

Politique africaine

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Economic Sovereignty and Political Places in Contemporary Morocco

Coordinated by

Nadia Hachimi-Alaoui (University of Turin; CRESC-Rabat)

Béatrice Hibou (CNRS-CERI/Sciences Po, Paris)

Deadline for submission of proposals: **June 6, 2022**

The objective of the special issue we are proposing to *Politique africaine* is to interpret contemporary Morocco from what we term the economic foundations of power: in other words, the economic dimensions of the exercise of power and domination.

This question has been extensively discussed in the public debate in Morocco, as well as in the grey literature and research, from a very specific focus: the “makhzen”, and more precisely the “economic makhzen”. The aim behind this term is to offer a reconstruction of the assumed presence of the monarchy in business, the creation of large private groups and their proximity to the palace (whether declared or not) and appointments to the highest public positions (in the major agencies, offices and other public enterprises), interests media and communications and policies for developing “national champions”, etc. This has given rise to a real resurgence in work on economic and financial elites (Bendahhou 2009; Vermeren 2011; Zeroual 2014; Majidi 2020), including at a local level (Péraldi 2007; Chahin 2011; Labari, 2016), on incomes and Moroccan crony capitalism (Saâdi 2017; Oubenal 2019; Oubenal et Zeroual 2021), and on political clientelism and corruption (Akesbi, 2008; Hachemaoui 2012; El Mesbahi 2013), as an extension of all the works – on the formation of Moroccan capitalism, the constitution of a state bourgeoisie and economic elites in general (Waterbury 1967; Berrada 1968; El Maalki 1980; Saadi 1989; Berrada & Saadi 1992; Tangeaoui 1993) – which they have brought up to date to these neoliberal times, making the role of entrepreneurs the centre of attention (Cammett 2004; Catusse 2008). All of them offer an update of the straddling between the positions of power and accumulation, the influence of these characteristics and practices on

the emerging type of capitalism and the economic and political limitations of this configuration. They clearly demonstrate the conflicts of interest, the rentier nature of Moroccan capitalism and the venality of the political elites, and stress the impossibility of making a distinct separation between the economy and politics, and suggest the fundamentally political nature of the most significant economic activities¹.

However, these works are not satisfactory when it comes to gaining a better understanding of Moroccan political economy. In fact, they amalgamate very different processes and neglect the “intrinsic logics” (Weber) of the economy. Above all, they reduce politics to questions of individual interests, political games and the “rise” of the palace and large groups in the economy, and underestimate all the stakeholders who participate in the national economy and their logics of action (Hibou 2011). They share an instrumental version of the economy that also reveals an omniscient and omnipotent power (Hachimi-Alaoui 2019). Naturally, our idea is not to ignore these processes, but rather to explain the dynamics at work in as much detail as possible. Moreover, we want to highlight a plurality of relations between economy and politics as a result of an analysis that takes account of the actions and rationalities of a far more significant group of actors on the other. In other words, the question of the ties between economy and politics is not reduced to the relations between the monarchy and the economy, and here as elsewhere it is important to understand these relations “from below”².

Understanding the relationships between economy and politics: what the notion of “economic sovereignty” brings

This question of the ties between economy and politics is a particularly broad one, and we intend to look at it from a very particular – and extremely daunting – angle: economic sovereignty. Understanding the sense of this term in the Moroccan context and the plurality of forms it currently takes, and studying what it is applied to and the attributes it is based on forms an especially rich basis from which to study a whole series of fundamental problems with analysing politics, in particular the economic foundations of power. Before we look at them, however, we must explain what we mean by economic sovereignty.

The various concepts of economic sovereignty we propose to study are as follows:

1) *Economic sovereignty can be seen as one of the expressions of political sovereignty* oriented towards facts, objects, actors and “economic” places. It is therefore a way of understanding the exercise of power and domination, using the economy as a starting point. The capacity to make choices and define economic policies and to establish norms and rules is an essential attribute of economic sovereignty (Maucourant 2011; Strassel 2012; Fridenson and Griset 2013). It is also a subject of struggles and competition. On the one hand, conflicts of sovereignty involve actors and institutional bodies competing for control – or even a monopoly – over economic decisions, while on the other, the very concept of what economic sovereignty is and what it means is not homogeneous, and can lead to conflicts (Aglietta, Ahmed and Ponsot 2016). It can, in fact, be understood as sovereignty “through” the economy or as sovereignty “over” the economy. In addition, the means by which sovereignty is attained differ depending on the actors, the period and the context.

