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Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, Amazigh Politics in the Wake of the Arab Spring

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Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *Amazigh Politics in the Wake of the Arab Spring* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2022), xii + 212 pp. ISBN 978-1-4773-2482-0. \$45.00 cloth.

Bruce Maddy-Weitzman's *Amazigh Politics in the Wake of the Arab Spring* is a relatively slender yet remarkably comprehensive volume that traces the fate and evolution of the transnational Amazigh movement in the wake of the 2011-12 uprisings across North Africa. It constitutes a timely and lucid follow-up to the author's 2012 study, *The Berber Identity Movement, and the Challenge to the North African States*, updating the first book's pathbreaking chronicle of the courageous fight of indigenous activists working against all political odds. With the new book, Maddy-Weitzman emphasizes the diversity of social, political, and cultural interventions in the name of Amazighité/Tamazgha and how they have developed in distinct but overlapping fashion over the past decade in Algeria, Libya, the Sahel, Tunisia, and Morocco. Each of these is the focus of an individual chapter, elucidating the particularities of each state/region's (post)colonial political history, even as, as Maddy-Weitzman shows, Amazigh activists have to a certain extent coordinated their demands and mobilization strategies across the region and have learned from each other's experiences. The author does an impressive job of tracing some incredibly complex and little-known developments within and across these cases. The chapters on Libya, the Sahel, and Tunisia are particularly exciting, given how relatively little has been written on these countries' Amazigh/Tuareg communities compared to the relative wealth of studies of Algeria and Morocco. In the case of Libya and Tunisia, such a lacuna can be perhaps partially explained by the relatively smaller numbers and relatively recent nature of public activism, which had been nearly impossible under the Qaddafi and Ben Ali authoritarian regimes. Since Maddy-Weitzman's path-breaking first book focused almost entirely on Algeria and Morocco, the inclusion of these other areas constitutes a significant added value for the new volume.

Maddy-Weitzman builds his chronicle on a wealth of media and INGO reports, primary documents (political communiqués, manifestos, constitutional reforms, etc.), and his own interviews with Amazigh scholars and activists from the region. The result is an impressive level of detail, sometimes tracking the almost weekly developments during moments of significant protest like the Hirak uprisings in the Moroccan Rif (2016-17) and across Algeria (2019-20) or the 2012-13 armed struggle for Azawad in northern Mali. He is remarkably able to keep track of the continuously morphing ecology of Amazigh cultural associations and federations at the local, national, and transnational scales—an environment fraught with strategic divergences and personal rivalries. He also nicely connects a more formal sociology of social movements and civil society to equally important developments in Amazigh popular culture, including the incredibly rich and creative vein of protest songs authored by rising stars like the Libyan Dania Ben Sassi or the Tunisian Nora Gharyéni, as performed in concert halls, football stadiums, and street demonstrations. By calling our attention to such performances, Maddy-Weitzman helps us understand the Amazigh language and culture as not merely an object of politics but as something viscerally lived and felt, animating millions of women and men across the region to fight for a more inclusive future.

This attention to detail does not preclude Maddy-Weitzman from identifying a set of “common themes” (4-5) that cut across individual country-specific cases. Among these are constitutional reforms which, over the last decade, have formally recognized Tamazight as an official language

alongside Arabic in Algeria and Morocco. Similar efforts are underway in Tunisia and Libya with support from international groups supporting indigenous rights. In the wake of such constitutional reforms, Maddy-Weitzman identifies a broad-scale shift in Amazigh politics from a focus on language and culture to an increasingly clamorous call for territorial self-determination (particularly in Azawad and Kabylia, but also in the Libyan Jebel Nafusa and the Moroccan Rif), local resource management, and socioeconomic equality. Finally, in parallel with such an emphasis on locality, the author underlines the rise of transnational ties between Amazigh activist organizations in North Africa and the diaspora, aided in no small part by the rise of social media. Maddy-Weitzman's overall assessment is cautious, noting the Amazigh organizations' "difficulty in building durable alliances" (5) with situationally allied class-, gender-, and ethnoracial-based reformist movements in the region which likewise have challenged extant authoritarian regimes. Such solidarity will surely prove crucial in the larger fight for a more democratic and egalitarian society, to achieve the unfulfilled promises of the 2011 revolts, and to counter state accusations of Amazigh "secessionism."

Ultimately, the book does yeoman's work in bringing under one cover an analysis of the diversity of interconnected contemporary Amazigh political developments. It will be a one-stop resource for anyone interested in Amazigh indigenous politics, but also, more generally, could serve as a veritable primer for what became of the so-called "Arab Spring" in North Africa. The book will be ideal for undergraduate teaching; Maddy-Weitzman, as always, writes in a straight-forward, easy-to-understand fashion almost entirely unencumbered by academic jargon or recondite theoretical interventions. At various points, he does draw productively on Anthony Smith's formulation of a "modern ethnîe" (10) or J. P. Nettl's discussion of "stateness" (56) as analytical frames for understanding North African state-challenger relations, but these conceptual interventions are gentle and do not take away from the social history and political chronicle that are at the heart of the book. That chronicle, at times, does suggest an implicit modernization narrative which contrasts the "deep-rooted tribal and ethnocultural underpinnings" of Amazigh societies with "ostensibly modern aspects" (104) like territorial nation-states and transnational ties, and suggests a stuttering evolution from the former to the latter. Such a suggestion does risk bracketing the myriad ways in which local traditions are being (re-)invented by new generations of Amazigh activists or how the Amazigh struggle against assimilative Arab nationalism has actually contributed to processes of (re-)tribalization in peripheral Amazigh-speaking areas. Accounting for the historicity and sometimes even radical newness of seemingly primordial ties would require a different kind of history than the political one which Maddy-Weitzman provides. It would likely be a different book altogether—and certainly a much longer one. In the meantime, we can be grateful for the scholarly gift which Maddy-Weitzman has generously offered us. There is much to learn from it.

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