

# Beyond the 20FM: The Revitalization of the New Moroccan Left Following the 2011 Protests

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**Abstract** Since the late eighties, the Moroccan Left has been experiencing a profound ideological and political crisis exacerbated by the co-optation of the traditional socialist parties of the country. Starting from the nineties, numerous new forces tried to emerge as the new leading leftist front, although with little success. However, the events of 2011 in the Arab region played a crucial role in the revitalisation of the new Moroccan Left, today mostly represented by the Fédération de la Gauche Démocratique (FGD) and Annahj Addimocrati. The article investigates the interplay between the 20 February Movement (20FM) and these new socialist forces and it strengthens the idea that behind the 20FM and the establishment of a new non-governmental left lie the very same political and socio-economic reasons. Indeed, in 2011 the leftists attempted to emerge as leading forces side by side the 20FM, but due to their balkanization and internal divisions they were not able to form a united front and seize the opportunity to carry out their fight against the regime. Nevertheless, the political engagement of the 20FM stressed the importance of a new strong leftist-opposition front in the country and the 2011 protests eventually prompted the socialists to start a process of rapprochement aimed at overcoming the divisions of the past years.

**Keywords** Morocco. 2011 protests. 20FM. Leftist parties. Socialism.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Political Developments and the Rising of a New Leftist Front. – 3 The 2011 Protests and the Revitalization of the New Moroccan Left. – 4 Conclusions.



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## 1 Introduction

In 2011, the Arab region witnessed a unique wave of protests that spoke out against socio-economic disparities and corruption while calling for a political change. The uprisings were initially sparked off by a first wave of protests taking place in Tunisia after Muḥammad al-Bū'azīzī's self-immolation on December 18, 2010 in sign of protests against police acts of abuse and violence (Aleya-Sghaier 2012). Throughout 2011, major demonstrations arose in the country as well as in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, Oman, and Iraq. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan also witnessed a series of protests but on a smaller scale. However widespread the protests became throughout the Arab region, generalisations might be misleading, as each country effectively shows its own peculiarities as regards the causes, strategies, and the outcomes of the demonstrations (Allinson 2014; Barany 2011; Hinnebusch 2014). While political authoritarianism, rooted in all countries in question, is commonly regarded as one of the main reasons behind the outbreak of the uprisings<sup>1</sup> the economic and social dimension of the protests should not be underestimated either. Demands for greater social and economic justice alongside the discontent brought on by growing inequalities and poor job opportunities seem to suggest that the Arab Spring also mirrored a more structural crisis of the neoliberal system (Bogaert 2013). "Poverty, inequality, and precarity" are indeed the three words chosen by Achcar (2013) to sum up the social situation faced by the majority of Arab countries at the dawn of 2011, emphasising the severity of high unemployment rates in the region, especially among young graduates and women. Indeed, regardless of their actual outcomes, the 2011 protests brought to the fore a large section of the civil society whose demands are, at least in part, aligned with the traditional stances of the Left (Resta 2018; Achcar 2013).

The history of the leftist parties in the Arab countries dates back to the early 1900s. During the colonial era, the leftist forces in the region were often at the forefront in the fight for independence against the colonial powers (Bustani 2014; Gelvin 2004) while they later set as the main opponents to the authoritarian rules that came to power in the post-colonial era. Often outlawed and persecuted, these parties would establish close relations with trade unions, professional associations, and human rights associations, often carrying out their activities illegally (Majid 1987; Hendriks 1983). Nevertheless, as Resta (2018) recalls, starting from the eighties up until 2011, the Arab Left went through a period of significant decline, with an increasing number of parties being banned, co-opted, or marginalised.

<sup>1</sup> Gelvin 2015; Heydemann, Leenders 2011; Teti, Gervasio 2011; Droz-Vincent 2011.

This was, for instance, the case of leftist-opposition forces in Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco.<sup>2</sup> While it is true that in the post-2011 elections the leftist forces in the region were largely marginalised to the advantage of the Islamist parties (Al-Anani 2012), it is equally true that the role of the Left during the uprisings, its evolution over the following years, as well as its present role in politics, have been widely understudied in the international literature. Indeed, the purpose of this contribution is to provide an overview of the major leftist parties in Morocco, shedding light on the interplay between the rising of a new Left and the events of 2011.

