



# Making Morocco: Colonial Intervention and the Politics of Identity

*By Jonathan Wirtzen*

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**Making Morocco: Colonial Intervention and the Politics of Identity** By Jonathan Wirtzen

How did four and a half decades of European colonial intervention transform Moroccan identity? As elsewhere in North Africa and in the wider developing world, the colonial period in Morocco (1912–1956) established a new type of political field in which notions about and relationships among politics and identity formation were fundamentally transformed. Instead of privileging top-down processes of colonial state formation or bottom-up processes of local resistance, the analysis in *Making Morocco* focuses on interactions between state and society.

Jonathan Wirtzen demonstrates how, during the Protectorate period, interactions among a wide range of European and local actors indelibly politicized four key dimensions of Moroccan identity: religion, ethnicity, territory, and the role of the Alawid monarchy. This colonial inheritance is reflected today in ongoing debates over the public role of Islam, religious tolerance, and the memory of Morocco's Jews; recent reforms regarding women's legal status; the monarchy's multiculturalist recognition of Tamazight (Berber) as a national language alongside Arabic; the still-unresolved territorial dispute over the Western Sahara; and the monarchy's continued symbolic and practical dominance of the Moroccan political field.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"*Making Morocco* paints a compelling picture of this country's extraordinarily complex twentieth-century history. Jonathan Wyrzten explores interactions between Moroccan leaders and their colonizers and the responses of subaltern groups, which ranged from anticolonial jihad to individual efforts to exploit contradictions within colonial policy. The book pays special attention to practices shaping the identities of Arab and Berber, male and female, and Muslim and Jew. A work of stunning erudition, drawing on a vast range of archival and original sources, including Berber oral poetry and Arab-language newspapers."?George Steinmetz, Charles Tilly Professor of Sociology, University of Michigan

"*Making Morocco* is an imaginative and original analysis of how modern Moroccan identity (or identities) developed between 1912 and 1956. Jonathan Wyrzten shows how the interaction of state and nonstate actors and institutions shaped and politicized what he defines as the 'colonial political field' and continued to influence the formation of Moroccan identity in the postcolonial period. Wyrzten offers a convincing explanation of how the Alawid dynasty survived the colonial period and regained its position as the center of power after independence. Wyrzten focuses not only on the nationalist elites but also on rural Berbers, Jews, and women as active participants in the contested field of Moroccan identity. Especially innovative is his use of Berber poetry as a way to understand non-elite identities."?Daniel J. Schroeter, University of Minnesota, author of *The Sultan's Jew: Morocco and the Sephardi World*

"This book is a compelling account of struggles over identity during French colonization in Morocco. It is a must-read for anyone in search of a greater understanding of interactions between those in power in the colonial state and marginalized subaltern local groups. Jonathan Wyrzten combines a rich, well-crafted, finely grained narrative with a rigorous sociological analysis. The Berber oral poetry skillfully discussed by the author speaks volumes on anticolonial sentiments in rural areas and resistance to colonial encroachment. *Making Morocco* is a major contribution to the study of French colonialism in North Africa."?Mounira M. Charrad, University of Texas at Austin, author of the award-winning *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco*

"In *Making Morocco*, Jonathan Wyrzten takes a refreshing approach within the realm of sociological histories. The sociological concepts and categories he uses are well chosen and deployed with sophistication and a good underpinning theoretical understanding. His use of a variety of archives and archival material is also to be commended, particularly the way in which he draws on oral histories and poetry to build specific understandings of the politics of identity among people less likely to leave behind written records. This book's organization around issues of identity provides a distinctive entry point into the wider debates on state

formation."?Gurminder K. Bhambra, University of Warwick, author of *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*

Jonathan Wyrzten's *Making Morocco* is an extraordinary work of social science history. *Making Morocco*'s historical coverage is remarkably thorough and sweeping; the author exhibits incredible scope in his research, and mastery of an immensely rich set of materials (from poetry to diplomatic messages in a variety of languages across a century of history). The monograph engages with the most important theorists of nationalism, colonialism, and state formation, and uses Pierre Bourdieu's field theory as a framework to orient and organize the socio-historical problems of the case and to make sense of the different types of problems various actors faced as they moved forward. His analysis makes constant reference to core categories of political sociology (state, nation, political field, religious and political authority, identity and social boundaries, classification struggles, etc.), and he does so in exceptionally clear and engaging prose. Rather than sidelining what might appear to be more tangential themes in the politics of identity formation in Morocco, Wyrzten examines deeply not only French colonialism but also the Spanish zone, and he makes central to his analysis the Jewish question and the role of gender. These areas of analysis allow Wyrzten to examine his outcome of interest – which is really a historical process of interest – from every conceivable analytical and empirical angle. The end-product is an absolutely exemplary study of colonialism, identity formation, and the classification struggles that accompany them. This is not a work of high-brow social theory, but a classic work of history, deeply influenced but not excessively burdened by social-theoretical baggage.

#### About the Author

Jonathan Wyrzten is Assistant Professor of Sociology and History at Yale University.

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