

Forum: Nation: S. Wagenhofer: Branding the Moroccan Nation—From Post-Colonial Discourse to Global Participation
by Sophie Wagenhofer

After Independence — National Unity

„The Kingdom of Morocco, a sovereign Muslim state, whose official language is Arabic“.¹ This is how Morocco was defined in 1962 in the preamble to its first constitution, and this is how Moroccan identity and the Moroccan nation was framed until the 1990s, as an Arab-Muslim state.² Carving out a clear, unified, and strong nation-state is usually described as key goal of post-colonial states in search of their own history, their own identity, and a future far beyond the shadows of the former colonial power.³ However, a path that might seem so natural and inevitable was not uncontested in Morocco in the 1950s; it was rather marked by conflicting conceptions, political struggles, and controversial processes of negotiation. Power struggles between the monarchy and different social and political groups characterized the initial years after independence in 1956. The question of how Morocco was defined as an independent nation-state was intrinsically tied to the question of power. It was the sultan, the later King Mohammed

¹The text of the constitution from 1962 can be downloaded from the website *Digithèque de matériaux juridiques et politiques* <<https://mjp.univ-perp.fr/constit/ma1962.htm>> (31.08.2021). For more information on Morocco's first constitution see Willard A. Beling, *Some Implications of the New Constitutional Monarchy in Morocco*, in: *Middle East Journal* 18 (1964) 2, pp. 163-179.

²I am aware that one can dedicate an entire article to defining what the nation actually means. In order to make these reflections on the Moroccan case readable, I skip this theoretical discussion and draw on existing debates and definitions, namely the rather subjective approach suggested by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London 1983 and David Archard, *Myths, Lies and Historical Truth. A Defence of Nationalism*, in: *Political Studies* 34 (1995), 2, pp. 472-481.

³From 1912 until 1956, Morocco was a protectorate under French and Spanish rule. Under pressure from the Independence Party and international interventions, the French Foreign Minister Antoine Pinay and the exiled Sultan Mohammed Ben Youssef signed the La Celle-St-Cloud agreements in November 1955, which led to the independence of Morocco and to the sultan's return to the throne as King Mohammed V.

V who successfully reclaimed the power of the Alawi dynasty. After the sultan's return from exile in 1955, expectations of a parliamentary democracy were high. But the hopes fostered by Mohammed V, who promised to appoint a constituent council, prepare a constitutional text, and allow steps towards democratisation, did not materialize. It was only under the reign of Hassan II that the constitution was adopted on 7 December 1962 and it was—after six years of ambiguity—a very clear manifesto for a strong monarchy and a politics of strict Arabization. Article 23 articulated the king's strong position explicitly as 'Commander of the Faithful' (*amir al-muminin*). With this role, his person was declared sacred and inviolable. Besides the central defining parameters of the Moroccan nation—language and religion—the constitution also codified the trinity *Allāh, al-Watan, al-Malik* (God, homeland, king); a motto carved literally into numerous mountains and plateaus, and also figuratively into the mind of almost every Moroccan, whether by conviction or force.

The constitution laid out a clear path for forthcoming decades that was adopted by different political and social agents, in the educational system, political discourse, and culture. Images of an independent Arab nation with roots in a long historical continuity were promoted. In order to strengthen the 'we', representations that challenged the unity and homogeneity of the nation were suppressed and counter-hegemonic groups were silenced. This was especially true for the Imazighen.⁴ Although they form up to 45 percent of the population, they were completely neglected as an integral factor in forming the new nation. Other groups were likewise excluded and suppressed, such as Jews, who did not seem to fit with the 'Muslim' identity of Morocco; atheists, whose existence was completely unthinkable; Islamists, who had different visions for Morocco; and Sahrawis, who challenged the territorial integrity of the nation-state.

⁴Although the term Berber is still widespread, I use the self-designation Imazighen (sg. Amazigh) in the following. The umbrella term for the indigenous languages of the Imazighen is Tamazight, for the alphabet Tifinagh. See, Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *The Berber Identity Movement and the Challenge to North African States*, Austin 2011, p. 2.