Morocco has always been characterised by an exceedingly varied political plurality. While this outward pluralism has partly reflected a specific strategy of the regime aimed at weakening the competing parties (Democracy Reporting International 2007), over the decades several leftist forces emerged as the main opponents to the domineering monarchical power. Specifically, after the post-independence period, two main parties set apart and stood against the regime and its political allies: the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) and the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS) (Willis 2002). The USFP was officially founded in 1975 at the Extraordinary party convention of the National Union of Popular Forces (UNFP), the first Moroccan socialist party founded in 1959 by a splinter group of the *Ḥizb al-Istiqlāl* (Independence party, IP) headed by the leftist leader al-Mahdī bin Barka (Khatibi 2000; Ben Barka 1999). The PPS was instead established in 1974 by former militants of the Moroccan Communist Party (PCM), founded by ‘Alī Ya‘tah in 1945 and outlawed by the King several times between the end of the protectorate and the first years of independence (Majid 1987). Nevertheless, throughout the nineties, these forces experienced a long-lasting process of co-optation and ideological metamorphosis and the local political landscape was emptied of strong leftist-opposition parties. At the same time, between the end of the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s, new leftist and dissenting voices arose, attempting to carve out an ever-wider space of visibility and to pave the way for a genuine democratization of the country. At the time, this new emerging Moroccan Left was mainly represented by the *Parti de la Gauche Unifié* (PSU), the *Parti de l’Avant-Guarde Démocratique et Socialiste* (PADS), the *Congrès National Ittihadi* (CNI), and *Annahj Addimocrati*.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the establishment of new leftist and opposition parties between the 1900s and the 2000s was not confined to Morocco, as evidenced by the foundation of the *Congrès pour la République* (CPR) in Tuni-

<sup>2</sup> Penner Angrist 1999; Maghraoui 2002; Lust-Okar 2005; Ryan 2011; Albrecht 2012

<sup>3</sup> For “*Annahj Addimocrati*” I decided to use a simplified transliteration, as it is commonly used in Morocco as well.

sia, the Hizb al-Karāma (Dignity Party) in Egypt, and the Democratic Left Party in Lebanon (Resta 2018).

Even if Morocco was not as affected as other countries by the 2011 protests, the political vacuum left by the USFP, now governmental left, and the absence of any strong leftist force capable of catalysing the widespread popular discontent played a significant role in the emergence of a new social movement, the 20 February Movement (20FM), which dominated the local political scene throughout 2011. On February 20, thousands of demonstrators gathered in the capital and other cities such as Casablanca, Marrakesh, Al Hoceima, Fez, and Tétouane, receiving the full support of the PSU, PADS, CNI, and Annahj Addimocrati. The 20FM, in which activists with different political backgrounds converged, indeed voiced a number of demands traditionally assumed by the left, such as the restriction of the powers of the King, social and civil rights, the recognition of the Amazigh language and culture, and the fight against censorship. Furthermore, the outbreak of the protests, the rising of the 20FM, and, in particular, the disappointing response of the King to the demands of the population played a major role in the revitalisation of the new Moroccan Left, that intensified significantly its political and social action from 2011 onwards. Moreover, while the socialist parties decided to join the demonstrations forthwith, they also attempted to catalyse this rising wave of protests in an attempt to carry on their struggle against the regime. While Annahj Addimocrati was accused of manipulating the leadership of the 20FM for its own agenda, the 2011 protests are one of the main reasons that prompted the PSU, PADS, and CNI to initiate a process of rapprochement which eventually translated in the establishment of a stronger leftist alliance, the Fédération de la Gauche Démocratique (FGD).

The arguments that follow have been carried out through the use of the scholarship on the political and economic history of Morocco in the last decades as well as on the evolution of the local parties since the post-independence period. However, previous published studies have rarely included comprehensive analysis of the FGD and Annahj Addimocrati. Hence, in order to better appreciate the new Moroccan Left, I relied on primary sources such as the political documents, the official statutes, and the official political programs of the parties in Arabic language. A more detailed investigation of the post-2011 events was also made possible by the reading of Moroccan newspaper articles both in Arabic and French language.

## 2 Political Developments and the Rising of a New Leftist Front

Starting from the 1970s, Morocco entered a phase of a severe economic crisis that led the country to initiate a long phase of structural reforms aimed at reducing the role of the state in the economy while strengthening the free market and the private sector (Bogaert 2013). These measures were further supported by King Muḥammad VI who announced the beginning of a new era of political and socio-economic change (Daadaoui 2010). However, research investigating the implications of neoliberal policies in the Middle East has shown the negative impact of these measures on the socio-economic condition of the population, especially regarding the rural-urban relationship, youth unemployment, and job insecurity (Zemni, Bogaert 2011; El-Said, Harrigan 2014; Kreitmeyr 2018; Cohen 2004). Over the decades, such changes brought wide resentment among the population and they eventually laid the groundwork of a series of popular protest movements and organisations, such as the Association Nationale des Diplômés chômeurs du Maroc (ANDCM) (Montserrat 2007), founded in 1991, and more recently, the 20FM, inspired by the demonstrations in the Arab region in 2011 (Paciello 2019).

