
H-France Review Vol. 17 (June 2017), No. 95

Edmund Burke III, *The Ethnographic State: France and the Invention of Moroccan Islam*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014. xi + 273 pp. Maps, tables, notes, bibliography and index. \$49.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-5202-7381-8.

Review by Adam Guerin, Eckerd College.

Edmund Burke III's *The Ethnographic State* examines the complex relationship between colonial knowledge, the imposition and maintenance of colonial rule, and the lasting political legacy of French scholarship on the operations of power in independent Morocco. Burke's central contention is that between approximately 1900 and 1919, French ethnographers played a powerful and, until now, underappreciated, role in constructing a vision of Moroccan life based upon the appropriation of a distinctive form of "Moroccan Islam." The Islam imagined by French scholars provided a frame through which Morocco could be rendered legible and administered. Significantly, this model placed the Sharifian sultan at the center of the sociopolitical order—an interpretation that would have far reaching effects long after the eclipse of the protectorate. Relying on cultural assumptions largely imported from the Algerian experience, contemporary scholars produced an overly theorized, almost mythical Islam as a way to explain the complexity (and opacity) of Moroccan life. The emergent discourse of Moroccan Islam carried important consequences for the policy orientation of the protectorate and, after 1956, for the development of independent Morocco. First, it served as a plausible metonym to explain Morocco as "the land that time had forgotten, an outdoor museum of archaic customs and beliefs, the abode of tradition" (p. 177). Secondly, as a product of the larger French sociological tradition, ethnography carried the symbolic capital and authority of "scientific" colonialism, which reinforced the claim that only France could guide Morocco into the modern world. Burke shows how the invention of Moroccan Islam indirectly justified France's (usually failed) attempts to establish a host of extraneous policies: ethnic legislation such as the ill-fated Berber *dahir* (decree) of 1930, urban policy for Morocco's metropolitan hubs, regulation of rural tribes and, most importantly, the authority and status of the sultan. This latter category is key to Burke's analysis as the myth of Moroccan Islam allowed French administrators to impose a reinvented sultan onto the people of the realm. The office of the sultan, which began as an expedient means to shore up colonial control, evolved into the lynchpin that held together a powerful religious-cum-political system of rule.

In the years preceding the establishment of the protectorate in 1912, French scholars produced a number of discursively constituted "Moroccos," which form the three broad sections of Burke's book: "Ethnographic Morocco," "Native Policy Morocco," and "Governmental Morocco." Ethnographic Morocco could be described as "research Morocco": a realm of perceived culture and social practice grounded in French readings of popular custom that existed primarily in the minds of colonial scholars and bore little resemblance to the actual experience of life in Morocco. Burke employs the Foucauldian conceptual tool of the colonial "archive" to delineate a field of power underwritten by collective intellectual authority. The colonial archive in Morocco comprised a discursive system by which French administrators derived their right to rule and justified specific policies over the decades. Departing from Edward Said's notion of Orientalist discourse, however, Burke makes an important distinction between

the general French orientalist tradition and the various contexts and conjunctures that produced the ethnographic vision of Morocco in the first decades of the twentieth century. Rather than accept a timeless, “always already there” Saidian Orientalism, Burke distinguishes between the social observations of scholars and the competing local, global, and discursive contexts in which the observations were produced. These contexts matter deeply for Burke as they allow for the possibility of change within the discourse of Moroccan Islam. And change it did. “Social observations, we discover, were devised experimentally, provisionally, with many gaps and artful bridges between reality as perceived, represented, and projected” (p. 8). By focusing on both the overlapping contexts in which scholarly agendas were deployed and the global and local forces to which scholars reacted, Burke masterfully weaves the story of protectorate-era ethnography into the larger fabric of world history. Much like the protectorate itself, the official French version of Moroccan Islam was a work in progress that took years to reach a mature form and was subject to countless twists and turns in the process of refinement. “The shape of intellectual fields was determined not only by the development of binaries, but also by personal and political rivalries over intellectual turf, and the larger political and economic contexts in which these mundane struggles were played out” (pp. 11-12). This section of the book is the most powerful, as Burke mobilizes a lifetime of research and scholarship to map out the overlapping political, economic, and intellectual contexts in which scholars struggled for the right to speak for Morocco. Indeed, there may not be a scholar alive today who knows these contemporary ethnographers as well as Burke, and his authority on the subject shines through on every page.

