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**Policy analysis**

**The Discourse of Change in Morocco**

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## ***Series (Policy analysis)***

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## Introduction

The question of democracy in Morocco has remained suspended since the independence of the country in 1956, and the royal palace has aborted all attempts to limit the monarchy through popular sovereignty and the establishment of a democratic state. King Hassan II monopolized rule according to the 1962 constitution and faced a ferocious political opposition, as well as two military coup attempts. In the mid-1990s, the King chose a new path under the slogans of “the democratic series” and “the government of alternation,” permitting him to draw his opponents towards the regime while disarming them from their historic demands, thereby providing political cover to pass the power to rule to his son Mohammad VI, whose ten years of rule have engendered a Morocco suffering from more crisis and impasses.

The voices calling for a democratic state surpassing the formula of absolute monarchy did not cease, but worked in tandem with Moroccan society, stressing the demands of justice and combating corruption until these voices found their appropriate historical context in the Arab spring, leading to the discourse of change regaining the glimmer of historic political and social demands, in an unprecedented challenge to the repression of the authorities.

## Slogans of Change in Morocco

The main components of the discourse of change in Morocco can be gleaned through two indicators: the new actor, and the content of the discourse. Directly following the escape of the deposed Tunisian president on January 14, 2011, and the flaring of the Egyptian revolution on January 25, Morocco witnessed the emergence of new voices from their youth calling for “deep and real change”. The independent activists among this youth are primarily from the middle class, receiving their political formation in families that had experiences in leftist parties, Islamist groups, or trade unions; others among the youth represent an extension of Islamist or leftist opposition movements that remained long deprived of the appropriate spaces and opportunities to express their demands in an open manner.

The youth made Moroccan Internet news sites and social networking sites into a platform for their call for change, and as a lectern for the defense of the legitimacy and rightfulness of their demands. These calls mostly came in the form of political writings, as well as debates, studies, and research.

The “February 20” slogan, the title chosen by the youth of change for their movement that departed on February 20, 2011, utilized an emotive symbolism that gathered most of these voices despite their intellectual and ideological differences, demanding deep political change in which the contract between the ruler and society is renewed through a new constitution that would grant sovereignty to the king and rule to the people, in addition to various demands such as: dissolution of the government and the parliament, accountability for the corrupt, and freedom for

political prisoners, as well as acknowledging the Amazigh language as a second official language.

Civic, political, and independent movements formed councils in support of the February 20 movement, so one can find components from leftist parties and Islamist organizations, including the Unified Socialist Party, the Democratic Socialist Vanguard Party, the Ummah Party (or community in Arabic, a banned Islamic party), the Justice and Charity Group (a banned Islamist organization), the Democratic Path Party (a leftist party), as well as civic and legal organizations, youth, and Salafist groups.

This movement found its natural place in the Moroccan society where those aged 15-43 years represent 36% of the population. According to the latest official census (2011), those between 15-24 years represent 35.7% of the total active population, while those aged 25-34 years compose 61.5% of the total active population. According to the same official statistics, the percentage of the unemployed in the first age group reaches 17.4 %, and 13.1% for the second while the statistics specified the percentage of the unemployed among the active population to be 9.1%. These figures received criticisms from specialists and scholars due to their alleged lack of precision and their occasional contradiction with other figures previously announced by the government.

Among the young intellectuals and scholars, the discourse of change was based on boldness and clarity, especially when discussing the matters of the monarchist regime and the Moroccan economic and social reality.

### **The Monarchist Regime**

The Monarchist regime occupied a wide section of the debate for change that has been witnessed on the Moroccan scene since the beginning of the events of the Arab revolutions. This endowed the political dialogue in Morocco with a seriousness that has long-been absent, especially when discussing the parliamentary monarchy, the Commander of the Faithful (*amir al mu'mineen*), the sacredness of the monarchy, the rituals of the royal court, the budget of the royal palace, and the king's entourage.

The nature of the ruling regime in Morocco has been among the most important questions, at least in terms of the studies and research produced about it in the last phase. There are multiple differing perspectives regarding the regime's capacity for reform and for accepting democracy as a new mechanism for managing governance and society. This subject took an important portion of the debates of the youth, about which Moroccan researcher Izzidin Allam posed several questions, including: "Do we have a modern state with a modern constitution, or do we still inhabit a despotic sultanistic state? Are we in front of a veritable government that is accountable

to the representatives of the nation, or do we live in the rule of a “sultanistic entourage” that takes orders from its ruler? Furthermore, are we faced by a “civic” nation, where the citizen has value, or are we still dealing with a collection of subjects who await the “benediction” of their Lord?”<sup>1</sup>

These are central questions that seek to help one understand the nature of a rule that attempts to affect the present without breaking with a history that extends for more than three centuries, which is why the scholar Rashid Shrayt termed it “the historical state,” as a distinction from the “civic state” and the “religious state,” asserting that what is called the *Makhzan*<sup>2</sup> in Morocco extracts its legitimacy from historical postulates that are incapable of progress and are closer to being historical sacred relics.<sup>3</sup>