In Morocco, these issues have taken particular forms for at least three reasons: first, because political life is characterised by a two-headed power; second, because monarchical sovereignty now coexists with a new source – popular sovereignty arising as a result of elections; and

¹ Of course, we do not take the works of the economists who understand the economy in a totally disembodied manner into consideration.

² We explicitly follow in the steps of “politics from below”, as well as the “macroeconomy from below”, both of which have been developed in the pages of *Politique Africaine* over the course of many years.

finally, because political imaginaries refer to two very different political registers – national and imperial – which concern different concepts of intervention in the economy (Hibou and Tozy 2020). In this context, understanding how economic sovereignty is expressed means asking how power is divided, and even more sensitive, the question of responsibility in its various understandings. Finally, it means asking what the legitimate ways of intervening in the economy are.

2) *Economic sovereignty can also refer to the question of national power and domestic economic interests* (Fourquet 1980). It makes it possible to ask what we mean by “nation”, the contours of the “domestic” and their historical evolution, and the actors and strategies that form them. It also relates to the classic issue of globalisation and how to secure inclusion in an international context, playing political games around the overlaps between local, national and global.

When it became independent, Morocco decided on a territorial definition of the term “domestic” and the notion of “national economic interests”: all actors and processes were considered to be Moroccan, including the actors and dynamics brought by the former colonisers, because they were part of the territory and operated within it (Bono 2015, 2016, 2019; Diallo 2021). In the 1970s, this idea gave way to a more restrictive view of the domestic, one that was associated with the holders of capital and owners as a Moroccan bourgeoisie gradually developed. The Moroccanisation (of land ownership and productive resources inherited from the protectorate), and later – in the 1990s – a privatisation policy that was largely reserved for Moroccan operators, were the principal means by which the Moroccan private sector was created. At the end of the 1990s, economic openness, and with it rising foreign private investment, redefined, and still continue to redefine two decades later, the domestic economic landscape, not by returning to the ideas of the period between 1950 and 1960, but by associating a territorial logic to economic indicators and a nationalist logic to economic actors. For example, investment must be deemed to be domestic even if it is brought into Morocco by foreign actors. At the same time, we see a significant rise in economic nationalism in the sense that efforts are made to favour Moroccan actors, or even to define a policy to promote Moroccan interests and “Moroccan production” (El Aoufi and Billaudot 2019). These transformations and the current coexistence of nationalist and internationalist dynamics inevitably lead us to question what the wealth and power of the nation is considered to be, and what the levers and logics of action are that make it possible to strengthen them. Here, too, these questions do not require single answers: the coexistence of different logics illustrates different concepts of these notions.

3) *Finally, economic sovereignty can be understood as the expression of economic autonomy.* An understanding of this idea opens the window for reflections on the contours of the economy and types of relationship with the economy: being sovereign means being autonomous, the master of one’s destiny. In this sense, the sovereignty of the economy over politics and society may legitimise discussions on the necessary processes of depoliticization. These processes are clearly highly political, in particular by concealing the power games and relationships of strength that are played out in these economic places. This way of understanding sovereignty also affirms the universal and general nature of economic processes by calling into question the importance of contexts such as historical periods, which here, too, has significant political effects, for example in terms of exclusion and inequality.

At the beginning of the 2000s, in Morocco as elsewhere, managerial changes, in public companies for example, made in the name of economic efficiency and the need to construct “national champions” (Mhaoud 2018) that would be both locomotives for the national economy and drivers of its international expansion, were made solely in the name of economic aspects, and even with the stated intention of depoliticising the economy and responding only to economic imperatives. However, these transformations had fundamental political and social outcomes in terms of intervention in local territories and available public services, and perhaps

even more in terms of changes in the power relations among actors. Equally, the reorientation of sectorial policies (such as the Moroccan Green Plan for agriculture) in the name of greater consideration of the economic challenges led not only to the marginalisation of entire sections of the Moroccan economy (family-based agriculture, to continue with this example), but also to the use of ways of thinking based on very particular representations of the nation, progress and development, and on social imaginaries that in spite of everything contributed towards “politicising” all these new perspectives. In short, towards blurring the borders between the economy and politics.

