Political Reform in Morocco between Tradition and Liberalization

Ghita Bousmaha

Abstract

In the post-colonial era, the Moroccan monarchy has unified its basic foundations by focusing on the historical and religious legitimacy, and also by considering the modern administration as well as the security system. In this regard, this article tries to study the various moments through which Morocco has been reformulating its political system. Moroccan society has kept its traditional structure after independence. Still, it could not escape the world wide flow of global and modern values that the world started to experience. In the process of urbanism and nation building, the country has chosen to cope with the changing aspects that all the Arab and non-Arab nations started to experience. The changing aspects in Moroccan society have also provoked nationalist movements who were calling for legal authority.

1. Introduction

This article takes a great part in shedding light on the major components of the Moroccan political system along with a deep reading to the most prominent moments it has been through. In this sense, as far as the Moroccan political system is concerned, the king has the power to interfere in case of emergency, ratify and sign international treaties; he acts as a sovereign in national issues, and distributes authority to the members of the parliament in the Legislative, Exclusive and Judicial branches. The king, as a supreme power, can appoint the prime minister and also the cabinet. He presides over the meeting of the Supreme Judicial Council and the cabinet. The system of Makhzen in Morocco has always been revived; its

connotation is near to the Moroccan political system. In this respect, in contemporary Morocco, the meaning of Makhzen refers to the government and everything that is related to it, notably the bureaucracy and the army. Furthermore, the concept of Makhzen is constantly represented in the physic of Moroccans or the collective consciousness; it presents an absolute or a supreme power that ought not to be contested. The concept of Makhzen has expanded its legitimacy as a source of authority portrayed through formal bureaucratic and also informal sources like traditional authority and patriotism, towards other formal and informal relations and segments within society.

1. **2. Research problem**

The understanding of the various transformations that Moroccan political system has witnessed is a key towards formulating a clear idea about how the sociopolitical changes have the power to reshape different relations within Morocco. This has contributed in the construction of a personalized system where each group tries to get closer to the palace for the sake of rewards and favors. Accordingly, the small elite that dominate the Makhzen system is a despotic power, managing all the issues related to the infrastructural and administrative power, and therefore, the state's ability to penetrate different sectors like civil society and political system which is included within the national identity. In Morocco, the monarch is charged of dividing society in order to raise the number of groups; which are going to be one against the other. Hence, the Makhzen remains the only arbiter and the center of all decisions (Layachi, 1999).

1.3.The aim of the study

This study has the objective to shed light and describe the major cultural, social and political components that contributed, to a large extent, in setting the basics of Moroccan political system. Therefore, throughout Moroccan history, a set of dynasties have contributed in the forging of Moroccan cultural identity. Hence, the concept of modern state goes back to the sixteenth when Morocco had adopted a tribal system in which the sultan was the supreme

power; his religious belonging and spiritual character strengthened his central authority. This mere relationship between the sultan and his people is based on a mutual love and sacrifice. In the same line of thought, a new connotation to the concept of Modern state can reflect the relationship between Morocco and Europe especially during European colonialism, which had to change the cultural attitudes about Europe; the purpose was to develop Moroccan economic benefits. Hence, the interest in describing Moroccan community was to create a new assumption to the political and cultural relations that link between Europe and Morocco. Accordingly, Makhzen is the name which was given to the sultan's bureaucratic system. The government played a major role in establishing certain stability among Moroccans; therefore, "its rudimentary administrative and military apparatus was devoted to the extraction of taxes in specie and in kind" (Waterbury, 1970, p.17).

2. Ulema, a Spiritual Sign of Morality

In term of moral values, Abed Al-Jabri brings a symbolic category in Moroccan history which is Ulema, they are actually a group of scholars whose word is inspired mainly from religion. Ulema's main duty is to spread moral values among pupils and youth in particular. In addition to that, this category represents a group of scholars who used to teach at Al Quaraouiyine University in the spiritual capital of Morocco 'Fez', as in other religious sites. Their role was not only to orient and guide people's deeds and attitudes; they were also acting as defenders of Shari'a considering themselves representatives of the community as well. Their impact was mostly based on the fact that people used to purchase the presence of these scholars, believing that they represent peace and certitude for them. The accumulation of all these factors had enabled them to play a major role in society. Furthermore, the famous Moroccan scholar Abd Al-Jabri discusses in his book that the sultan or the future king could not legally become one until he got a signed and written baya'a from this category.

