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# **NARRATIVES OF PUBLIC POLICIES AND LOGICS OF POWER IN A HYBRID CONTEXT: THE CASE OF MOROCCO**

## **Abstract**

Instead of focusing on the question of the validity of the transfer of the theoretical apparatus between the North and the South, in this contribution we aim to enrich the analysis of public policies through reflection around the narratives of public action in Morocco. The argument of this article is that the narrative of public policy in a hybrid context can be a resource used by actors and stakeholders as well as it provides the structure in which the action is circumscribed. In this sense, the COVID-19 crisis was a godsend to push the political game more towards an apolitical logic.

**Keywords:** public policy narrative, hybrid context, logics of power, social cohesion, COVID-19.

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## Introduction

In recent years, the disciplines of political science and political sociology have continued, to provide numerous examples and case studies to provide reflections based in particular on the role of the State and the different actors and institutions in the development of public policies. While the concept of public policies was born in the 1920s in the United States, interest in their analysis is very recent and it is becoming increasingly important given the profound changes that affect states and societies. In many cases, combining a structural approach with an actors approach, the analyses focus on the issue of change, social, legal and institutional constraints, economic obstacles, the cost of the implementation of the policies to be carried out, and to protest movements and demands (Muller 2005, p. 158).

Indeed, failures in many countries around the world point to the wrong choices of public policies. Despite attempts to democratize power and improved social spending, challenges are still on the agenda and sometimes reach alarming proportions. Between the logic of power and the demands of transformation, the paradoxes of public policies weaken their mode of action on societies. Carrying out an analysis of public action on African and Maghreb countries soil raises a number of questions, since almost the entire theoretical corpus has been built around North American and then European sectoral experiments.

What does talking about public action mean in the Moroccan context? Does a look in terms of public action shed new light on the policies and interventions of the Moroccan state? How do actors contribute to the emergence and formulation of a public problem in Morocco? Is there a contextual specificity of the narratives of public action or, on the contrary, do we see convergences with those analyzed in a democratic context? How can we refine the question of the links between political regime and narratives of public action, beyond the dichotomy between democratic and authoritarian regimes? How do normative ideas and matrices participate in systems of representations, interests and narratives of public policies produced by its actors?

The question therefore about the change of public policies in a hybrid<sup>2</sup> context is to immediately ask of the greater or lesser weight of the authoritarian

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<sup>2</sup> The English magazine, *The Economist* was the initiator of a ranking of states according to an indicator of democracy, by developing from 2006 a panorama of world regimes on the basis of sixty criteria grouped into five categories: the electoral process and the pluralism; civil liberties;

past over the present<sup>3</sup>. However, public policies refer more to an evolution of the balance of power between various public and private actors, themselves conditioned (by) and conditioning the way of perceiving a given reality. Through this broad conceptualization of the notion of public policy, it is possible to think about the narrative of public policies in Morocco.

At the outset, it should be noted that the use of the terms “continuity” and “change” has become a classic practice, used even in the analysis of the entire Moroccan political system (Saaf 2015). However, the legalization of the different societal spaces and the different interactions that take place there should fulfill a double function: the promotion and the regulation of the changes in progress, so that they remain socially acceptable and politically manageable. Thus, the promulgation of the various organic laws governing social-political and economic relations in the wake of the constitutional reform of 2011 remain significant indicators. Similarly, national foundations (tax reform, land registry, housing, etc.) and national debates in a given sector (Justice, Education, Civil Society, etc.) are instruments for establishing public policies.

Depending on the political concerns of each situation, public policies therefore experience evolutions, changes of paradigm or of reference. Indeed, in crisis situations, the public policies followed consisted in taking into account the need for change. This hypothesis supported by empirical examples can constitute an entry allowing making visible the narrative of public policies in the Moroccan context. The heterogeneity of the actors involved must make it possible to renew the vision of decision-making processes, of formal and informal institutions structuring public action in a hybrid context. The political and democratic breaches opened since the 2000s have not fundamentally changed the modes of governing public action in use for decades. Disenchantment is currently affecting economic, political and social structures and reflects the bankruptcy of public development policies.