By the end of the 1980s, following the fall of the Soviet bloc and similarly to other leftist parties in other countries, the two major socialist forces of Morocco began to experience an ideological and leadership crisis. In order to adapt to the new global economic and political order, the former leftists had to accept the neoliberal system thereby shifting towards socio-liberal positions: the parties gave up their main revolutionary, anti-imperialist, and reformist stances, and they eventually started a process of rapprochement with the King who was able to co-opt an increasing number of socialist militants (El Maslouhi 2009; Storm 2007). This situation translated into an ideological crisis of the left that turned the USFP and the PPS into loyalist and governmental parties without any real intention of changing the political and economic system (A'boushi 2010; Vermeren 2002; Khatibi 2000). In the aftermath of the 1997 elections, after four decades of political opposition, the USFP and the PPS decided to cooperate with the King and to head the new government with 'Abd al-Rāḥmān al-Yūsūfi, USFP leader, as Prime Minister. Even though the parties claimed their desire of bringing about a real changing of the system within the institutions, the King managed to ensure a substantial continuity of the political practices and the socialists were not able to improve the socio-economic conditions of the country nor to establish a truly democratic parliamentary monarchy (Joffé 1998; Storm 2007). The co-optation of the former leftist opposition parties, their alignment with the monarchy, and their full acceptance of the liberal economic system had two main effects: on one side, other po-

litical forces started to dominate the local political scenario, among them the monarchical parties and the Islamists.<sup>4</sup> On the other side, the crisis of the Moroccan Left cleared the way to the rising of new leftist parties that today set themselves as the most progressive and democratic front of the country.

In 1994, in response to intense international pressures of human rights associations, King Ḥassan II granted an amnesty to more than 420 political prisoners jailed between the 1970s and the 1980s (Rollinde 2002). Most of them were leftist militants, especially members of *Ilā al-Amām* (Forward) movement, a Marxist-Leninist organisation founded in 1970 by Abrahām Serfātī and other communist militants (al-Wajāni 2011; Vairel 2014). Indeed, it was precisely during their time in prison that a group of *Ilā al-Amām* activists headed by Muṣṭafā al-Barahmīh and ‘Abdallah al-Ḥarīf agreed on founding a new radical-left force that was eventually established under the name of *Annahj Addimocrati* (Democratic Way) on April 15, 1995 (Laḥaḍar 2018). Since its foundation, the party embraced a radical Marxist ideology and made its first priority the establishment of a socialist society. The fight against neo-colonialism, the Arab and African solidarity, and the Third Worldist ideology also emerged as a central part of the agenda of the party. Furthermore, *Annahj Addimocrati* is today the only political force in the country that support the self-determination and total autonomy of the Sahrawi people from the domination of the Moroccan State (“*al-intiḥabāt al-barlamāniyya*” 2002). Nevertheless, probably due to its radical positions, *Annahj Addimocrati* was not recognised by the government until 2004 and it was forced to carry out its political activity illegally (El-Hassouni 2004).

By the end of the 1990s, the *Organisation de l’Action Démocratique Populaire* (OADP), a leftist party founded at the end of the 1960s as the political persecution of the far-left 23 March movement (Vermeren 2002), went through a phase of internal conflicts that divided the uncompromising militants from those who were progressively accepting a warmer collaborative relationship with the monarchy (Vairel 2014). On the contrary, the party members who refused to cooperate with the regime decided to merge with other minor leftist movements, namely the *Mouvement pour la Démocratie*, the *Mouvement des Démocrates Indépendants*, and the *Potentialités Démocratiques de Gauche*, with which they founded the *Parti Socialiste de la Gauche Unifié* (PSGU) (“*La gauche se rassemble, l’USFP fait cavalier seul*”, 2004). In 2005, the *Fidélité à la Démocratie* movement, a splinter group of the USFP headed by Muḥammad al-Sāssī, joined the PSGU and together they founded the *Parti Socialiste Unifié* (PSU). Since its foundation, the PSU was conceived as a new and independent social-

4 Sater 2003; Hamzawy 2007; Garcia, De Larramendi 2017; Szmolka 2015.

ist party whose political action was mainly marked by the promotion of democracy and the fight against socio-economic inequalities. Soon, the PSU established dialogue with few other democratic, socialist, and opposition forces, among them the Parti de l'Avant-Garde Démocratique et Socialiste (PADS) and the Congrès National Ittihadî (CNI) ("8 Mâi 1983" 2007; El Bouzdaini 2018; al-Râmi 2006). The former was established in 1983, but formally legalised only in 1993, and its militants have been always close to the local human rights associations, the Association Marocaine des Droits Humains (AMDH) in particular. On the contrary, the CNI was only founded in 2001 and it has, since the very beginning, developed a close relation with the Confédération Démocratique du Travail (CDT), one of the major local trade union. Despite some minor differences, both parties were established in response to an internal split among the USFP and their leaderships have consequently tried to stand out as much as possible from their former party, thereby defining an uncompromising and uncooperative approach towards the governmental left.

