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by Béatrice Hibou and Mohamed Tozy, Paris, Karthala, 2020, 658 pp., €35 (softcover), ISBN 978-2-8111-2765-7

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BOOK REVIEW

Tisser le temps politique au Maroc: Imaginaire de l'État à l'âge néolibéral, by Béatrice Hibou and Mohamed Tozy, Paris, Karthala, 2020, 658 pp., €35 (softcover), ISBN 978-2-8111-2765-7

This lengthy tome is an imaginative post-modern excavation of Moroccan political culture inspired by Michel Foucault and, curiously, Max Weber. In an earlier publication, one of the authors, Béatrice Hibou, published a book 'where Max Weber meets Michel Foucault', *The Bureaucratization of the World in the Neoliberal Era*.¹ Her present work, a veritable tapestry 'woven' in extensive consultations and writings over fifteen years with distinguished Moroccan scholar, Mohammed Tozy, can be seen as an extension, or localisation, of the earlier study. The authors attempt to gain an empathetic understanding (Weber's *verstehen*) of how people exercise and view the art of governing in Morocco.

The authors worked closely together (28–38) – Ms. Outsider with Mr. Insider, so to speak (30) – to spin and weave two basic designs out of a century and a half of Moroccan history. The two designs of the state are supposed to be what Weber called 'ideal types'. They are empire and nation-state, woven into the political fabric, or *imaginaire*, of Moroccan society. Each is understood in this book to be a way of normalising and legitimating the '*violence des rapports de domination*' (13). The authors wish to bring to light 'the simultaneous diversity of power relationships, of conceptions of authority, of sovereignty, of responsibility or representation, of modes of action and the role of the state as well as ways of understanding its legitimacy' (24; all translations by the reviewer). Instead of the alternative types of traditional and modern ration-legal legitimacy suggested by Max Weber, we have a set of political meanings that plays simultaneously on both, like the black and white keys of a piano. Their approach sidesteps any inconvenient questions about regime change: the 'ideal-typical perspective ... is freed from the reformist paradigm' (42). And as if echoing Max Weber's 'elective affinity' of Protestantism with the spirit of capitalism, their concluding third part of the book is titled 'Imperial affinities with the neoliberal art of governing'. This *imaginaire de l'État* is seen as easily responding to the demands for adjustment and privatisation of our supposed 'neoliberal age' or era.

Leo Strauss claimed that Weber derived his types of legitimate authority from the succession of political regimes in the 'two or three generations' following the French Revolution.² Hibou and Tozy improved on Weber by dissecting five or six generations of Moroccan behaviour and picking out 'indicative paradigms' leading to the identification of the two ideal types, empire and nation-state, each one intertwined with the other. There is no succession of a traditional imperial state to a modern nation-state, they argue, challenging the conventional

wisdom that empires gave way to nation states in the twentieth century.³ In their postmodern perspective, they envision the Moroccan state working in what they see as the 'presentist' neoliberal era. Any issue of regime change is bracketed out of the analysis of this slice of time. The five or six generations are collapsed into an 'imaginary' construct of political culture.

The reader must travel 118 pages through Introduction and Prolegomena – literally more introductions – finally to reach a summary description of the ideal types. Empire

combines an absence of any claim to control or monitor society and a tendency to favor accommodation and adaptation; a lack of awareness of any association of legitimacy with a monopoly of power, including the use of force; a desire to govern at the least cost by multiplying intermediaries and various forms of mediation; accommodating to a plurality of jurisdictions, ethnicities, nations, and religious groups and to its capacity for managing territorial as well as temporal discontinuities; massive investment in the production and monitoring of certain sorts of information, and betting more on people than on institutions or structures. (118)

As for the nation-state,

it is based on the principles of unity and continuity, voluntarism and standardization, and producing systematic and homogenizing uniformity, by favouring averages and the law of large numbers and developing transformative action. (118–119)

The authors admit that these ideal types are 'very personal' and that their 'empire' is more like Morocco than others with tendencies toward expansion and cosmopolitanism, and their 'nation-state' is really more France than, say, Italy or federal Germany, but then Morocco's modernisers were largely French educated. Yet the authors' political archeology began with the ambition of delineating ideal types based respectively on loyalty and legality (22) that might offer 'a way of conceptualizing power, the state, and manners of governing that can be generalized to other societies' (22). In such a schema, former President Trump, playing on the loyalty key, might be home free in neoliberal America.

The ideal types for studying Morocco are contradictory but the authors view their *imaginaire* as 'a mental universe ... which permits the association of different logics and rationales, processes of legitimation as diverse as they are incompatible' (120). So anything goes or at least can be comprehended, if not pardoned, in their Weberian *verstehen* mode. The reader may still want to know who is performing the empathetic understanding, on which key and for whom. The authors admit that the use of their mental inventory may, for instance, transform an actor's apparent opportunism into a routine daily matter (34). They also admit that the ideal types are not a set of 'shared representations' (120) actually present in people's minds that survey research might disclose. Rather, they are ways for the authors to interpret various events and behaviours.

It was perhaps just as well in Morocco's authoritarian setting that sensitive issues about regime change suggested by Max Weber's own typology could be set aside. Hibou and Tozy implicitly rule out any historical comparisons

between the Arab Spring and Europe's succession of revolutions in the nineteenth century. They wish instead to demonstrate the smooth workings of the Moroccan state in responding to major social changes accompanied by 'neoliberal' pressures. They examine the big changes in Morocco's transportation infrastructure, demography, and its expanse of territory, including not only the Western Sahara but also the diaspora of some four million or so Moroccans located in various parts of the world.