Now, “Who gets what, when and how?”, These three questions of Laswell allow us to return to a classic definition of public policies. In this sense, public policies are linked to the will of the State to decide on the choices to be followed, the actions to be carried out and the measures to be taken to face

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the functioning of government; political participation and political culture. From its 2012 report until the 2019 report, Morocco has been classified as a hybrid regime.

<sup>3</sup> “Incrementalism” (Lindblom 1959), “path dependence” (Pierson 1997) or “heritage” (Rose 1994) are the terms most used in public policies to designate the relationship to the past. With a few differences, all three postulate the dependence of public action on its own history.

a precise question in order to improve, changing and regulating situations. In a national framework, public policy refers to “anything that government actors decide to do or not to do”. The use of the concept of public action makes it possible to highlight the shared construction between a set of state and non-state actors of responses to problems within a society (Thoenig 1998).

From this perspective, public policy narratives were initially defined as “stories (scenarios and arguments) that underlie and stabilize assumptions for public policymaking in situations where there are many unknowns, a high degree of interdependence and little or no agreement” (Roe 1994, p. 34). Others have given the following definition: “a narrative is a story with a temporal sequence of events, unfolding like a plot with dramatic moments, symbols and archetypal characters, and which leads to a moral” to generally provide a public action solution (Jones and McBeth 2010, p. 329). Therefore, once it has become dominant, a narrative empowers certain actors. It redirects collective preferences. Ideas that stray from the dominant narrative will be seen as irrelevant or strange. Indeed, the narrative dimension of public action is interesting to study only in connection with the strategies of the actors and the asymmetries of power (Radaelli 2000; Schmidt and Radaelli 2004).

Briefly, the story can be defined as a discourse made up of a succession of actions involving the three temporalities, past, present, future. It expresses beliefs and certain interpretations of events and how reality works. From this point of view, the analysis of public policies in terms of narrative emphasizes the role of ideas in the conduct and change of public policies in situations of uncertainty. In other words, in order to identify objectives and action programs, the conduct of public policies implies a work of interpretation of reality which allows coherent choices to be made (Roe 1994; Radaelli 2000).

In a context of legitimacy crisis and declining resources, the participation of stakeholders in the development of public policies is supposed to democratize the intervention of public authorities and improve its effectiveness. Marked by a multitude of programs, plans, strategies and projects in different sectors concerned, public action is structured by spaces for negotiation and compromise between multiple actors. This conception of public action makes it possible to focus not only on the construction of problems and issues, but also on the development of agendas, representations and State / society interactions.

In fact, the neo-liberal turn has shifted the relationship between the State, the private sector and the associative sector in the production and implementation of public policies, based on very different models, linked to the political trajectories of the States. These decompositions take specific forms in hybrid

regimes, because of their political and institutional history<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, the effects in terms of policy relevance and democratization of public action are at best mixed. Thus, it is interesting to note that an important dimension of political power lies in the narratives. In such a perspective, the struggle for power appears from a new angle.

A public policy narrative therefore has a strategic and instrumental dimension. While the existence of public policies in Morocco makes them an object of scientifically relevant study, their analysis nevertheless raises methodological questions linked to their accounts. It is very often the characteristics of the Moroccan state (its actors, its instruments, its interactions) that make it possible to understand certain configurations and articulations of public action, and in particular the discontinuities of its processes.

The ambition of this article is to contribute to the opening up of knowledge on public action in a hybrid and non-Western context, and therefore to revisit the “cultural” frameworks which often over-determine the approach to State action in southern countries. The challenge is to make this field a laboratory for theoretical experimentation in a relatively young discipline, the detour of which is a necessary risk to meet the challenge of its universality. The diversity of accounts of public policies in Morocco and the inconsistency that characterizes the process of their development, implementation and evaluation place them in the crosshairs of criticism based on the foundations of their democratic functioning. While the spread of COVID-19<sup>5</sup> has contributed to the consecration of the Moroccan state, in its social role, as the only entity capable of managing the crisis, another story will soon accompany this pandemic situation. Four moments structure this study.

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<sup>4</sup> In Morocco, privatization and liberalization policies, concretizing the neo-liberal turn, have affected both the national and local levels. Regarding the national level, the policies of the last few years have led to the creation of several regulatory authorities, such as the Council for Ethics in Securities, the National Agency for Telecommunications Regulation, the Council of competition, the High Authority for Audiovisual Communication, a higher consumer council. At the local level, Law 54-05 provided a visible legal framework for the delegation of local public services and therefore for the private management of these. As for territorial policies, the new policies to extend competition call for extensive decentralization.