Between the 1960s and the 1980s, several militants of the PADS, CNI, and PSU fell victim of the political persecution against the political opponents, while many of them were forced to leave Morocco seeking asylum abroad. For these reasons, the parties developed great care and interest on questions such as the democratic transition, human rights respect, and the fight against the oppressive power of the regime (Bentahar 2020; Vermeren 2002; 2006; "8 Mâi 198" 2007; "Maroc: Scission" 2001).

At the beginning of the new millennium, Annahj Addimocrati approached these other socialist forces as they were all attempting to establish a united leftist bloc capable of challenging the other monarchical and Islamist forces, the Rassemblement National des Indépendants (RNI) and the Parti de la Justice et du Développement (PJD) in particular. Indeed, on December 1, 2001, the leaders of the OADP met 'Abdallah al-Ḥarîf, first secretary general of Annahj Addimocrati and Aḥmad Binjallûn, leader of the PADS, leaving the impression that the parties would have merged together (B 2011). Few months later, in February 2002, Muḥammad bin Sa'îd Ayt İddar, former leader of the PSU, and other leftist leaders sent a message to Aḥmad Binjallûn and 'Abdallah al-Ḥarîf, pushing for the formation of a new democratic and socialist bloc, with the ultimate goal of taking part in the 2002 elections (A 2002).

In other words, in the early 2000s, the groundwork for the rising of a new Moroccan Left was certainly laid. Nevertheless, these emerging socialist parties kept experiencing a process of fragmentation and a double political crisis: on one side, they lacked a deep-rooted popular support and they struggled to win back the trust of the leftist voters disappointed by the bad performances of the governmental left. On the other side, the leaderships of the parties were

not able to overcome their differences and they eventually decided not to participate in the 2002 elections as a single and united front.

A certain improvement was brought by the 2007 elections. On the occasion, the PADS, the PSU, and the CNI decided to take part in the electoral process with a shared political programme, common status and electoral rolls. Indeed, on April 22, in Casablanca, the parties announced their intention to run for the elections as a single alliance, the Alliance de la Gauche Démocratique (AGD) (Herradi 2007). Their joint political programme stressed the necessity to adopt a new constitution, to fight against unemployment and poverty, and to control the economy in order to overcome the 'favours-and-privileges' system and to best handle the negative effects of globalisation while preserving the domestic economic balance (Hamrouch 2007).

Nevertheless, Annahj Addimocrati did not join the other leftists in the run for the elections since few critical differences kept the parties apart. In particular, the major discrepancies between Annahj Addimocrati and the other leftists concerned the Sahara question and the rejection of the elections as a protest against the regime (B.H. 2011). In fact, for the Marxist militants the choice of boycotting the electoral processes has always been a matter of principle and a specific political strategy, as they believe that no real changing can be achieved while participating in the institutional life before a full restriction of the powers of the monarchy.

Therefore, one can understand why, in the first decade of the 2000s, due to the failure of the USFP-led government and to the inability of overcoming their strategic and ideological divisions, the new Moroccan Left kept experiencing a profound crisis that condemned the socialists to an absolute marginalisation and to political irrelevance.

### **3 The 2011 Protests and the Revitalization of the New Moroccan Left**

Starting from the 2000s, growing social inequalities and an uneven access to local resources and other basic amenities triggered off occasional and long-lasting protests that were organised all across the country, both among urban populations and rural communities. Moreover, the demonstrations were supported by various sections of the population, such as political activists, young people, journalists, students, militant and associative circles, who started to express a sever aversion and dissatisfaction towards the political power (Ben-nafla, Seniguer 2011).

Few years later, on the heels of the wave of protest movements across the Arab World, on February 20, 2011, tens of thousands of Moroccans took to the streets both in urban contexts and rural ar-



eas joining the rising 20FM (Bergh, Rossi-Doria 2015). The 20FM emerged as a decentralized and cross-class protest movement that, since the very beginning, gathered a variety of independent activists and a number of different political organisations. Desrues (2013) suggests that the 20FM displayed a dualistic nature as for the complexity of its alliances, internal structures, and strategies. In particular, he distinguishes two different groups of members within the Movement, according to their different role before and during the protests: a first group of activists made up of young people with no political experience and no direct affiliation to political parties who organised the first demonstrations on February 20, 2011 through an extensive use of internet and social medias such as Facebook and Twitter (Desrues 2012); and a second section of the members that was instead formed by a wide range of people, political parties, and organisations that joined the protests right after and that was later going to establish the National Support Council of the 20FM, connected with the rest of the members around the country through local councils (Desrues 2013; 2012).