Abbas Boughanim clarifies the concept of the *Makhzan* saying: “the *Makhzan* in its Moroccan form represents a parallel and omnipresent state within the state, and independent from it; the *Makhzan* control the rules of the game and determines the nature of the roles that each political actor is to assume, along with the edification of the hegemony of the ruling authority as a power of control and arbitration that locates itself above all social and political forces. In contemporary Morocco, the concept of the *Makhzan* became a reference to every action or behavior that does not conform to legal regulations (i.e., every action taking place outside of legality and law). When the *Makhzan* is present, the state of the right and the law is absent, and when Makhzanist practices take place, democratic practice dissipates along with all of its terminology. In a word, the concept of the *Makhzan* became a metaphor for every authoritarian despotic practices based on the submission of everybody to the one and only ruler.”<sup>4</sup>

One could then pose the question: what can the new generation do when faced with an opponent with such complexity? Professor Nureddin Lashhab answers this questions in his article “Deconstructing the Makhzanist Structure” by saying that the youth of change in Morocco are laboring to undo the Makhzanist culture that dominates social, political, and economic life.<sup>5</sup> This means that the task of the youth is not merely limited to the achievement of specific demands as

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hespress.com/?browser=view&EgyxpID=29979>.

<sup>2</sup> The *Makhzan* is linguistically derived from the verb “to collect” in Arabic, which was a reference to the funds from taxes and religious and non-religious duties that were collected. The term is used metaphorically to refer to the ruling elite in Morocco that is centered around the king, and, previously, the Sultan. Historically, the *Makhzan* is composed of those from the monarchist regime, the notables, landlords, leaders of tribes, senior military officers, directors and heads of security, and other members of the executive establishment. In the last decades, the features of the *Makhzan* became mysterious since the government does not consider itself to be part of it. In the rhetoric of the educated and the elite, the term *Makhzan* was given a pejorative connotation, symbolizing the old style of administration that resists freedoms and democracy.

<sup>3</sup> <http://hespress.com/permalink/29931.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Abbas Boughanim, “The Makhzanist Ramifications in Modern Morocco,” *Wijhit Nathar* magazine, Issue 38, Autumn 2008, pp. 28.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.maghress.com/hespress/29958>.

much as it must launch an effort of continuous work to liberate the major aspects of Moroccan life from the hegemony of Makhzanist culture.

Another important demand from the February 20 movement was the concept of a “constitutional monarchy,” often defined as “a monarchy that rules but does not govern,” where ruling is for the king and governing is for the people; alternatively, it could mean that the authorities of the king are limited through constitutional restraints.

Morocco experienced its first attempt to restrain the authorities of the Sultan in 1903 under the slogan of “the conditional *pledge of allegiance (al-bayah)*,” in which Morocco’s scholars determined conditions of rule for Sultan Abdel Hafiz following his overthrow of his brother Abdel Aziz. Historical sources mention other conditional pledges preceding and following this example. The same demand was raised at the eve of Morocco’s independence in 1956, with national figures, such as prince Mohammad Bin Abdelkarim Al Khatabi,<sup>6</sup> insisting on the establishment of a modern democratic regime where sovereignty is that of the people.

However, Hassan II imposed an absolute monarchy, an act that cost him two coup attempts, and cost Morocco a chronic retardation and decades of struggle against the parties and the opposition; at the same time, the regime edified institutions that were mere fronts that were given the task of maintaining the façade of a modern and democratic state.

Regarding the demand of parliamentary monarchy, Moroccan scholar Ala Eddin Bin Hadi says: “The Moroccan monarchy has no choice in order to guarantee survival, remaining within the constitutional institutions, and playing an active and positive role in our political life, as a symbol of the nation (*Ummah*), except for effective and quick transformation into a parliamentary monarchy.”<sup>7</sup>

Professor Mohammad Al Sasi believes that Morocco must decisively resolve the question of democracy, and replace quasi-absolute monarchy with parliamentary monarchy to provide itself with a constitution that would place power in the hands of the voters, furnishing them with an opportunity to enact their program in its various political, economic, social, cultural, foreign, domestic, security, and defense dimensions. Additionally, the main authority granted to the king needs to be precisely that of facilitating the tasks of those who are elected, while occupying honorary and symbolic positions, and intervening to decide on some institutional crises in a manner that places initiative in the hands of the voters.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mohammad Bin Abdelkarim al-Khatabi (1882-1963) was a leader of the Moroccan resistance movement that fought against both French and Spanish colonialisms in Morocco. He became an emblematic figure for all people fighting for independence.

<sup>7</sup> <http://hespress.com/writers/35001.html>.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.lakome.com.02-18-13-23-06-2011-5910/الراي/كتاب-49/الراي/html>.