<sup>5</sup> The Coronavirus 19 was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020 as a pandemic. Faced with this scourge, countries have adopted different strategies ranging from reactions close to denial (USA, United Kingdom, Netherlands, etc.) to more realistic reactions, which have made it possible to implement the measures recommended by the WHO. Morocco seems to be a good example of this second strategy (placing the health of Moroccans in a position of absolute priority).

## **The acclimatization of a scholarly scheme in a hybrid institutional context**

While each era is characterized by the domination of one type of public policy, it should be noted that in practice contemporary states combine various types of policies in varying proportions. Given the complexity of the social reality, the approach of public policy styles, aims to show the specificity of national contexts by identifying for each country a particular style of development and implementation of its public policies. However, to study the interacting state is first to reveal its nudity (Hassenteufel 2007). Publicizing public issues is accompanied by a series of narratives. As a result, the dominant narrative sets up a scientific controversy which it transforms into a social controversy. This produces a counter-narrative that introduces a rupture, a disturbing element, in the habit of validating knowledge. The narrative of public policies here becomes “science of government”, that is to say this specific way of reconciling knowledge and action. It describes both the expansion of state power, but also the interactions between a myriad of actors (local, national, regional, international, public and private) positioned within different spaces and levels of the factory and implementation of public action.

In addition, the constitutional and institutional framework in which Moroccan political life has been taking place since 2011, has brought to power new coalition governments following sanctions votes, and is fuelling the discourse around public policies. The institutional logic resulting from the 2011 Constitution would, in fact, be a consolidation of the autonomy of the head of government and therefore of an increased weight of the latter in general governance. Thus, public action is decided and led by two rather differentiated categories of actors. The first brings together those who do not depend on the election: the king, his advisers, the senior officials he appoints and certain ministers who report to him more, if not exclusively, then to the head of government; The second brings together those who depend more or less directly on it: The head of government, the majority of ministers and parliamentarians.

These two categories of actors move in different temporalities. The king and the actors directly linked to him act in the medium or long term, while the latter act in the short term, from one election to the other. The result is a singular situation: the authors of the main public policies escape almost entirely from the questioning of their initial choices (the limit of this immunity being the riot) at the same time that the blame is on those who execute them without having decided or who do not execute them. Since the latter alone depends on

the election, they alone pay the electoral price. This is, however, rather light, the proportional system allowing each party to retain enough seats to survive a five-year disgraces; and the need to form coalitions, such as the weak differentiation of the political offer, ensure that they find themselves, in a more or less reduced time, in the government.

From a comparative point of view, two peculiarities of Moroccan political life appear to be salient in relation to European contexts: first, public action takes place free from the polls and the incessant debates that weigh and weigh public action endlessly. Then, public policies pre-empted by the king escape criticism of their validity, even if the sovereign is the first to criticize the vagaries of their implementation. Indeed, in Western Europe, the state actors in public action belong, for the most part, to the same category, directly or indirectly: their performances are indexed over the duration of mandates. This now makes real temporary autonomy for the rulers impossible and therefore almost automatically produces compromise public policies and forces those who promote them to focus on their implementation. Since their fate depends on it. In other words, there is greater continuity between the actors who decide public action and those who implement it (Ferrié 2014).

The Moroccan situation is somewhat different because of the existence of two categories of actors. They have no interest in being confused. Beyond the very structure of political institutions, this possibility is based on the leadership of the monarchy (Saaf 2015; Tozy 2011). The royal prerogatives stipulated by the Moroccan Constitution are taken literally, so that it is accepted that the king sets the main orientations or makes the determining choices. The other actors are therefore modelled on him. It follows that there is no alternative political offer. Partisan political offers are in a way subsidiary. From now on, the existence of a certain asymmetric dichotomy tends to transform the State, as a device for the design, development and implementation of public policies, into an archipelago of sub-devices and networks promoting inertia by virtue of its structure “discontinuous”. Indeed, this archipelago structure appears clearly unfavourable when it comes to broad-based policies requiring continuous coordination between several categories of actors, which is typical of social or human development policies (health, education, social protection) (Akesbi 2017; Jaidi 2016).

