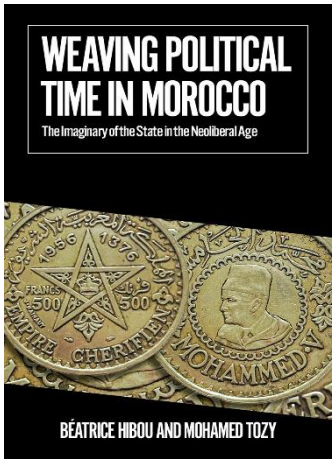


Béatrice Hibou and Mohamed Tozy.- *Weaving Political Time in Morocco: The Imaginary of the State in the Neoliberal Age*. Translated by Katharine Throssell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025) 424p.

Béatrice Hibou and Mohamed Tozy's concept of "woven political time" has significantly contributed to Francophone discussions on the Moroccan state's (re)formation, but it remains largely unknown in Anglophone academic circles. Translating this work into English fills a critical void, enabling comparative politics, North African studies, and global authoritarianism scholarship to develop using a framework that has shaped and will continue to shape our understanding of state power in Morocco. This translation broadens the intellectual landscape by introducing a highly regarded theoretical contribution to new audiences and addressing the underrepresentation of critical Francophone research in Anglophone debates.

In *Weaving Political Time in Morocco*, Hibou and Tozy offer a meticulously researched reinterpretation of Moroccan state power discourse, moving beyond simplistic linear narratives of transition from "tradition" to "modernity." Drawing on over thirty years of fieldwork, interviews, and archival research, the authors argue that the Moroccan state's governance practices throughout its history cannot be solely attributed to colonial legacies or current neoliberal reforms. Instead, they posit that Morocco's political framework results from interconnected episodes shaped by the ongoing interaction of distinct yet overlapping temporal and institutional elements, encompassing precolonial Sharifian imperial traditions, the formation of the postcolonial modern nation-state, and the current neoliberal transformation of governmental institutions.

The theoretical framework underpinning this book is both subtle and potent, as Hibou and Tozy revisit Max Weber's classification of authority, carefully sidestepping the evolutionary traps that have plagued many postcolonial interpretations of his work. In the Moroccan context, traditional and rational-legal authority exist concurrently, mutually reinforcing each other; a minister might negotiate performance contracts with the IMF in the morning and engage with hand-kissing notables in the afternoon, a practice unchanged since the nineteenth century, with both activities equally vital for maintaining authority. Michel Foucault is presented not just as a source of overarching theories but as a precise guide to the micro-techniques of governance, where neoliberal tools like benchmarking, branding, and public-

private partnerships don't supplant older power dynamics but are integrated into them. The monarchy's sacred aura isn't diminished by the discourse surrounding development initiatives like “Morocco 2030” but is instead enhanced and modernized through it.

The argument’s departure from pure abstraction is rooted in its deep well of empirical detail, drawn from Hibou and Tozy’s extensive three-decade study of Morocco. The book fluidly navigates Alaouite court chronicles, early independence administrative reforms, structural adjustment programs of the 1980s and 1990s, and the pandemic management of 2020-2022. Archival snippets intertwine with rich ethnographic narratives, such as a rural notable securing a detained cousin’s release, a Casablanca businesswoman explaining Zenata eco-city plot acquisition, and a civil servant detailing the annual allegiance ceremony’s choreography in the age of live television. These are not mere embellishments but the very foundation upon which the theoretical argument is built.

Hibou and Tozy’s work moves beyond simple lamentations about tradition's persistence in the modern world or celebrations of hybridity. Instead, they delve into the monarchy’s intricate methods of weaving the past into the present for effective governance. The *bayaa*, an annual loyalty reaffirmation, isn't just a tolerated relic but a ritual executed alongside macroeconomic data presentations to global investors. The muqaddam, a long-standing embodiment of state authority, became crucial during the 2020-2021 lockdowns for distributing permits and aid. High-speed rail and new ports are promoted with global competitiveness rhetoric, yet their contracts still flow through palace networks. These dimensions don’t negate each other; they mutually reinforce their credibility.

From its inception, the book positions itself as a response to prevalent portrayals of Morocco within scholarly works, where political science and area studies have often leaned on binary oppositions like modernity versus tradition, or narratives emphasizing resilience and authoritarian stability. Morocco has frequently been depicted as a prime example of Arab exceptionalism, characterized by a monarchy deriving legitimacy from religious ties and a resistance to democratization and political reforms. Hibou and Tozy challenge these representations, asserting that such interpretive frameworks fail to grasp the intricate realities of governing Morocco; instead, they propose the concept of woven political time, a metaphor and analytical tool illustrating how traditional power structures rooted in imperial authority, ritualized loyalty, and patrimonial mediation are not supplanted by bureaucratic rationalization or neoliberal efficiency principles, but rather adapt and integrate with modern governance methods. This perspective suggests that time does not progress linearly but coils and layers, with past

and present continuously reemerging in governance practices. The book's central conceptual contribution lies in this notion of time folding back on itself, enabling the authors to dismantle linear teleologies that have long dominated both Moroccan historiography and political sociology.