The Ulema are considered as representatives of religious sing without which his majesty would be only a despotic ruler or an intruder. As a matter of fact, the sultans have always

been trying to attain the legitimacy to be in position of a good ruler. Al-Jabri, adds that, in order to solve problems among the nation, the sultans have always used the Fatwa 'discussion' of Ulema to justify their directives (Idrissi, 2010).

Political reforms in Morocco have come as a way of reconsolidation between the individual and his own nation. Intellectuals, scholars and also common people in Morocco have experienced different periods of prosper and also a mere moments of oppression and detention. Since 1990, Morocco has known different political and economic reforms; democratization and modernization were among the major goals that the country decided to achieve, and to assert as first steps towards prosperity and progress. As a matter of fact, these two concepts seem to be important especially when defining political liberalization in relation to Moroccan context.

3. Liberalization's Interference within Political System

Overall, if political liberalization means freedom of expression, a great emphasis; then, has to be put on the main mechanisms that constitute the concept of democratization. The country's open up to the huge amount of global aspects has allowed its economy to be influenced by the private sector investment, which encourages local and global exchange of not only products but also cultures. Interestingly, the analysis of the two concepts: liberalization and as well as democratization proves that when they both meet, they lay important basics especially for underdeveloped countries, but at the same time they reveal the weakness of the widespread culture that dominates these nations. In this regard, "to give the opposition groups a way to blow off steam. The steam valve must meet the opponent's minimal expectations for political openness and participation, but prevent them from understanding the regime's ultimate control" (Carothers and Ottaway, 2005, p. 20)

When liberalization interferes in Moroccan political affaire, it provides a limited freedom for political young leaders; they are allowed to access, compete and prove their ability to legislative plans and execute them. However, the king's word is the most heard; he interferes

to solve sensitive issues that make serious decisions concerning the political reforms of civil society laws and organization. Another approach to that indicates that quasi-government and non-governmental organizations have witnessed a democratic revival thanks to liberalized autocracy. The non-governmental organizations have the ability to fulfill the state's functions. In this regard, when state cannot provide or satisfy health, schooling and social services; the regime starts searching to lay out and more precisely "performing" laws that frame the work of labor associations and civic professionals which finance their main activities. In the same line of thought, the Moroccan state has paved the way for the proliferation of a great number of civil society institutions and organizations, taking into account their objectives, orientations under the laws reform which manage and define their activities. However, despite the freedom which the state provides for these organizations, they do not enjoy a total freedom and autonomy; the state tries to keep this control as a way to apply different methods that can divide rule strategy.

During lead years[1], the role of civil society was restricted and controlled by the state, this policy was meant to shrink the space of these organizations that were serving certain causes; they tried to blur the borders between friends, 'enemies', which empowers the role of the state in maintaining different decisions. Moreover, its belonging to the Charefien origin has also helped the state to further legitimize its policies and control. Moreover, partial economic reforms can be achieved through providing space for professional and social groups in collaboration with liberal autocracies. Partial reform of parliaments and electoral systems as it is the case with some Arab countries.

The structure of political system in Morocco seems to be ambiguous, which weakens youth's perception of the political parties and their actions. This growing lack of interest and trust among youth has led to a growing in the rate of abstention especially in 2009 local elections in Morocco. To solve this problem, the ministry of interior has tried to suggest

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[1] The period from 1960 to 1990 ; it had witnessed the arrest of different activists in the history of Morocco.

different reforms to encourage youth participation in elections and in the political life in general.

4. Human Rights and Political Awareness

The process of democratization and human rights into which Morocco has embarked, has provided a new way to deal with all the social and political issues that characterize the country. In this respect, (Sater, 2007) explains the changes that Morocco has experienced asserting that "the 1999s saw Morocco's most profound and accelerated formal political changes since independence, which cumulated in the death and the accession to the throne of his eldest son, Mohamed VI, on 23 July 1999" (p. 85).