Writer and journalist Khaled Al Jami'i attempts to approach the subject by depicting what he views as a contradiction in the new constitution, exclaiming: "the first article of the constitution enshrines the concept of 'linking responsibility to accountability,' making every person in the exercise of power a subject to accountability; in short, each person would be responsible for his actions and decisions. However, the king in the constitution's draft maintains all of his attributes as a head of the state and a Commander of the Faithful, as well as being the highest authority in religious matters, and heading the Council of Ministers and the Higher Judicial Council. He also remains the commander in chief of the army, and the head of the 'the Higher Council for Security' that is to be created. Isn't he the one appointing the ministers? Does he not have the authority of rejecting or dismissing them at will? Isn't he the highest arbiter? According to that first article, we would expect the king to be accountable, which cannot take place given that he is above the laws and cannot be questioned or put to account. In the lack of the linkage between responsibility and accountability there will never be a democracy."<sup>9</sup>

The question of the Command of the Faithful was among the important issues discussed by the Moroccan forces of change, especially pertaining to its historical context, the extent to which it fits democracy, or even its fulfillment of the conditions of the *Imama* (religious leader) according to Islamic political doctrine.

Abdelrahman El Nuda believes that "the objective of Hassan II from the 'Command of the Faithful' is to justify his despotism, and to make his hegemony over all powers legitimate. Hassan II used the ruse of 'the Commander of the Faithful' to impose his 'sanctity' and to justify the repression of any individual or group that criticized his dictatorial regime."<sup>10</sup>

He adds: "Everyone who accepts that the king is the 'Commander of the Faithful' becomes chained in many respects, especially in the political field, since it becomes prohibited for him to criticize the 'Commander of the Faithful,' or to question his powers or his manner of ruling, since with the flaring of each acute political crisis, a 'Command of the Faithful' is interpreted as bestowing holiness upon the king, and that he is God's caliph on earth, which means that he is above humans and garners his legitimacy from God; therefore, no citizen or group – even if it were the absolute majority of the people – could attempt to debate or oppose the king, criticize him, question him, or express a desire in changing the regime pattern."<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, scholar Yusuf Barbeet affirms that the king's authority, given that he is the "Commander of the Faithful," is a comprehensive authority that invades the entire political space of the *ummah*. Addressing the opposition, the king intervened as the "Commander of the

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.maghress.com/lakome/6051>.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.lakome.com/opinion/49-authors/3816-2011-04-06-11-54-41.html>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*



Faithful,” forcing the opposition coalition to remain in the parliament when it decided to withdraw in 1981,<sup>12</sup> stating: “if the constitutional king were not entitled to intervene, the Commander of the Faithful is so entitled according to the Book (Quran) and the *Sunna*”<sup>13</sup>.”<sup>14</sup>

Scholar Ahmad Al Ansari raises a number of questions regarding the concept of the pledge of allegiance (al-bayah), which is directly related to the Commander of the Faithful, including: “how can we conciliate the essence of democracy as a tool permitting real social participation in choosing who rules society with the notion of the pledge of allegiance? Is this allegiance discussed by the scholar Al Zamzami conditioned or is it “a blank cheque”? And how does the allegiance conform to the current constitutional rules? Does the concept of linking accountability to responsibility and power have roots in religious doctrine? If so, is the prince’s authority to be considered as an effective authority resulting in accountability?”<sup>15</sup> Al Ansari adds: “religion has never been, nor should it be, a justification for despotism in any shape or form; eminent scholars with credibility are those who oppose all attempts to exploit religion for an authoritarian despotic goal, rather than becoming tools for such exploitation; the legacy of the prominent scholars of the *ummah* testifies to this.”<sup>16</sup>

The youth criticized the rituals of the royal court, such as kneeling before and kissing the hand of the king, wearing the *shashiya*, a hat designated for the slaves in royal palaces, at all times, waiting excessively long for the king’s presence, and other similar rituals that are considered by many as humiliating to human dignity and in contravention with the values of Islam and the modern democratic state.

In regards to the budget of the royal palaces, engineer Mohammad Bin Al Siddiq published an article revealing the budget of the royal court, which is approved by the parliament as part of the state budget without debate, with the budget of the royal palace representing 1.17% of the total budget. Bin Al Siddiq compares the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the budgets of ruling establishments in Morocco and developed countries; it turns out that Morocco’s GDP in 2009 was USD 90 billion, while France’s was 2.750 billion (30 times the Moroccan figure), 1.476 billion in Spain (19.7 times the Moroccan figure). In contrast, the budget of the Moroccan royal palace exceeds 2.565 million Dirhams (around USD 1.39 million), while the French presidency’s (the Elysée) is 112.6 million Euros (USD 156.7 million) and the Spanish royal palace’s budget is equivalent to 8.9 million Euros (USD 12.4 million). These figures show that the budget of the

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.aljamaa.net/ar/document/45013.shtml>.