Indeed, while the leftists played a crucial role among the Movement, the 20FM was capable of uniting “previous ideological enemies” (Badran 2020, 620), as the individuals that joined the protests were more often than not characterised by different when not contrasting political backgrounds: socialist militants from the AGD and Annahj Addimocrati, activists of the AMDH, Islamists from al-‘Adl wa al-Ihsān and from Hizb al-‘Umma (The Party of the Nation), and Amazigh militants from various Amazigh groups (Badran 2020; Rossi-Doria 2016). The first wave of protests took place on February 20 and within one month, the uprisings involved more than 300,000 people in more than 50 cities. As never before, the demonstrators were not driven only by economic or strictly material needs, but they started to question the overwhelming privileges of the monarchy asking for substantial political changes and calling for the abolition of the 19th and 23rd articles of the Moroccan constitution, which grant the sacredness and the unlimited powers of the King. Moreover, some protesters even called for the full establishment of a truly democratic parliamentary monarchy, a decision that would have inevitably threaten the privileges of the monarch himself (Arieff 2011). However, the ideological divergences of its members alongside a series of internal disagreements concerning strategies and goals eventually weakened the 20FM, which gradually lost its mobilisation capacities (Hoffmann, König 2013). Several leftist militants, for instance, had expressed their concerns over an excessive media coverage of the Islamists as well as on the latter’s role among the Movement itself. After the withdrawal of al-‘Adl wa al-Ihsān from the 20FM on December 18, 2011, a number of Islamist militants indeed confirmed the presence of internal disputes within the Movement (Badran 2020).

Moreover, the presence of the non-governmental left alongside the Islamists of al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān among the 20FM was repeatedly used by the regime in order to discredit the Movement and to create divisions among its militants (Desres 2012).

However, as the popular uprisings were spreading across the country, the militants of both the AGD and Annahj Addimocrati took the streets with the demonstrators and attempted to catalyse such emerging social force. Nevertheless, any attempt to head the 20FM or even to stand as leading forces in the protests eventually failed. Regarding Annahj Addimocrati, for the leadership of the party the 2011 protests represented the unavoidable result of the “separation between the existing regimes and the people desiring freedom, democracy and a decent life”.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the party offered a Marxist interpretation of the protests led by the 20FM: “The profound crisis of the capitalist system...”, ‘Abdallah al-Ḥarīf claimed, “was a fundamental factor in the outbreak of these revolutionary processes while the rising of a multi-polar world offers better chances for the fight of the people who suffer from western imperialism, Zionism and reactionary Arabs in our region”.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the secretary general of the party identified few main reasons behind the spread of the 2011 protests in the Middle East. First and foremost, the reciprocal influence of the neighbouring Arab countries played a decisive role as the spark that ignited the popular uprisings. According to al-Ḥarīf, the common struggle against Western imperialism, Zionism, and reactionary Arab regimes seems to be the main factor that laid the foundation for the outbreak of the popular outcry. In the second place, according to the leadership of Annahj Addimocrati, the global crisis of capitalism brought to the fore the most adverse effects of our economic system, that translated in social inequalities, over-poverty, social exclusion, welfare cuts, and high levels of unemployment. Indeed, the authoritarian local rules have always managed to repress any real democratic threat with the only goal to ensure their own political and economic interests at the expense of the most vulnerable sectors of the population.<sup>7</sup>

For their radical stances and for their political engagement side by side the protesters, ‘Abdallah al-Ḥarīf and ‘Abd al-Salām Yāssīn, leaders of Annahj Addimocrati and al-‘Adl wa al-Iḥsān, were accused of manoeuvring the young members of the 20FM; indeed, according to some local newspapers, the leadership of Annahj and the Islamist militants were able to exploit the popularity of the Movement with their own agenda, putting aside the original goals of the demonstrators

<sup>5</sup> Translated from Arabic: “‘Abdallah al-Ḥarīf, Manāḏil taqaddumī wiḥdawī” 2017.

<sup>6</sup> “‘Abdallah al-Ḥarīf, Manāḏil taqaddumī wiḥdawī” 2017.

<sup>7</sup> “‘Abdallah al-Ḥarīf, Manāḏil taqaddumī wiḥdawī” 2017.

("Les liaisons dangereuses" 2011; "Annahj manipule-t-il les jeunes" 2011a; "Houcine Abenkcer: Il y a plusieurs" 2011b).

Such accuses were not limited to local media attacks and they did not remain confined to the Moroccan borders. For instance, another clamorous episode took place at the European Parliament on March 22, 2011. There, 'Abdallah al-Ḥarīf and Ḥādīja al-Riyādī, ex-president of the AMDH and now member of Annahj, expressed their outspoken support for the total independence of the Western Sahara. But their claims caused the harsh reaction of the Association Marocain en Europe (AME), an organisation that represents the Moroccan diaspora in Europe, which made an official release arguing that: "Sans aucune forme de respect ni d'égard pour les valeurs sacrées de leurs concitoyens, Annahj Addimocrati et l'AMDH vendent leurs âmes et braquent l'idéal des jeunes du mouvement du 20 février aux rebelles du Polisario et à leurs mentors algériens" ("Réformes: Comment le Mouvement" 2011c).