Part two, “Native Policy Morocco,” traces the administrative results of the evolving scholarly script of Moroccan Islam. On this question, Burke makes a crucial contribution to the growing historiography of political power in North Africa. Recent works by Ety Terem and Sahar Bazzaz among others have shown that the Sharifian model of political power underwent phenomenal change during the nineteenth century.[1] French scholars arrived on the scene at a moment of transition, in which the power of the sultan in his multiple roles as “Commander of the Faithful” was being challenged in new ways. Owing to external and internal pressures, specific institutions such as the *bay’a* (oath of allegiance) and the *ulama* (religious elites/intellectual class) were already in rapid flux by the time the first French ethnographers began conducting their research. Burke’s ethnographers were largely ignorant (or indifferent) to these developments. Rather, they looked back into what they considered the “timeless” history of the sultan as the political center of the realm and produced a largely invented (or, at best, anachronistic and uneven) understanding of the sultan’s “traditional” power over his people. By investing the sultan with new forms of power backed by French political and military might, protectorate authorities contributed to the veritable creation of the modern, authoritarian sultan at the very moment when local forces were pressing for substantive change. The sultan and the protectorate developed hand in hand, so much so that Sultan Muhammad V emerged in 1956 as a greatly enhanced figure able to make more powerful claims over the land and people of Morocco than his pre-protectorate ancestors could have imagined.

The final section, “Governmental Morocco” takes up this question of the power of the Moroccan sultan as a product of colonial scholarship and reforms. At the turn of the twentieth century there were a number of Muslim monarchies in the Middle East and North Africa. Today, only Morocco—and its supposedly distinctive form of Islam—remains. Independent Morocco could have emerged in a number of different political forms, yet the office of the sultan remained supreme following 1956 and in many ways determined the course of the independent nation. Scholars have recently highlighted the complex politics of the 1940s and 1950s to explain the evolution of the sultan and his relationship with Moroccan nationalist, Islamist, and socialist leaders at the time.[2] Burke contributes to our understanding of this crucial period by highlighting the interventions of American and British scholars following independence. Scholars such as Clifford Geertz, Ernest Gelner, and John Waterbury, each in their own way, rehabilitated, reproduced, and further solidified the myth of Moroccan Islam and its authoritarian arbiter, the ‘Alawi sultan, which they indirectly inherited from turn-of-the-century French ethnographers. This final section of the book perhaps raises more questions than it answers. However,

Burke makes a strong case for the connections between turn-of-the-century ethnographers' work and the development of the office of the Moroccan sultan following independence.

Throughout the work, Burke establishes a number of important historiographical points and works against several common assumptions about the inception of French rule in Morocco (too many points, in fact, to list in their entirety here). For example, he lays to rest the canard that the Moroccan protectorate was a system of indirect rule. Rather, French policy-makers largely dictated the institutional reforms that comprised the "pacification" and reform of Moroccan state and society. Also, by highlighting the, at times, vicious political contest between scholars based in Algeria and those without connections to previous colonial systems, Burke is able to show the degree to which scholars of Morocco were unable to escape the shadow of the Algerian "colonial Vulgate" and all of its associated stereotypes of North African peoples and cultures.

Written with verve and wit, Edmund Burke's *The Ethnographic State* displays the deep erudition that has marked the author's career. Clearly in tune with the murmuring currents of change in Morocco today, Burke closes the book with the tantalizing line, "The invention of Moroccan Islam and its successive transformations led to the forging of a powerful political discourse that still has currency. But for how much longer?" (p. 200).

NOTES

[1] Sahar Bazzaz, *Forgotten Saints: History, Power and Politics in the Making of Modern Morocco* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2010); Ety Terem, *Old Texts, New Practices: Islamic Reform in Modern Morocco* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014).

[2] Daniel Zizenwine, *Emergence of Nationalist Politics in Morocco: The Rise of the Independence Party and the Struggle Against Colonialism After World War II* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

Adam Guerin
Eckerd College
guerinam@eckerd.edu

Copyright © 2017 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172

Russian sociological review. 2018. vol. 17. No 4. 9. 10 russian sociological review. 2018. vol. 17. No 4. populist far-right movements, and accompanied by crises of truth, civility, and authenticity. 4. Salikov A., Zhavoronkov A. (2017) The Public Realm and Revolution: Hannah Arendt between Theory and Praxis. *Estudos Ibero-Americanos*, vol. 43, no 3, p. 522. 12 russian sociological review. 2018. vol. 17.