<sup>13</sup> Sunna, also spelled Sunnah, is the body of traditional social and legal custom and practice of the Islamic community. Along with the Quran, Hadith (recorded sayings of the Prophet Mohammed), it is a major source of Shari’ah or Islamic law.

<sup>14</sup> Hind Al Wali Aroub, “The Makhzan: Its nature – roots – prospects,” *Wijhit Nazar* magazine, Issue 38, Autumn 2008, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.nashess.com/news4761.html>.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

Moroccan royal palace doubles that of the French presidency, and is 12.6 times the Spanish royal palace.<sup>17</sup>

Ahmad Bin Al Siddiq adds that “in both the current (former) constitution that was enacted in 1996, or the draft constitution that will be put to referendum in days (the constitution was approved in a political referendum on July 1, 2011), texts treating the budget of the palace (Article 45 of the new constitution) remain extremely brief. The king has a civic list of requests, which as we have already mentioned includes a sum of 26,292,000 Dirhams, nearly equivalent to 1% of the general budget of the royal palace that reaches 2.565 million Dirhams. This means that over 99% of the royal budget has no constitutional basis. Why? Is this a transparent or democratic mechanism? What is to be done if the king, or whoever is in charge of the court and the palaces, were to ask the government to raise the figure to 5 or 10 billion Dirhams?”<sup>18</sup>

Writers demanding change in Morocco discussed the royal investments in the Moroccan market, where the companies of the royal family dominate most productive sectors and the national wealth. The profits of these companies, which increased by 347% in 2010, drew broad criticisms at a time when the private sector is suffering a stifling crisis, in addition to the American magazine *Forbes* publishing that King Mohammad VI is ranked in 7<sup>th</sup> among the world’s richest kings.

Scholar Yusuf Barbeet enumerates the ways in which the palace controls economic life in Morocco:

“The monopolization of strategic planning for economic policy, the submission of government programs to royal directives in developmental projects in a manner that preserves the interests of the high-ranking wealthy, the dominance of the rentier economy, enshrining the uneven distribution of wealth, including lands, funds, privileges, and permits in various economic fields such as: transportation permits, fishing, and mining, from which the influential and powerful in the state benefit, including the high placed figures in the military, security, and politics – in a complete absence of the rules of competition and transparency, and flagrant transgression of legal texts. The royal establishment alone controls one-fifth of the national wealth, and about 30% of the Moroccan productive capacity through octopus-like companies (e.g., Una, Siger, and the National Society for Investment), investing in most economic activities, and seizing the most important strategic sectors, including finance, banking, insurance, mining, consumer goods, and chemical industries. Thus, they achieve astronomical profits and accumulate immense wealth. The National Society for Investment, in which the royal conglomerate Siger has a 60% stake, announced a large increase in its net profits to 828 billion centimes, with an increase of 347% in 2010, at a time when the world – and giant multi-national corporations – witnesses a stifling economic crisis. Furthermore, to protect its interests, the *Makhzan* besieged the economic actors that did not revolve around the

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.maghress.com/lakome/5773>.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

Makhzanist economic institutions, which led to the accumulation of a very large share of the wealth in the hands of few families.”<sup>19</sup>

The online societies of the youth and their articles mention the names of El Magidi, Ben Hemmu, Al Hima, Al Sharaybi, and other close friends of the king, with angry protests raising the pictures of those and their names as politically and economically corrupt elements who contribute to deepening the political and social crises of Morocco.

### **Morocco: Figures and Reports**

The discourse of change summoned the economic and social conditions in Morocco, discussing the chronic crises and their deep effect over the Moroccan citizen who is plagued by illiteracy, poverty, disease, and debt. The youth condensed these negative connotations in the colloquial term *alhogra*; linguistically, the term originates from the Arabic root “contempt”. In the mind of the Moroccan citizen this word combines the meaning of injustice, humiliation, and scorn to which he is subjected by the ruling system in all its shapes and manifestations. Scholarly articles present government and international statistics as a reflection of the low ranks occupied by Morocco in international indices, the last of which being a report for the World Bank that affirmed Morocco’s position in the lower-middle income countries, at the same level of countries such as Gambia and the Ecuador.

On the level of social indicators, many Human Development Indicators in Morocco remain below the global average; for instance, the rate of illiteracy for those above 15 years reaches 56%. Educationally, the ratio of teachers to students in primary education hovers around one teacher for every 27 students. By comparison, in Algeria this figure is around one teacher for each 23 students, while in Qatar it is one teacher for each 11 students. The rate of completion for primary education in Morocco is 80%, in contrast to 91% in Algeria, and 100% in Bahrain. On the front of sciences and innovation Morocco ranked 94<sup>th</sup> out of 125 countries in the Global Innovation Index for 2011.

In the health sector, the World Bank report registered that spending on health care in Morocco is equivalent to 5.5% of the GDP; in comparison, this rate in Algeria is 5.8%, and 8.5% in South Africa, while in the United States this proportion reaches 16.2%. Per capita, Morocco spends USD 196 million per year, in comparison with USD 422 million in Jordan, USD 330 million in Algeria, and USD 9 billion in Switzerland.

