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Political women in Morocco - then and now

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contained in this volume make it a valuable addition to the literature on state and society in Morocco, and a worthwhile read.

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Political women in Morocco – then and now, by Osire Glacier, Trenton, NJ, The Red Sea Press, 2013, 166 pp., \$21.95 (paperback), ISBN-10 1569023778, ISBN-13 978-1569023778

‘Political Women in Morocco – Then and Now’ is a gem of a book. At 154 pages of text, it is a small volume that has been researched with great care. Osire Glacier presents the life stories of 34 women who played an important role in the political life and development of Morocco from antiquity to the present day, beginning with Tin Hinan in the fourth and fifth century after the common era and ending with Nidal Salam Hamdache, born in 1985, who was instrumental in the February 20 movement that arose in the wake of the Arab uprisings in North Africa in 2011.

The stories of women from earlier centuries read somewhat repetitive: they were wives of powerful, well-known historical figures in Morocco who ruled by exerting enormous influence over their husbands and/or sons. Much of this repetitiveness is due to the fact that there are scant historical records to draw from which is, unsurprisingly, in sharp contrast to the male historical figures to whom these women were related. Osire’s research confirms Fatima Mernissi’s assertion of describing political women as ‘victims of historical assassination’ (p. 153). Glacier also states that chronicling women’s participation in Morocco’s historical development should not be interpreted as an indication of women’s emancipation. She writes:

On the contrary, historical texts reveal the existence of a patriarchal order that subordinates women to men, just as children are subordinated to a father or a male tutor ... This omission suggests that women cannot be the legitimate subjects of history. (p. 152)

Glacier’s style is eminently readable. The only criticism concerns an uncommon English transcription of common Moroccan terms such as spelling the city of Meknes as ‘Meknez’. The author occasionally uses unsubstantiated superlatives, such as describing twelfth century writer Nazhun Bin Al-Quila’i as articulating ‘the world’s earliest expression of feminist thought’ (p. 35).

The author relies on a variety of Arabic, French and English-language sources as well as extensive personal interviews with contemporary political figures such as Khadija Ryadi of the Moroccan Association of Human Rights and Hakima Chaoui, activist and controversial poet and the brother of Touria Chaoui and the Maghreb’s first female pilot, assassinated in 1956 at age 19. Included are accounts of well-known historical figures like the warrior Al Kahina (eighth century); the founder of Quarawiyyine University in Fes, Fatima al-Fihri; wives of dynastic rulers; and twentieth century independence and women’s rights activist Malika el Fassi. Several of the women are notable for exercising sexual freedoms that were

unheard of in their own time and contradict contemporary prevalent restrictive sexual morals ascribed Islamic modes of conduct.

The book offers the first comprehensive collection of political women in Morocco and therefore is a much needed, valuable addition to the library – and not only of North African and gender rights scholars. This text is also suitable for high schools where it could serve as an example of important achievements of women from a developing country that equal those of historical leading female figures from Europe. Glacier portrays these remarkable women with a fine pen and thus achieves a commendable balance between scholarly research and enjoyable, fluid prose.

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Smugglers and saints of the Sahara: regional connectivity in the twentieth century, by Judith Scheele, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2012, xi + 270 pp., US\$99.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781107022126; Kindle \$63.20

An impressive book with theoretical importance beyond its claims, this work argues that a dense network of regional social and economic relationships mediates local/global relationships along trans-Saharan trade routes for Algeria and Mali. Layers of outsider/insider social and economic relationships are essential for individual and collective life. Differentiated and extended networks of kinship, economic interests, and religious commitments sustain a large market in food as well as guns on the southern border of Algeria. This border, a local 'natural resource', makes possible the profitable strategies that bring food and petrol to Mali, cloth and people north. While these trade routes predate the colonial period, they gained new salience in the 1940s when roads in the northern Sahara were improved and after Algerian independence, when Algerian subsidies on basic foodstuffs and cheap petrol presented new opportunities for profits. Although most of the trade is illegal in Algerian law, or vulnerable to heavy customs in Mali, it plays a major role in sustaining life for those in the northern Sahara. Serious drought, several Tuareg rebellions, and an outbreak of conflict in 2012 between state and local actors with outside allies have all contributed to the precariousness of life and punitive state relations. Since 2007, a counter-terrorism project organised by the USA has deployed vast sums of money to coordinate military and intelligence projects with the states in the region in order to deny Al-Qaeda its possibilities in the region. When this book was in press in 2012, the role of Islamic militants in establishing an independent Toureg state (known as Azawad) brought French, Malian, and other African forces to the region. As security forces organise and offer information, and 'terrorism rents' encourage states and agencies to repackage many activities and challenges into terrorism categories, Scheele's study presents a world of people and projects far from the 'Swamp of Terror' that dominates much of Western analyses and popular understanding.

The economic and social world that Scheele documents – with meticulous and engaging field-work, colonial archives, family legal documents, and Muslim legal texts from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century – is preoccupied with a very different goal: the production of