of identity in the complex canvas of Moroccan politics. Another unsatisfactory aspect of what is otherwise a meticulously executed book is Sater's underlying belief that the transition to democracy is a process of modernisation almost entirely in the hands of official institutions, especially the Makhzen; due attention is thus not devoted to parastatal institutions such as the traditional systems of local governance in villages and, to a lesser extent, cities all over Morocco. His sometimes liberal use of the words 'tribal'

and 'tribes' to refer to these non-state structures of local government will raise the eyebrows of many a scholar of Morocco. Sater is also uncritical with regards to some ideological pitfalls of local historiography; without even a word of caution about the vagaries of the Arab nationalist ideology which shaped Morocco's historiographical canon in the post-independence era, the author leaves the general reader at the mercy of fallacious statements such as the one which has Moroccan statehood (and history) begin in AD 788 with the arrival of the Malekite-Sunni Idrissi dynasty to power in Fes (8); this dubious date opens the book's Chronology section (xiii-xv).

The above remarks notwithstanding, Sater's book is not only a masterful overview of his subject within the confines of a book series aimed at a broad readership, but also an up-to-date survey of a country in North Africa, a region likely to command overdue attention in global academic circles following the social uprisings since 2011. As such, this timely book will be of great value to researchers and students in the fields of African history, political science, development studies, international relations and cultural studies.

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