Wages in Morocco range between 1 and 1,000, while this proportion in Europe rarely exceeds 1 and 10. In the index of the respect for the freedom of the press, Morocco ranks 127<sup>th</sup> out of 175 countries in 2010. In a World Bank report on the investment environment in 2010, Morocco

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.aljamaa.net/ar/document/46147.shtml>.

came in the 128<sup>th</sup> place. Estimates assert that the cost of the absence of transparency in dispersing public funds in Morocco reaches 30 billion Dirhams (USD 3.6 billion) out of 130 billion Dirhams (i.e., 26% of public investment and around 5% of the GDP).

Many of the youth for change is convinced that the Moroccan regime is not serious in combating corruption or protecting national wealth from pillage, basing their conviction on the government's silence and its negligence of all official and independent reports that have exposed cases of financial or economic corruption.

In this regard, the social media websites of young Moroccans circulate a number of these reports, such as the March 25, 2011 report authored by "The Central Committee for the Prevention of Bribery," an official committee affiliated to the prime minister. In the preface to its report, the Committee asserts that a year after presenting the previous report, "its suggestions were generally not applied, [and] it was noticed that the government did not respond to most of them..."<sup>20</sup> The report warned that many obstacles hamper the stifling of corruption and the reprimanding of the corrupt, including the widening of the circles of corruption and their taking new and novel forms, in addition to its secrecy.<sup>21</sup>

The youth views the negligence of the 2009 report of the Court of Auditors (official body) as further proof of the government's unwillingness to combat corruption and prosecute the corrupt; this report, which was drafted by government experts, presents several dossiers exposing the amount of waste and embezzlement affecting public funds on the part of civil servants and others entrusted with public affairs that remain at large.

Furthermore, the 2010 report of the National Authority for the Protection of Public Funds (NAPPF), an independent commission founded by 44 legal, trade-union, and youth organizations, presents massive figures and files showing the scale of corruption and its spread in the governmental administration. In the report, one can find cases of embezzlement worth millions of dollars of public money, the transfer of ownership of thousands of hectares of public land (representing the countries' most fertile lands) to individuals and companies, including political and party figures, in a suspect manner, in addition to the sale of public institution companies in exchange for symbolic prices to private parties.

### **The Interactivity of the February 20 Youth**

The interactivity of the February 20 youth presents a new model of political protest behavior in Morocco; the components of the movement were capable of raising political demands in the Moroccan arena that have remained imprisoned for decades behind closed political parties,

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<sup>20</sup> Central Committee for the Prevention from Bribery Report, 2007, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

despite the agreement of most ideological currents and movements with these demands as representing the minimum. The movement has also maintained the peacefulness of protest in its capacity for mobilization and its influence, which is disseminated throughout the country.

This interactivity should also be credited for by-passing a number of hurdles placed by the Moroccan regime to hamper the movement, including security repression, besiegement, the use of thugs, arrests, trials, and libel against the youth, as well as accusing the Justice and Charity Group and the Democratic Path Party of controlling the movement. The strength of the protest movement in its resilience surprised the authorities and the loyalist parties, especially after the constitutional referendum. What are, then, the elements of strength in the interactivity of the February 20 movement?

The first secretary of the Socialist Union Party, which participates in the government, Abdel Wahed Al Radi said in one of his statements: “the party has sacrificed its popularity for the sake of a modern Morocco with modern institutions.”<sup>22</sup>

Leaders in other parties have expressed the same sentiment at different stages, in terms of having to balance the interests of society and the protection of the regime, or to commit to the requirements of social peace by passing what they view as “populism”; for this reason, these party figures believe in postponing political and social demands.

This discourse and its associated behavior was one of the reasons of the isolation of most Moroccan parties from society and its causes, in addition to their preoccupation with narrow political and electoral calculations, while the February 20 movement represented the societal and historical alternative that responds to the concerns of the Moroccan people.

Youth activist Al Saidiyye Al Fadeeleh stresses this theme by saying: “the natural situation is to be on the side of the February 20 movement. What makes it natural is that, first, it defends our long-term future and does not think in the short-term and accept scraps; it also belongs to the entire people and has emerged from it; it’s not a “made to order” party manufactured in the back rooms, and it is also not governed by the common tradition in parties consisting of – whether conscious or subconscious – attachment to the leader; the February 20 movement has no leader and no political belonging.”<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, scholar Ala Ben Hadi views this new actor as the standard bearer of the national movement and its inheritor: “the February 20 movement and our Moroccan youth are the answer to all the disconcerting questions that were assassinated by the years of bullets; they

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.usfp.ma/article\\_ar.php?t=1&id=1157](http://www.usfp.ma/article_ar.php?t=1&id=1157).