However, such accuses were rejected by the members of the 20FM. Interviewed by *Aujourd'hui Le Maroc*, one of them stated that "Annahj Addimocrati et l'Association marocaine des droits humains (AMDH) n'ont jamais été les guides spirituels du Mouvement du 20 février. Je crois que ces personnes représentent leurs propres structures politiques, parlent en leur nom et ont été invitées à Bruxelles en tant que telles" (Aswab 2011c). With respect to the Sahrawi people and the issue of their independence, he also argued that the 20FM never addressed the question of the Southern provinces, stating that no real solution can be accomplished without a genuine democratization and separation of powers (Aswab 2011c).

Over the weeks following the uprisings, the regime put in place a twofold counterthrust: on one side, the King enacted a media smear campaign against the 20FM, which was accused of being an enemy of the Moroccan territorial integrity (Fernandez Molina 2011). On the other side, on March 9, 2011, the King publicly addressed the nation revealing his decision to introduce a number of political reforms: beside the commitment to tackle the issue of corruption and to ensure greater freedom of expression, the most significant innovations announced by Muḥammad VI were a constitutional revision (*al-murāja'a al-dustūriyya*) and a constitutional referendum to approve the amendments set for July 1, 2011 (Arieff 2011).

While the royal speech was warmly welcomed by the international press, as well as by the loyalist parties (including the governmental left), the 20FM and the new Moroccan Left were the only forces that rejected the constitutional amendments, as they did not meet the expectations of both the protesters and the leftists (Arieff 2011). Moreover, even though the PSU was officially invited by the King to take part in the consultative commission charged with the revision of the constitution, the leadership of the party refused any form of

collaboration with the regime (Ait Akdim 2016). Furthermore, while the AGD participated in the 2007 elections, due to the limited prerogatives guaranteed to the parliament by the new constitution, the leadership of the party decided to not run the 2011 elections. The decision of the boycott was commented on by Nabila Munib, newly elected leader of the PSU, who stated firmly that: “La seule façon de concilier monarchie et démocratie est d’adopter une monarchie parlementaire. C’était la revendication centrale du mouvement du 20-Février, qui a été étouffé dans l’œuf” (Ait Akdim 2016).

Indeed, today the general consensus is that the 2011 constitutional amendments did not pave the way for a genuine democratization of the political structures but has, on the contrary, ensured the stability and longevity of the central power. According to the text, the monarch is inviolable and it is stated that respect is due to him (2011 Moroccan Constitution art. 46). Moreover, and this is even more crucial, the new constitution did not guarantee a real separation of powers while the activities and positions of the competing parties are always subdued to the will of the monarch himself. Indeed, even though the Prime Minister chairs the Government Council without the monarch being directly involved, the King presided the Council of Ministers, which plays a way more decisive role, since it controls the strategic guidelines of state policy, it deliberates the bills of organic laws, it approves the constitutional revisions, and it makes decisions regarding the army, the declaration of war, the martial law or amnesty (2011 Moroccan Constitution art. 49). In the end, the monarch was able to give the protesters and the observers the illusion of a democratic change while, as a matter of fact, he knew how to preserve its privileges and powers in the real decision-making bodies (Madani, Maghraoui, Zerbouni 2011; Desrues 2013).

In the following years, the new Moroccan Left continued opposing to the local regime and to the increasingly strong Parti de la Justice et du Développement (PJD), the Islamist party.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the widespread support enjoyed by the Islamist militants led the PJD to emerge as the major political force in the country, as the party won both the 2011 and 2016 elections (Szmolka 2015). Moreover, a similar scenario also occurred in Tunisia and Egypt. Indeed, while both countries witnessed the foundation of new leftist forces following the 2011 protests, such as the Voie Démocratique et Sociale in Tunisia, the Socialist Party, and the Socialist Popular Alliance in Egypt,

<sup>8</sup> The history of the party is usually traced back to the Chabiba Islamiya, an Islamist and illegal organisation founded in 1969. However, the PJD was officially founded only in 1996 and, over the years, it became a modern and legal party that openly accepted the monarchy and the institutional framework of the country. The PJD won consecutively the 2011 and 2016 elections and to date it represents the major ruling party of Morocco (Vermeren 2002).

they also registered a substantial increase in votes for the Islamists parties in the elections that followed the uprisings (Al-Anani 2012).

In Morocco, the relations among the leftists improved after 2011, both within the AGD and between the alliance and Annahj Addimocrati. In 2012, for instance, there was an attempt to merge between Annahj Addimocrati and the PSU: at the end of August, Nabīla Munīb and the Muṣṭafā al-Barahmīh succeeded to al-Harīf as secretary general of Annahj Addimocrati (El-Farah 2012), discussed the possibility to establish a joint new leftist force that would have brought their two parties together. Nevertheless, to date Annahj Addimocrati is still a single and independent force and its unwillingness to run for the elections and its radical positions towards the independence of the Sahara still pose a major obstacle for the unification with the other leftist parties (“Vers une Gauche Unifiée?” 2012).