The margin of speech has grown; the cultural means of expression have been empowered and strengthened. After the speech of King Mohammed the VI to carry on the trajectory of democratization and human rights, these reforms came as a continuity of the series of reconciliations the king Hassan II had already lunched. With his accession to the throne, his majesty realized that being near to Moroccans; to their dreams, aspirations and needs is the first step towards asserting the values of democracy and justice. This was demonstrated through his successive visits to different regions in Morocco so as to encourage the economic, social and political process the country was undergoing.

The king's aim is to pave the way for a non-stop process of reforms through a series of projects and programs that raise human rights status and guarantee the basic rights of any citizens regardless of their the region to which they belong. In term of development process, the king lunched a series of projects in all the parts of Morocco. The aim behind these projects is to fight poverty, to preserve citizen's dignity and the right to live in peace. In this respect, his majesty has also considered all the conditions that surround the status of Moroccans living abroad. His majesty expressed his love to his own people by visiting the centers of hosting by himself, and welcoming people. To ensure the continuity of these programs, the creation of the foundation of Mohammed VI in 1999 has come as a response to the national need of

revising the conditions of human rights in Morocco. The foundation covers all the issues related to the status of women and children in difficulty. Moroccans saw in these reforms introduced by the king a promising future that guarantees their dignity and valorizes their rights.

Morocco has responded positively to the conditions proposed by European Western countries, and embarked into a process of reviving the rights that were oppressed at different moments in the past. Indeed, the economic and political reforms have been cherished by different national and international organizations, which saw in Morocco's reconciliation with the past, a new path towards the improvement in the status of human rights and political constancy.

4.1. Political liberalization: from Detention to Freedom of Speech

What we call the new era can be considered as a break with the old regime, but at the same time, a continuity of some political practices that the country could not get rid of. This is how the nature of Moroccan system can be described. There are different challenges that limit or rather disqualify the credibility of various institutions within Morocco; the status of unemployed youth push the later to lose trust in these bodies and make them responsible of their own problems. The political and social reforms launched by king Mohammed VI have been appraised by his own people whose love to their King has grown. Thanks to his being near to them in mostly all occasions, the human rights subject has been one of the major king's priorities; his policy cannot assure the development of his own nation without providing all the conditions that guarantee the citizens 'dignity and welfare.

When looking at the process of democratization and human rights Morocco is undertaking, we realize that it is characterized by sometimes downs and in many different historical times with ups. It has never been fixed; this instability is due to different factors that are embedded within the political structure of Morocco. This is what explains the constraints that face democracy to have a full access within Morocco society.

The political openness Morocco adopts manifested in the series of amendments his majesty has been introducing, which paved the way for questioning the extent to which his majesty has succeed in balancing out between the traditional monarchy and democratic transition; especially that his majesty's promise was to continue the process of democratization his late father had started. All these changes have had a great impact on the position of political parties. For instance, political parties in Morocco are lacking the sense of independence; the differences found among them put them within a circle in which they find themselves clashing with each other. These parties also may face difficulties when trying to serve the aims of democracy. This relative freedom has not ushered with a totally free actions, thus, the clash between Moroccan parties submerge especially during lections; more precisely between the leftists an Islamists parties.

The relationship between the Islamists and secularists has always been characterized by a set of differences concerning their own orientations and beliefs. This relation has impacted the construction of identities among Arab nations and more particularly in Morocco. In the same line of thought, "one of the main obstacles to democracy in the Arab world is the absence of consensus regarding national identity, particularly as it relates to the controversial question of Islam's place in public life" (Carothers and Ottaway, 2005, p.24) In term of national issues, the center of contention in Morocco is mainly related to the references of decisions and laws. On the one hand, Secularists are mostly interested in the interpretation of religious matters through the adoption of the religious teaching method, especially when dealing with national issues. Islamists; therefore, stress the idea that religion is the best way to adopt in all the matters that concern the state. To avoid troubles and comments on behalf of Algeria, Morocco tries to balance out between these two different streams as a way to create stability within Moroccan society. As a case in point, the party of Justice and development as Carothers and Ottaway (2005) assert "Won some 12 percent of seats in the Lower House during the September parliamentary elections. Although it could probably have taken at least 50 percent,

its leaders chose not to run a full state of candidates and thus avoided a head-on collision with the ruling establishment" (p.26).