Focus of the issue

In particular, the expected proposals may take the following axis:

Axis 1: Economic sovereignty as it relates to the public debate in Morocco

When understood in the sense, the question of economic sovereignty makes it possible to offer an original interpretation of the problems that explicitly arise in the public debate in Morocco. These are the problems this issue of *Politique africaine* wishes to analyse. As an example, we would cite three issues that seem to us to be especially important.

a. A first interesting discussion for our topic relates to *industry and industrialisation*. In Morocco at the beginning of the 2000s, the internationalisation of production networks led to a spread of industrial outsourcing and new “global professions” (a category that describes – especially in Morocco – business sectors associated with international outsourcing, including aeronautics, the automobile industry and offshoring) alongside the traditional textile sector and agroindustry. Industry became an important lever of economic growth in Morocco (Piveteau and Rougier 2011; Piveteau 2018). This translated into a return of industrial strategies – such as the Plans for Industrial Emergence I and II (2001-2012) or the Industrial Acceleration Plan (2014-2020) – and sectorial “visions” (such as the “aeronautical”, “automobile” and “offshoring” visions), as well as a revival of the debate on industrialisation processes in Morocco. This debate has a history: just after independence, it had revolved around the dilemma between the construction of a highly capital-intensive industry to strengthen Morocco’s economic independence while also enabling the creation of domestic savings and the construction of a highly labour-intensive industry in response to the jobs emergency. Fifty years later, the terms of the debates have changed. The issues are now the “quality” of domestic production, the low value of the jobs it requires and the diversification it imposes on those who structure its terms, although it is still driven by the same impossible trade-off between employment and the creation of value.

These discussions are not confined to the spheres of public action: they can be found in the scientific literature on the “Made in Morocco” (El Aoufi and Billaudot 2019), in the press and grey literature around the “move up-market” and in cases of reflections on the “international expansion” of the Made in Morocco (the 2020 Special Commission on the New Development Model). Of course, these discussions are economic, but they are not merely limited to economic issues: they are fundamentally about the relations between power, wealth creation and sovereignty. They make it possible to explore the ways in which accumulation, distribution and innovation are conceived, for example. They reveal an ever-strengthening desire to bring about the emergence of an economically strong nation by making a nationalist discourse that is a strong presence on the international scene audible, and amplifying it. The highly sovereignist discussions on free exchange agreements (in particular the revision of the agreement between Morocco and Turkey in 2020, the attempts to revise the agreements between Morocco and Egypt and between Morocco and Tunisia and increasing tensions with the European Union)

and the rhetoric around the kingdom's economic diplomacy in Africa suggest that in today's Morocco, the economy participates fully in these times of exacerbating nationalism.

b. A second structural discussion for analysing economic sovereignty today is *the Moroccanisation of development and economic policy decisions*. The necessity of reorienting the development model has been at the heart of economic development in recent years. The discussions that accompanied the appointment of a national commission to restructure the development model were based around focusing on the need for a "Moroccan model" developed by Moroccans. This concern echoes the criticisms of the position held by international experts in the preparation of economic plans and programmes, with the increased power in public decision-making over the past twenty years of large foreign consultancy firms like McKinsey, Roland Berger and Boston Consulting Group (Piermay 2011; Piveteau and Rougier 2011; Akesbi 2015; Hachimi Alaoui 2019; Hibou and Tozy 2020).

