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Previous academic research on Morocco’s foreign policy mainly focused on sectorial aspects, especially on the Western Sahara issue or Moroccan democratic and human rights transitions. Rachid El Houdaïgui wrote a key book. He offered a crucial understanding of Moroccan decision-making processes by analysing various agencies’ positions in the process. On a more realist approach, El Hassan Boukentar’s book offered an interesting review of Moroccan regional and international diplomacy during the 2000’s.

New interesting entry points have been explored such as Ahmed Belhaj’s book on Islamic dimension of Moroccan diplomacy and Ismaïl Regragui’s concept of ‘nation branding’ of Moroccan public diplomacy. All in all, there is still a gap to be filled on the understanding of Moroccan foreign policy compared to other countries, especially in English-speaking academia.

With this book, Fernandez-Molina brings a quasi-exhaustive survey to the current literature. Her work on Mohammed VI’s reign is an essential read in order to understand the process of foreign policy making in Morocco, from the domestic sources of FP to the importance of the construction of a Moroccan identity on the world stage. This well documented empirical study applies *Foreign Policy Analysis* and merges two main theoretical frameworks: on the one hand, a liberal approach focusing on interactions between State and society in a non-unitarian State perspective, as well as the importance of agencies in the making process, and, on the other hand, a constructivist approach on identity roles and socialisation process.

In terms of method used, the author conducted a wide range of interviews of actors involved in the foreign policy decision-making process. She also applied discourse analysis to her research in order to emphasise the constructivist argument of her study.

Fernandez-Molina bases her thought on three main assumptions (p. 6). First of all, two categories of foreign policy decisions coexist in Morocco. Some policy decisions take root in a domestic consensus like the promotion of Moroccan territorial integrity and the close relationship with the EU. However, some do not reflect this consensus, such as the relationship with the US and policy decisions on the Middle East. Secondly, the two main roles played by Morocco on the international stage—champion of territorial integrity and EU model student—highlight the structural tension between a realist and a liberal definition of Moroccan national interest. Finally, Moroccan foreign policy functionality is mainly domestically oriented. It is used to serve internal politics and legitimation of the regime.

Chapter 1 focuses on the decision-making process and interactions of actors within the process. Fernandez-Molina uses El Houdaïgui’s concepts of central, subordinate and marginalised decision-making units to classify various actors and their functions. She highlights the innovations introduced by Mohammed VI who put an emphasis on economic diplomacy and the formation of a new technocratic elite. However, continuity with Hassan II’s reign is clear as diplomacy stays a reserved domain of the King and top priorities remain constant.

Chapter 2 discusses the main goal that drives Moroccan diplomacy today: the issue of sovereignty over Western Sahara. Since de facto control of the zone has been secured by Morocco, the country attempts to enforce it through legislation at the international level. Since 1999, the situation in Western Sahara has oscillated between periods of tension (2003–2006 2009–today) and appeasement (1999–2003; 2006–2008). Today, tension seems to be prevalent once more.

Chapter 3 analyses the issue of Maghrebi integration. On the one hand, tensions between Alger and Rabat remain unresolved under Mohammed VI’s reign, especially over the Western Sahara’s territorial dispute. On the other, Morocco tries to promote Maghrebi integration and has initiated a reset of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). This contradictory approach reveals the difficulties that Morocco faces in the construction of its identity at the international stage, both as a ‘territorial champion’ and as a ‘promoter’ of regional cooperation.

In chapters 4 and 5, Fernandez-Molina develops what she calls Morocco’s role of ‘model student’ of the EU. Proactive foreign policy towards the EU represents the main pillar of Moroccan external action. The EU still considers Morocco as its main strategic partner in the region. This exemplary bilateral relation has been made possible because of particular relationships constructed with Paris and Madrid. The definition of an Advanced Status and the important role played by Rabat during the construction of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) confirm this close relationship. This role of model student has been strengthened after the 2011 Arab Spring uprising. Morocco settled institutional reforms in order to avoid popular revolts. The EU welcomed the regime’s attitude and valued Rabat as the main stable country in the region.

Chapter 6 develops what the author calls “the unbalanced postcolonial triangle with France and Spain” (p. 157). The historical influence of former colonial Powers continues to be effective in the conduct of Rabat’s diplomacy. The two European states are the Kingdom’s main economic and trade partners. If the relationship with France seems to be more ‘symbiotic’—because of the particular socioeconomic elites’ interdependence—the relationship with Spain has been more tumultuous. Rabat and Madrid alternated phases of cooperation and conflict, especially around
territorial issues (Western Sahara, Ceuta and Melilla). However, the role of ‘good neighbour’ that Morocco seeks to promote has reshaped the bilateral relationship with Spain around economic cooperation and common challenges such as security and regulation of migration flows.

Finally, chapter 7 stresses the Morocco-US relationship. In a post 9/11 context, Morocco has represented a strong US ally in the counterterrorism cooperation in North Africa. The security aspect of the bilateral cooperation is accompanied by political support on the Western Sahara issue and a free trade agreement which entered into force in 2006. According to the author, the Morocco-US relationship is particular because it is not rooted in a domestic consensus. It is mainly the result of a rational cost calculus approach.

Fernandez-Molina draws four main conclusions. First, continuity with Hassan II’s domestic power organisation and foreign policy outputs prevails while discontinuity has been the fact of more ‘exogenous than endogenous’ factors (p. 213). Moreover, distinction between consensual and non-consensual areas is “not absolute neither static in practice”, contrary to one of her assumptions (p. 217). However, the assumption of national functionality of Moroccan diplomacy has been confirmed through the empirical findings (p. 218). Finally, regarding the question of success or failure of foreign policy, conclusions are mitigated. Rabat’s image has improved on the international stage but the conduct of the territorial integrity norm tends to avoid Rabat to adopt a pragmatic behaviour in order to solve the crisis over Western Sahara.

Based on this comprehensive analysis, it would seem interesting to analyse in the future two themes that have been mentioned by Fernandez-Molina. The first one would be to highlight the special orientation of Mohammed VI’s diplomacy towards ‘South to South’ cooperation. The author explains why she has not addressed this topic (p. 218), because it has not been a top priority of Moroccan diplomacy during the 2000’s. Many articles and books from academics and members of think tanks show the new role played by Morocco in Western Africa. Morocco tends to promote strong partnerships based on the rhetoric of Morocco’s Africanity and the will to promote ‘equal footing’ relationships, contrary to the image of former colonial Power action in the region. Applying Fernandez-Molina’s framework of analysis seems to be relevant in this case, by combining liberal and constructivist approaches.

The second one would focus on Moroccan cultural and religious diplomacy, mostly in the promotion of a moderate Maliki rite of Sunni Islam as an alternative to the spread of radical Islam through Muslim communities, especially in West African countries. The study of this diplomatic niche integrates a complex analysis of transnational actors, such as imams and Islamic brotherhoods, in their interactions with States, the Moroccan internal decision-making process when it comes to religious affairs and the function of branding and identity promoted outside as a crucial understanding of foreign policy making.

To conclude with a more critical assessment, whereas this book gives us a broad understanding of Moroccan foreign policy issues, one might regret that transnational actors’ role (such as elites and diasporas) in Morocco’s foreign policy remained on the margins. Political parties and civil society actors have been categorised as “marginized decision-making unit” of Moroccan diplomacy (p. 41). The importance of the elites’ socialisation in French culture is also mentioned (p. 161). A new assumption to test could be: does the elites’ formation through foreign schools
and foreign universities shape – at least partially – Moroccan foreign policy in the making?

This book is the perfect one for any student or academic who wants fully to understand the foreign policy of a fascinating country.