The political sphere in Morocco uses genius means to keep stability and avoid troubles. In this respect, politicians and the policy adopted serves to maintain a kind of ideological agenda that preserves national identity, and keeps communication in relation to other countries. Still, despite the set of attempts the country tries to keep, the meeting of all these elements like: economic and political reforms that are manifested through political autocracy, democracy, liberalization, and control of power sharing, may create ambivalence among citizens as well as social institutions, and may lead to a state of confusion linked to political field. In this sense, the existence of all these different streams within one nation has the power to impact youth perceptions and attitudes towards not only political life, but also their past, present and future.

In approaching the genius political ways that involve Moroccan youth in political affairs, quasi-government and non-governmental organizations have witnessed a democratic revival thanks to liberalized autocracy. The non-governmental organizations have the ability to fulfill the nation's functions. In this regard, when nations cannot provide or satisfy health, schooling and social services; the regime starts searching to lay out and more precisely perform laws that frame the work of labor associations and civic professionals which finance their main activities. In the same line of thought, the Moroccan state has paved the way for the proliferation of a great number of civil society institutions and organizations, taking into account their objectives, orientations under the laws reform which manage and define their activities. However, despite the freedom which the nation provides for these organizations, they do not enjoy a total freedom and autonomy; it tries to keep this control as a way to apply different methods that can divide rule strategy (Aarts & Nonneman, 2005).

Furthermore, liberalized autocracies almost allow elections and the creation of parliament. The parliament in Morocco plays a major role especially in law making. With

respect to the king who is the supreme power that controls the laws. The structure of political system in Morocco seems to be ambiguous, which weakens youth's perception of the political parties and their actions.

Accordingly, a set of amendments have been implied to the communal charter in order to empower the function of the local municipal and enlarged the scope of their responsibilities, and encouraged media campaign that insists on the importance of citizen's participation in choosing their representatives; through the register on the electoral lists with the help of a new system based on a criterion of residency in the electoral district.

5. The Presence of Youth in the Post-Colonial Morocco

Youth engagement in political life throughout Moroccan history was noticeable; this segment was trusted and given leading roles: "Mohammed Ben Youssef, usually referred to as King Mohammed V, was eighteen years old when he was selected by the French in 1927 for his apparent docility" (Ashford, 1961, p.25) This deep feeling that youth can do something is inspired from their inner energetic power and zeal.

Youth's engagement in political life throughout Moroccan history was noticeable; this segment was trusted and given leading roles. This deep feeling that youth can do something is inspired from their inner energetic power and zeal. Youth are characterized by ambition and willingness to change. Therefore, the sense of nationalism has encouraged some young leaders to take part in different actions that were taking place in Morocco "Ahmed Balafrej and Allal Al-Fassi; young nationalists leaders, were eighteen years old too, when they separately became the spokesmen for two small groups of nationalists meeting in Rabat and Fez in 1926"(Ashford, 1961, p25).

The growth of national values among youth has been enriched or empowered by the colonial presence in Morocco, youth attempted to form groups that are going to be at the head of the resisting policies. Interestingly, after independence, and with the establishment of

Moroccan parliament, a set of changes have been proposed to lay important basics such as: the creation of a House of Representatives. Indeed, with the constructional reforms that took place in 1996, the Moroccan parliament became bicameral with two chambers; the House of Councilors and the House of Representatives. The construction of these two houses can be analyzed or viewed as a strategy implied to keep a pro-government which contains political parties in the parliament.

In the stream of globalization and modernization, Morocco has taken a new path towards asserting the values of democracy and human rights. Hence, in order to transmit these values to its youth, Moroccan institutions need to open its borders to the norms and values of democracy by signing on a set of International conventions concerning human rights. In the same line of thought, the changes that were implemented and also the chosen policies in Morocco have always been standing as important labels that need deep analysis and understanding. Morocco is still between two ambivalent situations.