In fact, the king governs without depending on the election, but without being able (or willing) to exempt himself from the principle of representation. If the monarchical institution has control over the impulse, it is far from having full control over the implementation. It must always be negotiated with and

between many actors, for whom the risks of negative sanctions are diffuse and the possibilities of positive sanctions are uncertain (Ferrié 2014). Indeed, the discontinuity of the implementation find their reasons for being in the division of the executive, the subdivisions in the cascade of the notabilities and the partisan networks, which are inserted in the mechanisms of the administrative governance since the independence. For these reasons, the vacuum created by often biased public policies are likely to generate instability, sustained civil protest movements and therefore threaten social cohesion (Saaf 2017).

In a way, governments are often prisoners of political time. Thus, the longer public policies take, the less likely the mechanisms they put in place are to be known and the more likely they are to fail. The intermittent nature of the temporalities of public action feeds conflicting narratives. The positioning of political actors on these issues is clearly linked to the interplay of mutual influences in which the media highlight both the fears of opinion and the positions of political actors in relation to official narratives. The bidding becomes almost mechanical. If we consider the structure of Moroccan political life and its determinants, we can perfectly admit that the issues related to the social question are treated as they become stage problems.

Nevertheless, the constitutional and institutional framework within which public action has taken place in Morocco since 2011 has led to the establishment of an institutional economy and to narratives of public policies that are more or less politicized (Saaf 2015). In addition to the consolidation of the functioning of a competitive electoral system, the possibility of alternation and the protection of opposition rights, the control of thousands of superior civilian jobs is supposed to facilitate the implementation of policies, and build up client resources and economic supports. However, the virtual impossibility for a political party to obtain an absolute majority after a legislative vote makes it necessary to set up coalition governments that implement implicit covenants to share resources and state positions. Thus, partisan parties lack the means to develop public policies or even participate in their “de-objectivation”.

Now, in a hybrid context, public policies are difficult to build and implement. The constraints in the institutional order, as well as those related to the different dominant social and cultural logics, influence the policies carried out and the decisions to be taken. While several questions remain, here and there, the object of demands and resistance, the use of negotiations and the sectoral approach as a means of designing public policies and managing conflicts had led public and civilian actors to institutionalize progressive arenas of public action.

## **Sectoral policies between ambivalence and amplification of structures**

Since the 2000s, public policy analysis has flourished in the Moroccan context. Sectorial empirical studies (health, education, justice, environmental, urban policies, human rights, etc.), whether they come from academics, researchers, funders or public authorities, are multiplying. Driven by networks of actors who cross borders between the State, donors, experts and civil society, the analysis of the process of setting the agenda and developing the various reforms reveals a sectorization of public action.

Consequently, sectoral strategies occupy an important place in the articulation of public action in Morocco. These aim to structure public action over time by proposing a vision of the future and actions to be taken to achieve this vision. Although driven by a ministerial department, these strategies often go beyond its scope. The different strategies, also have largely overlapping objectives, whether in terms of effects on the trade balance, value creation or job creation. Certain sectoral strategies correspond to the main royal orientations, such as the Industrial acceleration plan, the Logistics plan or the Green Morocco plan, and are reflected in government action. Others translate sectoral visions into action plans with the aim of structuring public action over a medium to long term horizon.

For example, in the education sector, the Strategic Vision 2015–2030 proposes the main orientations for reforming the system, the implementation of which depends on the ministries concerned. In a constraining economic and social context, in addition to the diversity of expectations, criticisms and denunciations of parents and the economic world against the school system as a whole, the discourse of lack of quality is amplified by international evaluations<sup>6</sup>. The decision-making process at the sectoral level reflects the changes taking place in the economic and social fabric. It makes it possible to grasp the role and play of the actors present and reveals the powers in gestation and their

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<sup>6</sup> Analyses of the state of the sector carried out regularly by the Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research and its National Assessment Authority, highlight a significant number of chronic shortcomings noted in the level of the implementation of both the National Charter for education (2000), training and scientific research and the Emergency Plan (2008) called to give it new life. Let us note among others: Poor command of languages, knowledge, skills and values; The limited effectiveness of the performance of educational actors; Gaps in initial and continuing training; Limited access to learning through educational technologies; The low yield of scientific research; Hesitations in dealing with cross-cutting issues, particularly the issue of language learning and the languages of instruction.

way of expressing themselves and making themselves heard. It highlights, among other things, the role of technocrats and their contribution to decision-making, both as intermediaries between economic actors and central power, but also as elements that inspire strategies to be followed.