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.lakome.com/html/رأي/49-كتاب-الرأي/7072-لدينا-أكثر-من-حبيب-لدعم-حركة-20-غير-أير>.

also represent a gratification for every struggler and martyr. It is an attempt to revive all these noble values and historic demands for which our patriotic political leaders have dreamt and struggled ... our youth wants real democracy and human rights along the international standards, and a state of institutions and law, and a parliamentary monarchy, and a constitutional separation of powers guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary; the effectiveness of the parliament and a strong and executive prime ministership, in addition to the freedom of expression with constitutional guarantees. A new Morocco cannot be built unless we establish a political system where everyone, individuals and institutions, is subject to questioning and accountability, and without exceptions.”<sup>24</sup>

Scholar Abdallah Hamoudy believes that the February 20 movement has removed Moroccan society from the era of submission and fear, and transported it to the age of politics where slogans are raised in a direct and clear manner. It has also contributed to changing the mentality of society due to the dynamism of the youth, which stood against nepotism and rentier economy, in favor of the youth coming out to express their opinions in all freedom unlike the former *modus operandi* of some political elites.<sup>25</sup>

The regular weekly presence of the February 20 youth in the Moroccan street since the beginning of their movement has contributed to deepening their interactivity with society, encouraging many citizens to join the protests and break the barrier of fear that has constrained their movement for decades. The slogans and protests in the popular neighborhoods offered a qualitative contribution in that regard; Moroccans were able to hear unprecedented slogans in the history of popular protest as the demonstrations departed their usual locations in the major streets and thoroughfares to the marginal neighborhoods and the poor districts; furthermore, the resilience of the youth and their capacity to endure severe repression and violence by the security forces has also contributed to raising their credibility among citizens. The absence of leaders and representatives on the national level endowed an unconventional horizontal dimension upon the movement, which organized itself along local coordination committees in the cities and urban centers, and even in some countries with a Moroccan expatriate community, weakening the ability of the regime to contain the movement or target its symbols.

There is no doubt that the February 20 movement has benefited from the experience of similar protest movements in the Arab Homeland, especially in what pertains to the potentials of the cyber space, and what is engendered in terms of freedom, live interaction, and effectiveness; the youth founded individual and communal pages on Facebook with titles, slogans, and photos

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.maghress.com/hespress/32534>.

<sup>25</sup> <http://mamfakinch.tumblr.com/post/8208988244/20>.

calling for change. They also benefited from the website YouTube when it came to documenting protests and security measures, as well as the testimonials of the victims.

Those browsing through the debates taking place among the youth can glean the unified patriotic emotion and consciousness among them and their belief in the cause of change, on the one hand, while being aware, on the other hand, of the intelligence and security methods used by the regime to skirt their demands and contain them or repress their peaceful struggles.

### **The Hot Summer Letters**

The Moroccan youth movement lasted throughout the summer of 2011, with the constitutional amendments failing to stop the torrent of protests that overwhelmed many cities asserting their basic demands. Analysts say that the Moroccan regime did not fire at the protestors, despite using violence repeatedly and arresting many of the young protestors, though it has not responded to the demands of the thousands that have been taking to the street since February 2011 until today.

There are those who believe that the inability of the monarchy in Morocco to transform into a democracy is related to the very nature of the regime, its history, and its view of society and the political actors, with the structure of the *Makhzan* representing a major barrier in that regard, in addition to the title of the “Commander of the Faithful,” which places the king above the constitution, away from any monitoring or accountability. Those observing the statements of the parties that have supported the new constitution can notice the shift in their tone and the disappointment following the referendum. The constitutional referendum is no longer presented in the discourse of these parties as a paramount event and a historical juncture – as they used to reiterate before the referendum; instead, it is seen as a “beginning” that is still in need of much work. Observers can take note of the ongoing debates between these groups regarding the necessity of purifying the administration from those who falsify the popular will and forge electoral results; in anticipation of the coming parliamentary elections, the inadequacy of the electoral records comes to light because it was the same parties who testified to the integrity of the constitutional referendum and its results, which were produced by the same records, supervised by the same administration, and undergoing the same circumstances.

Days after the vote on the constitution, eight Moroccan parties issued a statement that said: “despite the promises in the royal speech on March 9 to begin a new phase, and despite the contribution of these parties in the success of the referendum over the draft constitution, the

political reality of our country has not changed; in fact, the dominant hegemonic mentality is still insistent on the same behavior.”<sup>26</sup>

The General Secretary of the Justice and Development Group Abdel Ilah Bin Kiran said to his party members: “the people have approved the constitution, but no change took place; everything remained the same; it is all talk with no results.”<sup>27</sup>