Nevertheless, in 2014, the PSU, PADS, and CNI decided to go one step further and to reshape the AGD, until then a mere electoral alliance, as a proper political union with the ultimate goal of leading the ensemble of the progressive and democratic leftist parties in Morocco. Indeed, on January 30, 2014, the announcement of the foundation of the Faydrāliyya al-yasār al-dimūqrāṭī (Fédération de la Gauche Démocratique, FGD) was officially made (Faydrāliyya al-yasār al-dimūqrāṭī, official website, n.d.).

Interestingly enough, the worsening of the socio-economic conditions of Morocco, the 20FM and the King’s response to the crisis are openly addressed in the first pages of the political document of the FGD:

It is beyond any doubt that the 20 February Movement have represented the major socio-political movement in Morocco in the beginning of the 21st century. The 20 February Movement constitutes the extension of the historic struggle of our people against oppression, corruption, and authoritarianism over the decades. The Movement took off with the courageous initiative of young Moroccans in reaction with and response to the popular movements witnessed in the Arab region and the Maghreb [...]. An objective assessment of the socio-political movement triggered off and headed by the 20 February Movement, in which the democratic leftists contributed significantly, indicates that yet again the regime succeeded in getting around the largest part of the demands of the Moroccan people in terms of freedom, democracy, and social justice. There are, indeed, several internal and external causes behind the inability of the 2 February Movement to achieve its goals. (Translated from Arabic by the Author: *Faydrāliyya al-yasār al-dimūqrāṭī, al-waraqqa al-siyāsiyya* n.d, 3-4)

Thereafter, the FGD identifies few major motives behind the failure of the 20FM. First and foremost, there is the strategy of the re-

gime, its experience in dealing with social movements and its ability to get around the demands of the population while mobilising its allied conservatory forces (*Faydrāliyya al-yasār al-dimūqrāṭī, al-waraqqa al-siyāsiyya*, n.d, 3-4). Furthermore, the FGD identifies some weaknesses in the 20FM itself: the absence of a unique leadership carrying a clear and single message capable of combining the interests of all popular classes surely affected the strategy and the impact of the protests. Nevertheless, the political document of the FGD pays a great deal of attention to the role played by the new socialist parties in 2011 and it severely criticises the political action of the leftists during the demonstrations. In fact, neither the AGD or Annahj Addimocrati had been able to offer a strong and cooperative leftist front that would have backed the demonstrators in order to pursue the struggle for democracy against the regime and its allies. Once again, the failure of the democratic forces prevented a real political change, since the 2011 constitutional eventually turned into the perfect mean to ensure the stability and longevity of the Moroccan monarchy. For these reasons, according to the political document of the FGD, it was imperative for the new Moroccan Left to learn some lessons from the 2011 experience and to work very hard in order to offer the political conditions for the revitalisation of a new socialist bloc with a clear and leftist political project (*Faydrāliyya al-yasār al-dimūqrāṭī, al-waraqqa al-siyāsiyya*, n.d, 6).

Indeed, it is beyond any doubt that the foundation of the FGD itself represents a first and fundamental step towards the establishment of a new leftist front whose foundation was certainly affected and accelerated by the outbreak of the 2011 protests in the Arab countries and by the formation of a local socio-political movement in Morocco.

Few years later, despite the harsh boycott of the 2011 elections, the FGD decided to run for the 2016 legislative elections. On September 2016, in Marrakesh, the leftist alliance launched its official electoral campaign under the slogan “With us, another Morocco is possible” (*ma'nā mağrib 'aḥar mumkin*) (“La Fédération de la gauche démocratique” 2016). From the very beginning, the FGD set as its top priority the switchover from constitutional to parliamentary monarchy. Furthermore, Nabīla Munīb emerged as the main leader of the newly established alliance (El Ghouari 2016).

The official electoral program for the 2016 elections, submitted on September 22 in Casablanca, addressed all the principal issues of the country in matters of socio-economic inequalities, constitutional and political reforms, human rights respect and individual freedoms (“La Fédération de la gauche démocratique lance sa campagne électorale depuis Marrakech”, 2016). In particular, the FGD planned to halt the neoliberal policies of the previous government aiming at fighting privatization policies and free trade agreements while maximising the role of the state as the main actor in the economic plan-

ning. Indeed, the ultimate goal of the alliance is the subordination of the macroeconomic dynamics to the local ones, in order to enhance the internal market and to reduce socio-economic disparities. Furthermore, the FGD aims at adopting a new constitution that guarantees a real separation of powers, the empowerment of the Parliament and its legislative authority, and the preservation of the national territorial integrity. Moreover, according to the alliance, the country must align with international standards of human rights respect, it must reform the financial system while fighting against unemployment and increasing funding for public education and the health-care system (*Faydrāliyya al-yasār al-dimūqrāṭī: al-barnāmij al-'am li-l-'intikabāt al-tašrī'iyya*, 2016).

