and Arabs, Africans and Arabs. But one may ask: if Arabs and Africans fought each other as well, can one support a racial dimension to the war, which Mamdani categorically refutes? Mamdani, in this regard, contends that Arabs and Africans fought over land, not race, but also that the Jan-jawiids who have been considered homogenously Arab, on the contrary, comprised Africans and Arabs. His view challenges the Save Darfur Coalition and the UN’s view of the war as racial.

In addition to the hardening of ethnic identities and the consequences of Cold War politics, Mamdani emphasizes the significance of environment in the rise of the violence. The role of the environment has been largely overlooked in previous discussions on the violence, so Mamdani has, in this case, made a significant contribution. As Mamdani shows, desertification in the Sahelian region engendered environmental strain that led to the conflicts over land between the landless nomads (Abbala) and landed “tribes” (Fur). The conflicts blew up into the insurgencies and counter-insurgencies that started in 2003.

Despite themes whose arrangement, especially in the chapters dealing with historical context, takes a close reading to follow and connect, the author has made a major contribution to contextualizing the violence in Darfur—a place that many people have now heard of, but whose history has not been sufficiently addressed in the media coverage of the conflict. Mamdani has yet again, after a series of significant groundbreaking monographs, enriched our understanding of the role of ethnicity, environment, international politics, and power struggle in conflicts in Africa. No doubt, the book is highly recommended reading.

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First published (in French) in 2005, this revised and updated translation, even in light of the fast-moving “Arab Spring” in 2011, is a remarkably current and concise response to those who wonder if, how, or why the Moroccan government has escaped the popular scrutiny that has engulfed the Arab states to the east in recent months. The answer lies in a complex set of relationships, deeply rooted in the Moroccan past that has pitted
the state and governmental authorities against religion and (fragmented) religious authority; provincial, regional, and state interests against international/pan-Islamic sentiments and influences; secular against religious education; and rural against urban civil societies, all in a chronological march across colonial Morocco, through early independence and into the late twentieth-century, second-coming of the Salafiyya.

But much as this may be her frame of reference, Zeghal’s account is not one of mindless structuralism. Her story is woven around the careers and words of a handful of the main actors who also wrote the script for this drama: the legendary ’Allal al-Fasi, and his nemesis Muhammad V, the king’s successor Hasan II and his nemesis Shaykh Yassine. What these figures (and a host of others and organizations they each give rise to) negotiate across sixty years is nothing less than a definition, and redefinition, of what nationalism will be in Morocco and how the authorities in the state will eventually be sanctioned through an electoral process. This is not to imply that modern politics in Morocco was without its thuggery, or duplicity or ideologues, or that the king didn’t do his best to arrest (figuratively and literally) progressive, democratic movements. But what we learn about is a unique, Moroccan political path that has been a synthesis of modern intrusions (Marxism, labor unions, democracy, Western-style universities) all buttressing new kinds of authority. And against them, a predictable array of Islamic institutions (Sufi organizations, madrasas, ulama, Salifism, Islamic universities) all backstopping traditional, religious authority in different ways. And in the middle, leading negotiations between these two forces, rests the office of the sultan, the symbol of Moroccanness that, at least since the sixteenth century, has held the far Maghrib together. For the twentieth-century story Zeghal leads her reader through the evolving thought and changing circumstances that defined and redefined the role of the sultan by a careful reading of the treatises and letters, pronouncements and acts of the actors themselves. It is a quality of groundedness in political science writing that is as atypical as it is refreshing.

So what does set Moroccan politics apart from its eastern neighbors? Part of the answer lies in a succession of savvy sultans who absorbed the nationalist cause as part of their own identity, from the 1930s onward. Another is the effectiveness of the sultan’s office to capitalize on its symbolic sharifian origins and consistently stay one step ahead of the religious authorities through their co-optation, repression, and fragmentation. Whether in dealing with Islamic education and the universities or the implementation of shari’ah and family law, the king led, mediated, and acted