In the beginning of September 2011, the Justice and Development Group issued a statement responding to the government, describing those doubting the integrity of the coming elections as enemies of the homeland: “it was expected that Morocco would enter a new phase where opinions and decisions would be given back to the people and its representatives, rupturing with the logic of domination and its symbols who hid themselves well during this turbulent phase; we could have made the preparation phase for the elections, and its regulatory laws, an opportunity to regain the confidence of the citizens ...” He added: “but these hopes did not account for the anti-reform forces, which waited for the passing of what they saw as a passing storm, only to return to their old behaviors and maneuvers that had almost taken the country to the unknown.”<sup>28</sup>

On the level of civil organizations, the Moroccan Network of *Election Monitoring Organizations* expressed its regret due to the government’s neglect of a number of proposals that had advanced to offer an independent monitoring of the elections. This association considered the disregard of its proposals as a transgression of the standards of independent and credible monitoring, which may encourage it to not participate in the coming electoral dates.<sup>29</sup>

Journalist Ali Anuzla explains the stasis of the Moroccan regime from a different angle: “King Mohammed VI disappointed all of those who expected that the popular movement, which is still simmering in the Moroccan street, would send the king signals that the monarchy in Morocco is being renewed; some news outlets attempted to predict events and spoke of the possibility of lightening the royal protocol, and its outdated rituals during symbolic occasions such as the Throne Day and the Allegiance Ceremony, but nothing of that nature took place. The king appeared in a traditional outfit shaded by an immense umbrella, while riding a black stallion surrounded by the palace’s slaves. In front of him were tens of rows of the men of the regime, including officials from the municipalities across the country, elected officials, and notables who were leaning to the point of kneeling in a ritual that insults human dignity.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.almaghribia.ma/Paper/Article.asp?idr=7&idrs=7&id=135242>.

<sup>27</sup> <http://hespress.com/politique/35866.html>.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.pjd.ma/news-pjd/actualite-1339>.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.lakome.com.13-09-2011-8149-سياسة/78-سياسة/html>.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.lakome.com.50-كتاب-الأعمدة/7263-مفارقات-رمضانية/html>.



The summer of 2011 saw strong messages addressed to the king and public opinion, whose senders preferred to be public. These included the letter of engineer Ahmad Bin Al Siddiq who condemned Mohammad VI's silence regarding corruption and his protection of the corrupt, declaring his retraction of his pledge of allegiance towards the king. Addressing the king, Ibin Al Siddiq said: "I have spoken to you in all forms and communicated with you by various means, reminding you of the crimes of some whom you had entrusted, or struck partnerships with, shading them with your robes, and they did not refrain from forging false accusations, disregarding the law, disrespecting heritage, history and civilization, and embezzling public money." He continues: "no investigation was opened, and no revision or accountability took place, which went along your habit of enshrining the immunity of despots who abuse the law, the country, and the people; this happened after you ignored the advice of Ibn Khaldoun<sup>31</sup> on the hazards of combining command with commerce, and you have let corruption thrive in the state and society."<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, after mentioning the aspirations of the February 20 movement for change, modern state building, democracy, freedom of expression, pluralism, respect of human rights and a decent living, while struggling against corruption, clientelism, and rentier economy, legal activist Said Al Omrani wrote from Belgium to the king asking: "where is the nihilism, the misguidance and the outdated ideas in all this your Majesty? Isn't the entire myth of the Moroccan regime built upon the past, relying on a network of king's rural notables, sheikhs, low-grade civil servants (*muqaddamun*, who are charged, among other tasks, with spying on Moroccan citizens), teachers of *zawaya*,<sup>33</sup> businessmen, and those looking for their interests? Does your regime not represent the essence of nihilism when it refuses to listen to the beat of the street and to an important section of the conscientious, dynamic, and hopeful Moroccan youth? Isn't the reliance of Sufi schools and their use in the streets, and the use of thugs to terrorize and scare away the activists, and the use of mosques to push the faithful to vote by "yes" on your constitution, the essence of the reactionary and outdated ideas that you discuss in your speech? Isn't the overlooking of the corruption, which spreads in all state institutions, a fatal act that encourages desperation? Isn't sparing, or giving freedom without accountability or punishment, enjoying full immunity, flagellants and embezzlers of the national wealth the essence of irresponsibility and a clear instance of the state of lawlessness?" Al Omrani added: "Isn't the continuation of the same rituals of allegiance during your last Throne Day celebrations, including practices that clearly belong to the past ages, such as leaning and kneeling to your person and your horse, offensive to

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<sup>31</sup> Ibn Khaldoun (1332-1406) was born in Tunisia and is considered the greatest Arab historian who developed one of the earliest non-religious philosophies of history included in his masterpiece the *Muqaddimah*.