Throughout the months before the elections, the FGD was able to carry out an intense campaign on social media platforms, attracting a substantial media coverage and the support among intellectual and academics ("Cent intellectuels" 2016). Nevertheless, on October 7, 2015, the PJD won again the majority of the votes, getting 125 seats in the Parliament. In second place, the Parti Authenticité et Modernité (PAM), a monarchical party, won 102 places (Badrane 2016). At the same time, the FGD only got the 2.83% of the votes, winning two seats in the Parliament, the first in the constituency of Rabat-Océan, gained by 'Umar Balāfrīḡ, and the other in Casablanca-Anfa, won by Muṣṭafā al-Šannāwī (Oudrhiri 2016).

While the election results cannot be considered a great success, the new leftist alliance won more votes than the USFP, in several cities such as Casablanca, Tangiers, and Oujda. Therefore, political observers in the country have argued that the FGD has indeed emerged as the new principal left-wing force capable of leading the front of the new Moroccan Left (Oudrhiri 2016).

As for Annahj Addimocrati, in the following years the party always remained loyal to its traditional stances, as it kept rejecting any form of political participation or collaboration with the regime. Concurrently with the local and legislative elections, such refusal translated into a number of tactics of boycott and sabotage both in urban context and rural areas.<sup>9</sup> As one can expect, more than once the expression of political dissent was harshly repressed by the regime. In August 2015, during the pre-election period, several militants of the party were arrested (few of them were badly beaten) for demonstrat-

<sup>9</sup> For the most part, members of Annahj Addimocrati would organise peaceful rallies in urban centres while handing out flyers stating their positions; in other contexts, such as al-Hoceima, Beni Mellal-Khénifra, or Marrakech-Safi, the Marxist militants would carry out more targeted protests against local authorities that more than once prevented the party to hold its regional congresses ("Man' al-Nahj al-Dimūqrāṭī" 2020; "Al Hoceima: Le parti de la Voie démocratique dénonce l'interdiction de son congrès régional", 2020).

ing against the scheduled elections in Bouyzakarne, Bijaad, Sefour, Salé, and Rabat (Bennamate 2015).

However, it is indeed possible that the party might review its more radical positions in the foreseeable future. In September 2019, the members of *Annahj Addimocrati* held a conference entitled “*al-yasār wa al-taḥālufāt al-mumkina*” (the left and the possible alliances) in which they addressed the future evolution of the party and its relations with the other leftist forces in the country, the FGD in particular. On the occasion, ‘Abd al-Hamīd anticipated that the leadership of the party intends to establish a new political project, the Working-Class party (*Ḥizb al-tabqa al-‘āmila*) with the ultimate goal of reaching out to all Moroccan Marxists and to engage in dialogue with all other leftist forces (“‘Abd al-Hamīd... *al-yasār wa al-‘amal al-wiḥdawī*”, 2019). In sum, it seems that the unification of the FGD prompted the Marxist militants to form a new political entity, the Working-Class party, through which they might be able to cooperate with the other leftist and democratic forces, forming a unique and solid alliance headed by *Annahj Addimocrati* and the *Fédération de la Gauche Démocratique*, the new Moroccan left.

#### 4 Conclusions

In 2011, the socio-economic demands and the call for a political change of the 20FM spread as a surge of energy for the new Moroccan Left, which was still struggling to emerge after the co-optation of the USFP and PPS, the traditional socialist parties by the 1980s. In fact, while the rising of the 20FM surely reflects the absence of strong democratic and opposition forces capable of leading the popular discontent, the social movements arose in 2011 in the Arab region played a pivotal role in revitalising both the FGD and *Annahj Addimocrati*. Moreover, the manipulative strategy implemented by the King, aimed at giving the illusion of a political change through the emanation of a new constitution, surely gave the leftists further reasons to continue their struggle against an oppressive and domineering regime. The reluctance of the King to reach out the demands of the population eventually stressed the need of a new democratic front willing to oppose the overpowering influence of the monarchy in the institutional affairs and public life.

Due to their internal divisions and weak external relations, the leftists did not succeed in catalysing the popular discontent in 2011 and they were not able to emerge as leading actors in the protests in order to gain a wider and more rooted popular support. Nevertheless, their political action and their future evolution were eventually deeply affected by the 20FM. In particular, the foundation of the FGD in 2014 represents the intent to overcome the fragmentation of the lo-



cal leftist forces and the numerous attempts to reach compromises with the leaders of *Annaḥj Addimocrati* also constitute a crucial step in the revitalisation of a new leftist-opposition front in the country. Therefore, even though the 2011 protests eventually turned out to be another lost opportunity to bring about a real democratic change, it seems that the new Moroccan Left is willing to play a greater role in the years to come, standing at the forefront of all progressive forces engaged in the fight for democracy and freedom.

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