One of the most engaging sections of the book addresses the COVID-19 crisis. In this context, the intertwining of different temporalities became particularly evident. The state employed two seemingly contradictory frameworks simultaneously: the moral and emotional discourse of collective sacrifice and loyalty to the Commander of the Faithful, alongside the rational, scientific language of epidemiological modeling and fiscal responsibility. Rather than pulling in opposing directions, these frameworks complemented each other. The monarchy was able to portray itself as both the eternal protector of the community and the effective overseer of a contemporary public health crisis. Local intermediaries – caids, muqaddams, and even neighbourhood WhatsApp groups – translated central directives into local expressions of baraka and communal solidarity. It is evident that the crisis did not reveal a divide between tradition and modernity; instead, it highlighted their continuous interconnection.

The primary accomplishment of the book is its clear interdisciplinary engagement. Furthermore, historians will certainly appreciate and commend the authentic revival and blending of (pre)colonial discussions, which are presented with a level of detail that is seldom found in works of this magnitude. Moreover, anthropologists will find themselves resonating with the sequences of rituals and the micropolitics involved in everyday governance. Political sociologists, on the other hand, may find that the Weberian and Foucauldian issues, along with a relative dismissal of linear narratives regarding state formation, offer them a chance to redefine and reconstruct their analysis of power as contingent and non-linear. Lastly, scholars focusing on neoliberalism and development strategies are provided with a thorough examination of how technocratic inclinations intersect with clientelist logics. Personally, I have concluded that Hibou and Tozy have effectively illustrated how theoretical and methodological pluralism can be productive rather than merely concessive. Indeed, the manner in which they articulated their argument reflects the intertwined nature of the temporality they conceptualize.

Despite the many strengths present in the book, certain limitations warrant attention. To begin with, the Moroccan case is presented with remarkable depth; however, its comparative potential is not fully realized. Although there are brief references to other postcolonial contexts, the lack of thorough comparison with cases like Egypt, Jordan, or South Africa raises questions about the transferability of the analysis. What specific aspects of

the woven political time are unique to the Moroccan context, and which ones have broader implications? In the absence of systematic and comprehensive comparisons, the model remains more suggestive than demonstrative.

A secondary area of concern pertains to analytical perspectives. The analysis favors the viewpoints of state agents and intermediary figures; subaltern actors and contentious movements are only occasionally acknowledged. The February 20 Movement, Islamist currents, and various forms of digital contention receive, at best, a cursory examination. This emphasis is questionable considering the book's primary focus on regime durability, yet it limits a more comprehensive investigation of other political subjectivities. How do ordinary citizens engage with, navigate, or challenge these diverse temporalities? Do they perceive them as a coherent structure or as a confusing disarray? A deeper exploration of such inquiries would have enhanced the theorization of temporality as a lived experience.

A third aspect pertains to the conceptual density of the text. While it appears to offer intellectual rewards, readers who are not well-versed in the literature may find themselves ill-prepared to comprehend the arguments and concepts discussed. The ongoing integration of theoretical analysis and ethnographic specifics demands significant intellectual focus; although the benefits are considerable, the cognitive effort involved is equally substantial.

Ultimately, while Hibou and Tozy's concept of "woven time" offers a sophisticated perspective for understanding the diverse state practices in Morocco, the book's limited comparative scope prompts inquiries regarding its wider academic impact. Aside from a few mentions of other North African nations, their framework may be perceived as exclusively applicable to the Moroccan context, which limits its analytical value for researchers examining political transformations in other regions. Indeed, this methodological nationalism could reflect both the authors' profound engagement with the Moroccan context and their hesitance to make sweeping generalizations; however, it leaves the audience questioning the applicability of the model in exploring temporality and statecraft throughout the MENA region.

Notwithstanding these concerns, *Weaving Political Time in Morocco* is widely regarded as a significant contribution. It not only provides a unique blend of conceptual clarity and empirical depth, but also acts as an essential resource for higher education in North African politics, postcolonial statehood, or the political economy of neoliberal authoritarianism. Importantly, while graduate students may find their preconceptions regarding tradition and modernity thoughtfully challenged, established scholars are offered a comprehensive framework that could be applied to other hybrid regimes. Lastly, the book engages with ongoing discussions about the legacies of empire and the limitations of linear modernization narratives. In

an era where much academic work fluctuates between narratives of rupture and crisis, Hibou and Tozy shift the focus towards persistence, illustrating the complex interweaving of past and present into enduring systems of governance.

Driss Laayadi
Mohammed V University, Rabat
Morocco