In recent years, the role of this category of public decision-makers have continued to grow. Their strong presence in the Royal Cabinet and their weight in government gave them the opportunity to be heard and accepted. Moreover, their strong presence at the level of intermediary decision-making centres (governors, general secretaries, directors, etc.) make them a pressure group not officially organized, of course, but influencing and acting in the same direction. Their strength comes from the fact that they have a rather close place with in the business world, economic actors and international institutions with which they share the same values, or often the same vision.

All these elements combine to form an unofficial but effective “coalition” for decision-making. As such, they contribute to the autonomy of actors at the sectoral level, by being their spokesperson at the state level. Without entering into a conflict or a direct dialogue with the State, through them, the economic actors limit themselves to tacitly claiming their autonomy. Consequently, the existence of rather complex practices and procedures reveal opacity and a centrally maintained by the absence of autonomy and responsibility of these actors.

With this in mind, the emergence of “critical citizens”, who are increasingly skeptical about the capacity of institutions modelled on neo-liberal recipes to translate democratic values into action, calls into question the legitimacy of the State and its representatives. The new relations between the State and the protesting society question the neo-liberal orientation that has prevailed in the factory of sectoral public policies for nearly three decades. These different elements lead to the rise of institutional evaluative practice.

## **Evaluative Practice Narratives and Accountability**

The evaluation of public policies and programs is a recent practice in Morocco, since it was not until the early 2000s that some Moroccan governmental bodies, existing or newly created (ministerial departments, joint commissions, agencies, etc.), begin to carry out sectoral evaluations to assess the impact of public

interventions under certain specific programs<sup>7</sup>. Over the past fifteen years, there has been a proliferation of studies on public policies in Morocco. However, it is a less academic work, mostly unpublished, than formal reports<sup>8</sup>.

The alarmist reports, which are as numerous as they are varied, show that the development approach adopted by the Kingdom until now no longer allows the Kingdom to meet the growing demands and needs of citizens and to reduce social inequalities and spatial disparities. With reference to the various reports, it should be stressed that inequalities and poverty continue to grow. Failures in the coherence of public policies directly affect the effectiveness of public action and economic and social performance. Weaknesses also persist in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies as well as in the territorial variety of public programs<sup>9</sup>.

In fact, the shortcomings of evaluative practice were strongly noted in the fiftieth anniversary report, which at the time highlighted the structural deficits in the Kingdom's development trajectory. Since then, references to the evaluation of public intervention as a tool for the improvement and readjustment of public action exist at various levels: Royal discourse, 2011 Constitution<sup>10</sup>, state bodies (Parliament, the Court of Auditors, consultation bodies, citizen participation, the role of the Economic and Social Council, evaluation in the regions, the Higher Council for Education and Training<sup>11</sup>). Nevertheless, if we refer to

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<sup>7</sup> This is the case, for example, with the evaluation of the drought control program carried out by joint committees of the General Inspection of Finance and the General Inspection of the Territorial Administration in 2002.

<sup>8</sup> In particular, mention should be made of two unpublished works of several thousand pages published in an interval year (2006, 2007): i-the report on the fiftieth anniversary prepared on royal instructions "50 years of human development – perspectives 2025"; ii- the "Morocco 2030 prospective" study prepared under the aegis of the High Commission for Planning (HCP). In addition to this ad hoc work, there are studies published regularly by national bodies (Economic, Social and Environmental Council, Bank Al Maghrib, HCP) and international organisms (World Bank, OECD, African Development Bank).

<sup>9</sup> The Royal Institute for Strategic Studies (IRES), in its strategic report focusing on the directions to be taken for the development of a new development model, has focused a lot on the place to be given to governance.