<sup>32</sup> <http://hespress.com/politique/35135.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Plural of *zaouia* or *zawiya*, an Islamic religious school or monastery. The term is Maghrebi and West African, roughly corresponding to the Eastern term *madrasa* (or school).

the humanity of people? It is clear that you are not prepared to change the methods of your rule, and that you insist on maintaining the same rituals and protocols, such as kissing the royal hand, kneeling, bowing, and other practices that belong to history.”<sup>34</sup>

On August 10, 2011, the mayor of Agadir, Tareq Al Qabbaj (member of the government), on behalf of the Socialist Union Party, published the letter of his resignation in protest over harassments that he has been subjected to by powerful parties, believed to be the head of the king’s private secretariat personal office Munir Al Majidi; the mayor spoke to the public opinion, saying: “We thought that the events witnessed in Arab countries, and the protest of the youth in the Mediterranean region, will push some to limit their appetite. Unfortunately, they suffer from an untreatable evil, we dreamt of a new Morocco, but what is confirmed is that change will be limited to the form and not the content. I must learn my lessons: I am a bother and I must depart.”<sup>35</sup>

In the first week of September 2011, the Moroccan public was surprised by a letter sent by a young man called Rashid Qananbi to King Mohammed VI expressing his regret for the failure of those close to the king and the state apparatuses to apply the legal decree that compensated him for his grave disability, after he had intervened five years ago to stop a suicide bomber from setting off his bomb in Casablanca. The young man says in his letter to the King: “A part of your oppressive entourage has been unjust in preventing me from receiving my compensations which you had ordered five years ago.”<sup>36</sup> He adds: “I have decided to return the royal letter that you had offered me in respect and appreciation for you and the letter because nobody among the officials whom I have addressed with the letter appreciated its instructions, starting with the worker, the mayor, the governor, and the minister of interior, including some who are close to you; I have also returned a copy of the ruling in my favor, which the Ministry of Interior has failed to implement.”<sup>37</sup>

The allegiance celebrations were an opportunity used by the king to send two clear messages; the first was the decoration of Abdelattif Hamoushi, Director of the DST, an intelligence agency, with the royal distinction. He is the person the protestors have been calling to put on trial for months because of his apparatus’s deeds against thousands of Moroccans, including horrendous torture and security harassments, some of which were recorded in the shape of testimonials on YouTube, in addition to his implication in acts of torture practiced by the United States against Guantanamo detainees in the secret Tamara prison.

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<sup>34</sup> <http://20fevrier.own0.com/t691-topic>.

<sup>35</sup> <http://agadir24.info/3658.html>.

<sup>36</sup> <http://hespress.com/societe/37584.html>.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

The second message was a reference in the king's speech to the forces demanding change, where he spoke of: "the trends of desperation and nihilism, and outdated misguided practices based."

### Conclusion

The discourse of change among the new generation of the Moroccan youth expresses a deep understanding of the cause for change, and an insistence on transitioning the country to a democracy that ruptures with despotism, offering the king a symbolic and ruling presence, while giving the people back its right to manage the affairs of regime.

Some parties and proponents of the regime believe that Morocco is witnessing the beginning of a democratic transformation, and that the success of this transformation requires suitable political and social conditions. On the other hand, the youth declare that this rhetoric perpetuates the current impasse, taking Morocco from one "waiting room" to another. They believe that the king's failure to respond to the demands of parliamentary monarchy, holding the corrupt responsible, and the dissolution of the parliament and the cabinet was a behavior in keeping with the spirit of the old *Makhzan*, which considers the responses of the "Commander of the Faithful" as gifts and grants to his subjects; therefore, nobody can ask him why he gave, or why he withheld.

This is a reassertion of the path of Hassan II, to which Mohammad VI declared his commitment after assuming power in August 20, 1999 speech, where he said: "We shall remain loyal to the path of Hassan and attach it to the Moroccan constitution that decrees that the king, the Commander of the Faithful, is the highest representative of the nation, the symbol of its unity, and the guarantor of the continuity and sustainability of the state," which he reiterated in his speech at the start of the protests on February 21, 2011 when he declared: "We have always refused to submit to demagoguery and improvisation in our efforts aiming at reinforcing our unique model in democracy and development."<sup>38</sup>

In the second week of August 2011, the Moroccan street was shaken by a tragic incident when a street bread seller, Hamid Al Kanuni, died from his wounds after committing self-immolation in front of a police station in the city Bourkan in Eastern Morocco in protest over being prevented from selling bread in the street by a policeman. The incident was an additional impulse that made the youth wonder: how many Bouazizi's does Morocco need for change to take place?

The continuation of the protests in the Moroccan street, and the joining of the protests by the unemployed and those with other social demands, along with the angry youth using new tactics, such as sit-ins inside government institutions and the sabotage of phosphate-exporting trains,

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<sup>38</sup> Mohammad the VI speech to the members of the Economic and Social Council, February 21, 2011.

makes us admit the existence of a qualitative transformation of the popular anger, while the Moroccan regime is still betting on its traditional tools in the face of the demands for change, including containment, skirting demands, polarization, sowing conflict between the youth, negligence, and back room security solutions.

The following questions remain: will Morocco witness a moment where the king responds to the necessities of historical transformation? Will the protests continue and escalate until reaching the point of no return? Will the regime succeed in absorbing the anger and convincing the new generation, once again, to postpone its demands into the future?