On the one hand, the country has tried to democratize its institutions, policies and constitution, and on the other hand, the country seems to be conservative about this change; Morocco still needs time to cope with these changes that have implemented the values of democracy to its inner system. The economic and political system has been experiencing different changes especially in term of political liberalization, which determines youth political attitudes and orientations. This ambiguous status has also been exposed with the Democratic Spring that took place in most Arab society of which Morocco was a part.

The Democratic Spring has come as a result of people's longing for asserting justice and valorization of human rights. The Tunisian revolution (known as Jasmine Revolution) represented Tunisians' feeling of oppression and marginalization. People manifested in the streets; their main demands were to have clear and transparent elections that guarantee new rights. In this regard, when the state fails to meet the necessary steps to join the stream of liberalization and democracy, the authoritarian leaders start looking for new ways to insert the

main values and principles of liberalization in society. The state tries, at this level, to calm down people's outrage. As a case in point, backward legitimacy, after a long process of resistance and criticism to the regime, the reformers start doubting its credibility and legitimacy, which pushes the leader to resign.

Prosperity and dignity are the ultimate goals that citizens in any country would like to enjoy in general, but the constant need for change is what characterizes youth in particular. In this regard, Democratic Spring has come as a result of many different attempts crossing the three seasons to stop at the spring one. Therefore, to put youth demands in the hands of the government and the king for a decent life that guarantees them the rights and freedoms that no population can dispense with. Democratic spring in Morocco is considered as a reflection of all the historical, social and political transformations in which youth have played different roles. In this regard, 2011 was a turning point in the history of democracy in Morocco. Based on the previous revolutions, Moroccan youth decided to engage into a movement for which they have chosen the name of 20th February, the need for change has increased especially among youth; a group of young people started their demonstrations first within virtual space in which they were gathered to exchange ideas and then went into streets holding different demands; youth first and foremost call was for change at the different levels especially the political one.

The fake collaboration between the Islamic movement Adl Wa Ihssan and the Extremist Left has given birth to the 20th February movement in Morocco. However, the alliance of the two sides was only to serve the upcoming political interests, but this movement was soon aborted revealing with it a set of deficiencies that handicaps the presence of youth within decision-making places.

In addition to that, the movement was an opportunity for youth to get close to each other; their common goal was the desire for change. However, this aim was not well structured to be able to transcended certain social and political barriers, and prove itself.

These youth have insisted on the necessity of establishing a parliamentary monarchy as well as paving the way towards a new constitution that provides new rights and liberties. As a reaction to this movement, a set of cultural stereotypes have been shaped in a genius way to accuse its members of being lacking the sense of politeness, responsibility and maturity.

The success of any revolution is related mainly to the extent of social, cultural and political framing youth have been given; regardless of the nation to which they belong, it is a long process in which all the previous elements should collaborate with each other; therefore, they can form strong, mature and responsible leaders whose actions are inspired from their deep and wise thoughts towards their own surroundings. In spite of the clear demands these youth were calling for, in depth, their aspirations were only repetitive and unconsciously manipulated by external powers as has been mentioned; lacking clear objectives is what weakened the 20th February movement, the absence of a strong orientation, profound political awareness, as well as youth being exploited by certain partisan and Islamic parties, has indeed, weakened the true image of youth, which exposed the real political status of youth as decision-makers. Hence, this has to question also the deep structures of the Moroccan political system in relation to youth.

Conclusion

Prosperity and dignity are the ultimate goals that any country would like to achieve, but the constant need for change is what characterizes the political system in Morocco. In this regard, Al Makhzen policy has overspread the deep structures of Moroccan political system; the relationship between the king and his people has always been characterized by an unconditional love inspired from the spiritual character of the king. Hence, by embarking in the stream of globalization and human rights, political system in Morocco has accepted to be open to different streams that touch the cultural, social and political aspects within society. Democratic Spring; therefore, has come as a result of many different attempts to voice out youth's aspirations towards the government and the king for a decent life that guarantees for

them different rights and freedoms. Democratic spring in Morocco is considered as a reflection of all the historical, social and political transformations in which the country has already embraced.

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