<sup>10</sup> The 2011 constitution has the merit of having laid the legal foundations that should promote the institutionalization of evaluation, notably in its articles 1, 12, 13, 101, 156, 168, 146. Article 13 of the Constitution stipulates that "public authorities shall work to create consultative bodies with a view to involving the various social actors in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of public policies".

<sup>11</sup> The Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research is an independent consultative body established by article 168 of the 2011 Constitution. It is responsible for giving its opinion on all public policies and questions of national interest in education, training and scientific research, <http://www.csefrs.ma> [accessed: 31.08.2020].

good practices at the international level, the culture of evaluation cannot fully produce its effects without an approach to institutionalizing and professionalizing the evaluation function.

To put it another way, the State bodies, whose tasks include the evaluation of public action, are diverse and numerous: the two Houses of Parliament, the Economic and Social Council, the Corps of Inspectors General, the General Inspection of Finance, the HCP, some observatories... They, which produce stories, information, indicators and knowledge useful for public action, nevertheless suffer from the lack of a comprehensive and crosscutting approach to evaluation. Of course, the narratives of public policy evaluation are gradually gaining ground and recent debates are trying to put evaluation on the public agenda, aiming to strengthen its public interest.

But, the disjunction between decision-making and responsibility is particularly evident in the case of public policies, the failure of which remains largely dependent on the very configuration of the Moroccan political system (Akesbi 2017). And now, public policies are carried by actors with distinct interests: the monarchy and partisan elites. "Like all political actors, they seek to maintain or increase their legitimacy, which implies first avoiding blame. For the monarchy, the avoidance of blame comes from the disconnect between impulse and implementation. It is from her that the impulse comes; but it is not from her that the implementation comes [...] what does not work is therefore not his responsibility." For the Government, Parliament and political parties, the (relative) avoidance of blame is paradoxically provided by the monarchical institution itself. These actors appear at best as performers who are not really given the means to do what they should do. The anchoring in the Executive of the first actor as the fact that the priority projects are almost never the projects of the government reduces the responsibility of these actors (Ferrié 2014).

Clearly, evaluative mechanisms are increasingly privileged, not only in the design and execution of different public policies, but also in the management and resolution of conflicts and the different resistances they generate. In addition to the mistrust of professional politicians, which is reflected both in the abstention of the electorate and in the emergence of protest movements, the very idea of the effectiveness of technocratic choices is pointed out (Tozy 2011). The questioning of the governance of public action updates the democratic deficit of its production (Akesbi 2017). As more and more the coherence of public policies such as accountability is at the heart of national concerns and the Gordian knot of thinking about the new development model in the making, Stories of social cohesion are currently punctuated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Stories of Social Cohesion in the Face of COVID-19

In the Moroccan context, social cohesion refers globally to the efforts of public policymakers to implement a social dimension in public policies. It is interested in the fact that integration and exclusion are priority issues for any society that wishes to guarantee its development while ensuring the well-being of its citizens. Beyond the role of everyone, the State has a responsibility to guarantee social cohesion. However, social cohesion is further strengthened in a context conducive to citizen participation in social policies (Saaf 2017).

Although Morocco enjoys economic and social development, since the end of the 1990s it is clear that the state has found it difficult to manage the social needs of citizens, especially in the rural world. Morocco's economic development model does not meet the imperatives of including young people and women in the labour market and does not take into account social inequalities (Jaidi 2016). More recently, the country has been marked by protest mobilizations that focused on political and social demands (Rachik 2016).

Similarly, there is broad consensus on the shortcomings and difficulties facing the Moroccan social protection system. Public action in this area is fragmented with a multiplicity of programs, stakeholders, benchmarks, objectives and methods for evaluating results, without any real coordination or long-term vision (Ministries of Employment, Social Affairs, Finance, Technical Tutorials, etc.). This situation is fraught with the risk of wasting time and expertise, and of losing sight of the recommendations and objectives resulting from technical studies, the work of the social dialogue or the institutions of governance and control such as the Court of Accounts.

As much, in the name of electoral legitimacy, economically and socially, the neo-liberal approach of the government (2012–2017) has often translated into “counter-reforms” (Akesbi 2017). Since then, the social component has remained the poor relative of the changes. The problem of social justice has not been the subject of a convincing political investment except for a few social measures taken during the same period, but which have not been able to balance them. As a result, the narratives around social cohesion in Morocco face several challenges that have been summarized in four elements: The crisis in the education sector, the non-generalization of social protection, the persistence of unemployment, and finally, the governance challenges of public policies in terms of social action and solidarity (Guerraoui 2016).

