

## [Wainscott on Stenner, 'Globalizing Morocco: Transnational Activism and the Postcolonial State'](#)

Review published on Saturday, April 4, 2020

**David Stenner.** *Globalizing Morocco: Transnational Activism and the Postcolonial State*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019. xiv + 289 pp. \$90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-5036-0811-5; \$30.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-5036-0899-3.

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**Printable Version:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=54410>

David Stenner's masterful new history of the Moroccan independence movement opens with a moment of "partial victory." In 1952, Moroccan anticolonial activists finally convinced the United Nations to take a position on the subject of French colonization of the kingdom. The body affirmed "the fundamental liberties of the people of Morocco," without calling for French withdrawal. From this moment, Stenner frames the book's project of one of answering the question that this situation raised: "how exactly did the nationalists internationalize their case so successfully that even the UN eventually deliberated the issue?" (p. 2). Stenner convincingly argues that it was the strategic action of Moroccan nationalists as members of global networks (as well as some good fortune) that positioned their movement to successfully overcome considerable opposition and become a model to other nationalist movements worldwide.

While working with a different set of tools than contemporary activists, the Moroccan nationalists employed a primary approach that demonstrates the timeless requirement of successful activism: building a broad range of sympathetic allies for the cause. And it was an odd bunch the Moroccan nationalists assembled: "Former intelligence agents, British journalists, Asian diplomats, Egyptian Islamists, Coca-Cola executives, Western labor activists, Catholic intellectuals, French socialists, a Nobel laureate, a US Supreme Court judge, Chilean businessmen, a former American First Lady," and the list goes on (p. 3). But this approach also had its pitfalls, and Stenner argues that the "networked approach" later became a liability in the context of independence, allowing the monarchy to take advantage of the infighting among political elites, co-opting the central figures in the network (p. 9). The implications have been far-reaching: "Sidi Mohammed laid the groundwork for the authoritarian monarchy that still rules the country today" (p. 10).

Stenner's work is organized around lobbying offices in Tangier (chapter 1), Cairo (chapter 2), Paris (chapter 3), and New York (chapter 4), but his work is more focused on the individuals who populated these offices, such as Abdelkhaleq Torres, M'hammad b. Ahmed Benaboud, Ahmed Balafrej, and Ahmed Alaoui. By focusing on the individuals who "internationalized" the Moroccan cause, who Stenner refers to as "brokers," in that they occupied key positions in multiple networks, Stenner highlights a different cast of characters than are normally associated with Moroccan independence (p. 11). The primary empirical contribution of this work is in establishing the centrality of these

figures, in both the nationalist struggle and in the early postcolonial state. Theoretically, the work raises (but does not explicitly address) larger questions: Does the historical record tend to memorialize domestic activists over their allies abroad? How might these networks be more fully acknowledged and evaluated in the historical record?

Despite the focus on individuals, the work also carefully contextualizes the struggle of independence activists in the constraints imposed by the end of World War II (and European citizens' desire for recolonization), the global demands for decolonization, and the beginnings of the Cold War. This grounding was necessary to illuminate other strategic choices made by the nationalists. They favored a democratic future for Morocco under a constitutional monarchy and sided unequivocally with the United States and Western powers against the Soviet Union in the Cold War, a decision that certainly contributed to their success. The work also highlights the role of American businessmen, such as Robert E. Rodes and Kenneth Pendar, whose roles were previously not well understood in contributing to the Moroccan nationalist struggle.

The book begins during the final years of the Second World War and concludes with King Mohammed ben Youssef's 1957 state visit to the United States. This time frame makes sense empirically and practically. The book is already somewhat lengthy at nearly three hundred pages. Nevertheless, H-Net readers would have benefited from an epilogue or other final chapter that makes connections to the present and helps to underscore how it was not just key individuals but also key *narratives* employed by the nationalists that have been co-opted by the Moroccan state. In the twenty-first century, Morocco repurposes the language of south-south cooperation, so popular in the time period addressed in this book, to defend its leadership position on the African continent. By not addressing the present, Stenner missed an opportunity to show just how long-lasting the effects of the nationalists' miscalculations have been for the country.

That being said, the book delivers on virtually all fronts. The writing is lucid, argumentative, and focused on a few key arguments. It includes several never before seen photographs of the era. The source base reflects research in a truly impressive number of archives. The only omission is the role of Shakib Arslan's publication *La Nation Arabe* in raising European and pan-Arab interest in the Moroccan nationalist cause in the 1930s and therefore laying a foundation for the Moroccan nationalists that Stenner profiles. Stenner's use of both the concepts and methods of social network analysis greatly strengthens the text, and his network visualizations in the appendix illustrating the networks of each of the lobbying offices are required reading to fully grasp his argument. The shift in Youssef's network from 1956 to 1957 as demonstrated in figures A6 and A7 strongly support Stenner's claims that the nationalists were positioned at independence to play a crucial role in the nascent state but were effectively sidelined by the monarchy almost immediately. In the end, the work's main contribution might be how it functions as a cautionary tale to activists to not allow individual interests and infighting to ultimately defeat their broader aims. It is clear that independence was the beginning, not the end, of the Moroccan struggle for democratization.

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**Citation:** Ann Wainscott. Review of Stenner, David, *Globalizing Morocco: Transnational Activism and*

*the Postcolonial State*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. April, 2020. URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=54410>

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