In the second part of the book describing government, for example, they devote an entire chapter to Tanger Med, the new state of the art shipping and industrial centre located some 40 kilometres east of Tangier. The Tanger Med Port Authority (TMPA) has overall authority but must deal with various local competing jurisdictions. TMPA plays the empire key and absorbs Morocco's dissident zone of Al Hoceima: 'the Tanger Med project indicates a painter's palette of meanings, and this variability opens the way to economies of scale and diverse signs which overlap and give it a special importance and symbolic value.' (279). The authors pointed out as an example of managing this dissident region the get-well wishes that the leader of Morocco's dissident *hirak* movement offered the king, recovering from a minor operation in 2018, from the depths of his prison cell (281).

The imperial hands-off 'frugal' style of government may well serve handling offshore entities and the privatisation of public sector enterprises such as the Office Chérifien des Phosphates. It also supports historic claims to the Western Sahara, although the authors also pointed to the defense of Morocco's borders against Spain in 1862 as stretching only from Agadir to Cap Juby, which lies just north of the border with the ex-Spanish Sahara (55). Imperial styles of cooptation are also in synch with contemporary technocracy. Relying on an extensive history by Ibn Zaidane,⁴ they discussed at length (67–78) the 'engineering' capabilities of Morocco's imperial court – in letter-writing, travelling, receiving people, producing statutes, and time management. Chapters are then devoted to the background and experiences of contemporary Moroccan technocrats facilitating adjustment and economic liberalisation in His Majesty's service. Proliferations of standing commissions of experts further ensure that the Constitution of 2011 remains fully consonant with empire as well as nation-state.

To be sure, events sometimes get out of control, threatening to spoil the fabric of Morocco's political culture. For instance, imperial etiquette suggested that a Spaniard be pardoned to honour the state visit of King Juan Carlos in 2013. The choice of a Spanish pedophile, however, raised too many objections and challenged the old paradigm of the king's pastoral responsibility for the community in general but nothing in particular. To protect himself, Mohammed VI signed a fatwa sentencing death to apostates. Reforms also get sidetracked. Freedom of the judiciary, for example, sent conservative judges seeking the protection of 'the sharifian parasol' from the politicians (577).

The authors' meticulous description of the *imaginaire* being played on two keys is supposed to show how easily Morocco has adapted to the demands of neoliberal globalisation. Their extensive bibliography, however, omits some key sources. The analysis of the *makhzen*, for example, might have benefited from

the reading of an insider, such as the published diary of the king's first cousin and schoolmate.⁵ And despite their focus on political economy, the discussion of the financial aspects of adjustment is sketchy. Not only do they omit *Le Roi prédateur* from their bibliography,⁶ they do not include the king's personal financial engineer, Mounir Majidi, in their list of technocrats. Since this huge tome unfortunately lacks an index, the reviewer could not find or recall any mention of him in the parts about banking and finance. Nor was there any mention of Siger, the royal holding company that King Hassan II had founded, spelling *regis* in reverse, Latin for 'of the king', that Majidi was supposed to be rationalising. The only mention was in a footnote of *Omnium Nord Africain* (ONA), the big French Protectorate conglomerate of which Siger gained control, along with a major bank, before Morocco engaged in major economic reforms, including privatisation. The footnote (429 n19) is about the Société Nationale d'Investissements being privatised in 1994 and falling under the control of ONA in 1999, but there is no mention at all of the removal of the ONA from the Casablanca stock exchange in 2010, further shielding royal economic activity from public eyes.⁷

In the end, however, the authors conclude that the political engineering capabilities connoted by empire 'are only being carried out by a minority of "prelates" on the way to extinction' (581). Does this mean slowly eradicating that imperial face of Moroccan political culture? The raw Thatcherite capitalism of the 'neoliberal age' is also undergoing transformation, rendering obsolescent any hypothetical affinities with the authors' imaginary Morocco. As Hegel once said, 'the owl of Minerva takes flight as dusk is falling.'⁸

Notes

1. As published and advertised by Palgrave Macmillan in 2015: <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9781137495273>
2. In his *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 57, Strauss opines that Weber viewed post-revolutionary European history to be a contest between tradition and reason but 'its manifest inadequacy ... forced Weber to add the charismatic type of legitimacy', presumably to include a couple of Napoleons.
3. As iconically expressed by Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).
4. 'Abd al-Rahmân Ibn Zaydân, *Al-'izz wa-al-şawlat fî mâ'âlim nizâm al-dawlat* (Prestige and authority of the organisation of the state), 2 vols. (Rabat: Imprimerie Royale, 1962).
5. Moulay Hicham el Alaoui, *Journal d'un prince banni: Demain, le Maroc* (Paris: Grasset, 2014).
6. Eric Laurent and Catherine Graciet, *Le Roi prédateur* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2012).
7. Clement Moore Henry and Robert Springborg, *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 219. On Majidi, see pp. 223-224.
8. G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, last page of the introduction. The citation is not intended to be a pun because the French translation is 'Ce n'est qu'au début du crépuscule que la chouette de *Minerve* prend son vol'. For the

renewed relevance of Hegel see Eric Lee Goodfield, *Hegel and the Metaphysical Frontiers of Political Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

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