With this in mind, the current COVID-19 crisis has been both a starting point and a revelation of profound economic, social, and human upheavals in

Morocco. Despite its own fragilities, Morocco has proven resilient to the three months of the crisis. Thus, the country has been spared the scenes of the overseas Mediterranean (Italy, Spain, ...) and the overload of hospitals by people infected with the virus has been avoided. Thus, the spread of COVID-19 has contributed to the recognition of the Moroccan state as the only entity capable of managing the crisis<sup>12</sup>. In fact, public authorities have various imperatives, including those of economic efficiency, competitiveness, respect for economic sovereignty, the guarantee of human security, the assumption of social solidarity, but also the inclusion of companies and social actors in the reflection of a response to the crisis and the draft of a possible recovery (Morocco's COVID-19 strategy, Policy Paper, Policy Center for the New South, April 2020<sup>13</sup>).

However, the situation of COVID-19 has thus revealed the absence of a legal framework concerning citizens who work in the informal economy and those who are in a precarious situation. As a result, the socio-economic situation of many social categories will be impacted. As much, the bio-politics of the health crisis were thus faced with another Morocco hidden by public policies. Beyond the pardonable ways in times of crisis, the containment will have revealed the country's structural weaknesses and the extent of social inequalities that tear Moroccan society apart. By giving more clarity to the situation of before the confinement, the post-crisis, asks to take seriously the social question. From this perspective, Morocco shares the same concerns with all countries. He faces the same dilemmas that he must resolve urgently.

In this difficult context, marked by a major health crisis and a deteriorating socio-economic situation, it is necessary to raise a set of questions that question social policies in Morocco: the measures taken by the government will they have an impact on the social situation of those who are economically affected by this crisis? Can we speak, as a result of these measures, of the genesis of the welfare state in Morocco? Will this crisis question the government's priorities in terms of social health policies? Will it give the government more prerogatives to develop health policies? Will the system of distance education,

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<sup>12</sup> As of March 15, 2020, the Head of State announced the creation of a special fund dedicated to the management of this pandemic. In addition to funding for measures to control the spread of Covid-19 and rehabilitate health infrastructure, this fund aims to support the national economy and vulnerable sectors affected by this health crisis, such as tourism. The objective of this fund is to reduce the social impact. To this end, an Economic Monitoring Committee and another Committee responsible for monitoring the supply of food products to the market were set up by the Moroccan Government.

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/PP-20-07\\_LastrategieduMarocFaceAuCovid19.pdf](https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/PP-20-07_LastrategieduMarocFaceAuCovid19.pdf) [accessed: 31.08.2020].

launched following this crisis, doesn't contribute to the strengthening of inequalities between rural and urban areas on the one hand and between poor and rich on the other?

The sketches of answers to such questions clearly crown on the following observation: the pandemic crisis has not been a social equalizer, as a certain reassuring narrative would have us believe. The country's health system already suffers from chronic weaknesses in the Moroccan context. As much, the response to COVID-19 reveals a paradox. While there is a surprising state capacity to mobilize resources and combat the spread of the virus, at least in the short term, the public is suspicious of the health sector, and most Moroccans perceive health services in the country as poor quality<sup>14</sup>.

The victims of the epidemic were not only health, but also social. And the latter is all the more numerous because they occupy an important place on the scale of class inequalities. The lower the scale, the more they increase. Indeed, the virus spread map in the Moroccan context indicates that the most alarming rates occur in poor, overcrowded and landlocked communities. The majority of COVID-19 victims are now people living in fragile and precarious economic and social conditions. Today, the epidemic situation in Morocco is almost inevitable because of the dramatic increase in daily contamination. While waiting for the vaccination campaign, the second wave of the pandemic continues to swell, with an explosion of positive cases and deaths.

More structurally, this brutal crisis has highlighted the degree of vulnerability and precariousness of a large part of the Moroccan population, which does not have social protection nets (absence of unemployment benefit, universal health insurance, old age pension). Also, direct state aid is cyclical measures that are there to deal with the emergency of an explosive social situation. But this situation should not obscure the need for the state to equip itself with a genuine social strategy that is financed over time<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Before the Coronavirus crisis, the dominant discourse was that of mistrust in political parties and parliamentary and government institutions, expressing a fed up with the country's poor governance.