The debate on the new development model and international expertise makes reference to the problems of the relationships between technocracy and politics (Bouabid and El Messaoudi 2007). In so doing, it refers to the issue of the bearers of sovereignty, and more precisely to that of the transfer of sovereignty to an "elected" group which, unlike the "people" – of course – and "politicians", would have the skills required to decide and govern. In the case of Morocco, this question intersects with the issue of the complex and ambiguous power relations among the various power circles, between different ways of governing and between the royal and governmental approach, among others.

c. A third important debate in Morocco today revolves around *its new economic ambitions in Africa*, which is accompanied by the deployment of Moroccan economic and financial stakeholders on the continent. The Moroccan economic leaders who harbour these ambitions (led by banks, telecoms and OCP, but also with the involvement of agriculture, public works and social housing) had their origins in sectors that were historically developed within the domestic economy. Expansion into Africa is constructed around this expertise, thanks to individual capabilities and the appropriate knowledge. The case of agriculture and the use of fertilisers is an iconic example provided by OCP, with its ability to put together specific fertility maps for every type of soil (Ferlaino 2018).

This debate on Morocco's economic expansion in Africa poses the question of the relations between knowledge and power. It makes it possible to understand economic knowledge as political challenges: from a geopolitical standpoint, economic know-how participates in the attempts to domesticate reality by defining the contours of state know-ledge and concealing, or marginalising, many other types of knowledge, interpretation and data.

Axis 2: Sovereignty and the rise of the economy in the exercise of power

These questions of sovereignty are not, however, always expressed explicitly. Other types of transformation raise them implicitly, but no less deeply, to encourage reflections on what they mean and to make it possible to better understand the economic foundations of power. There are many different kinds of transformation, but one of them seems to us to be particularly enlightening: the rise of economic issues in the exercise of power.

Since the mid-1990s, the discourse on authority has been focused on the economy and the managerialisation of methods of government. The primacy of the economy is attributed to neoliberal globalisation, but it also arises out of profound transformations in the Moroccan political economy that are directly related to the issue of economic sovereignty (Hachimi-Alaoui 2019). The State is neither the largest provider of funds nor the largest employer in the country. This is explained by fairly commonplace economic transformations that have accompanied privatisation and economic liberalisation. It is also explained by the loss of control previously exerted by the ministry of sovereignty *par excellence*, the Ministry of the Interior,

which until then had played an important role in the economy, with control over economic resources, redistribution and the most important stakeholders. Finally, it is explained by the rise of new technocratic elites and the conflicts of sovereignty over the economy this engendered, as well as the progress made by the opposition and the real competition within government bodies around control over economic decisions and important “economic” actors. In addition, the end of the 1990s saw the appearance of new economic interests, more precisely the creation of large private groups, as a result not only of privatisation but also of changes to the rules of public intervention and the increased power of foreign investment.

In response to these transformations, starting in the 2000s, the priority given to the economy and the reorganisation of mechanisms of authority and the methods of intervention in the economy redefined the content and contours of economic sovereignty. In actual fact, there was no “withdrawal” on the part of the State in any of these cases; rather, there was a plurality of these modes of redeployment (Hibou 1999 a and b; Hibou and Tozy 2020) that changed the ways in which sovereignty was conceived. However, they also suggest a transformation in politics itself by contributing towards modelling the places of power relations and the exercise of domination.

We also see a redefinition of the tools and instruments of governance of the social. The techniques for targeting social transfers that are developing continuously in Morocco clearly pose the question of the economic efficacy of social aid and the good management of resources. Beyond this, they invite us to reflect on the relations between the state and society, on the use of statistical categories by administrations and the historicity of intervention methods and economic memory (Samuel 2022). The indicators and construction of a unified social register therefore seem to be a way of redefining the means of domestication and a modality of state sovereignty over the population.

In short, it seems to us that the particular interest of this issue is to highlight 1) what the discussions around “economic sovereignty” say about economic misperceptions, but above all about political misconceptions; and 2) what the logics of action regulated by the issue of “economic sovereignty” say about the exercise of power and domination. The expected proposals may adopt various disciplinary approaches and empirical methods from the social sciences, from history to anthropology and from political sociology to economic and political geography.

The expected contributions should be based on original empirical material. Paper proposals should be sent to redacpolaf@gmail.com. They are due by **June 6 2022** in the form of a 500/600 words abstract, in French or English, presenting the objectives, hypotheses and empirical materials to be examined. The first versions of the selected papers should be submitted by **January 15 2023**.

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