<sup>15</sup> The speech of the Head of State on the occasion of the 21st anniversary of his enthronement, announced at the end of July, historic social decisions to "build a more inclusive social model". This includes the gradual generalization of social protection from January 2021, starting with compulsory sickness insurance, family allowances, unemployment insurance and retirement for all Moroccans within five years.

## Conclusion

The story of COVID-19, seen from the Moroccan context, suggests that from a public policy perspective, the transformations of public action in a hybrid context can be analyzed as a succession of narratives that correspond each time to a specific form of government<sup>16</sup>. The use of this notion of narrative is justified because each of the narratives (which will be detailed later) is characterized by the same temporality. Each time, we identify the development of a type of government mentality that will impose itself through a specific way of dealing with problems, and then, after a certain time, to experience a crisis that leads to a reformulation of the forms of government action and the way public policies are thought at a given time. The change of narrative therefore does not mean a return to the past, on the contrary, one might say, since each narrative corresponds to a specific moment in history.

In these uncertain times or the truth about such evil seems out of reach, the choices have not always been the right ones. They particularly affect the most vulnerable. Of course, the pandemic should be managed urgently but cautiously. Hence a series of legal decisions whose legality and impact on freedoms must be examined. So much so, COVID-19 has been stress tested not only for the normative system but also for government work.

By trying to detect a certain tendency towards differentiation between the register of political action and that of public action, The articulation between politics and policies aims here to clarify the narrative strategies deployed by the Moroccan State and the outsiders of public policies (experts, donors, social movements, interest groups, etc.). In this context of profound institutional transformations, agitated partly by social expressions and the rise of sectoral interests, the narratives of public action are part of the logic of power. The vacuum created by often biased public policies are likely to generate instability, sustained civil protest movements and hence threaten social cohesion. While the spread of COVID-19 has contributed to the recognition of the Moroccan state as the only entity capable of managing the crisis, another story will soon accompany this pandemic. Thus, the tools, actions and contents of the prevention and curation effort proliferate as quickly as possible, to minimize the risks of the degeneration of the health crisis into social inflammations.

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<sup>16</sup> It is still early to take stock of the confinement, but for the moment, the “government by number” which wants to save human lives is out of step with the real life of Moroccans.

Certainly, the pandemic is exacerbating the political crisis. In addition to the dual configuration of the executive, the management of the pandemic crisis is characterized by the privilege accorded to technical management to the detriment of politics and by weak political communication. As usual, COVID-19 had a mixed effect on political balances in Morocco. Technocratic rhetoric has replaced policy and government decisions have been a simple development of the technical and medical recommendations of the Economic Monitoring Committee. The COVID-19 crisis was a windfall to push the political game further toward apolitical logic. Despite the scale of the crisis, everything continued (almost) as before. A total social fact, in the Durkheimian sense, the pandemic crisis forces us to think about living together in all its complexity and necessarily calls for global reflection. Will COVID-19 be an opportunity to give social sectors the attention they deserve? Or will they pay for the economic crisis in which the country is sinking inexorably?

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## **NARRACJE POLITYK PUBLICZNYCH I LOGIKI WŁADZY W KONTEKŚCIE HYBRYDOWYM: PRZYPADEK MAROKA**

### **Streszczenie**

Niniejsze opracowanie ma na celu wzbogacenie analiz polityk publicznych przez refleksję na temat narracji polityk publicznych w Maroku, pomijając kwestię zasadności przenoszenia aparatu teoretycznego z Północy na Południe. Zgodnie z tezą niniejszego artykułu, w kontekście hybrydowym narracja polityki publicznej może być zasobem, wykorzystywanym przez zainteresowane podmioty, jak również określać strukturę określonych działań. W tym sensie, kryzys związany z pandemią COVID-19 jest zbieżny w zakresie reorientacji gry politycznej na bardziej apolityczną logikę.

**Słowa kluczowe:** COVID-19, kontekst hybrydowy, logika władzy, narracja polityki publicznej, spójność społeczna.

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