Representations of the nation in independent Morocco thus ignored various realities and counter-narratives and were consequently paved with numerous blind spots. One example is the complete exclusion of the region's indigenous pre-Islamic history and culture. Historiography in post-colonial Morocco, including school curricula and museum exhibitions, usually began its narrative with the Arab conquests of the 7th century, widely ignoring the fact that the region has been populated since the Neolithic period. This very narrow conception of early Moroccan history is, for example, mirrored in the standard reference work *Histoire du Maroc* (History of Morocco), published in 1967 by the historian Abdelaziz Amine who stated, „For a huge part of the country history did not start before the 8th century CE“. ⁵ Between 1960 and 1987, only three articles in the journal *Hesp ris-Tamuda*, the most important publication for historiography in Morocco, referred to pre-Islamic history. ⁶ Even the Archaeological Museum in Rabat, where one would expect to mainly find prehistoric and ancient artefacts, displayed only a few exhibits on the pre-Islamic history of the country. Pre-Islamic history remained largely obscure with one exception: non-indigenous cultures and societies. Showcasing North-West Africa in antiquity meant for a long time dealing with Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and Romans. Artefacts in museums that shed light on the language, culture, or religion of the indigenous population were either not on display or left unclassified without further explanation, and were thus intentionally disconnected from Moroccan history. ⁷ This very narrow focus was persistent and seemed unquestionable in public discourse. Even in the early 1980s, the historians Mohammed Ben Bachir and Najib Mohammed still described the „Arab-Muslim civilisation“ as an „essential component of national unity and the

original cultural heritage“ of Morocco. ⁸ This very monolithic representation of the past and present must be understood as a response to colonial narratives. It was a counter-narrative to the image of a fragmented, heterogeneous, anarchic, and backward Moroccan society, portrayed for many decades in French historiography.

New impulses—Maroc pluriel

In May 2007, the University of Rabat dedicated a conference to the topic of diversity and pluralism in education. *Maroc pluriel* (plural Morocco) became a catchphrase, in Morocco and beyond. The first tentative impulses to bring previously marginalized groups and topics into focus and to challenge the hegemonic narrative of the Moroccan nation as exclusively Arab-Muslim had emerged in the 1970s from outside Morocco; the work of Clifford Geertz, Lawrence Rosen, and Paul Pascon had a particular impact on established views. ⁹ Consequently, issues of identity and nationhood were also raised by Moroccan scholars and activists such as Mohammed El Ayadi, Mohammed Tozy, and Abdelhay El Moudden, and thus found their way into historical research and political discourse. ¹⁰ New topics rose to prominence at Moroccan universities, for example the research by Fatima Mernissi on feminism, Mohammed Ennaji's work on slavery, and Jama  Baida's focus on religious minorities. ¹¹ New projects also evolved beyond

⁸Mohammed Ben Bachir / Najib Mohammed, *La politique culturelle au Maroc*, Paris: 1981, p. 10.

⁹Clifford Geertz / Hildred Geertz / Lawrence Rosen, *Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society. Three Essays in Cultural Analysis*, Cambridge 1979; Lawrence Rosen, *The Social and Conceptual Framework of Arab-Berber Relations in Central Morocco*, in: Ernest Gellner / Charles Micaud (eds.), *Arabs and Berbers. From Tribe to Nation*, London 1973, pp. 155-173; Paul Pascon, *Le Haouz de Marrakech*, Rabat 1977; Paul Pascon, *La Maison d'Igh et l'histoire sociale du Tazerwalt*, Rabat 1984.

¹⁰Mohamed Tozy, *Monarchie et islam politique au Maroc*, Paris 1999; Mohammed El Ayadi et al., *L'Islam au quotidien. Enqu te sur les valeurs et les pratiques religieuses au Maroc*, Casablanca 2007; Abdelhay El Moudden et al., *La r alit  du pluralisme au Maroc*, in: *Cercle d'analyse politique. Les cahiers bleus 2* (2004), pp. 10-24; Abdelhay El Moudden, *Cultural Struggles in Morocco*, in: Mohamed Dahbi et al. (eds.), *Cultural Studies, Interdisciplinarity, and the University*, Rabat 1996, pp. 135-146.

¹¹Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, Cambridge 1975; Fatima Mernissi, *Le Maroc*

⁵Abdelaziz Amine et al., *Histoire du Maroc*, Casablanca 1967.

⁶Abderrahmane El Moudden, *The Eighteenth Century. A Poor Relation in the Historiography of Morocco*, in: Michel Le Gall / Kenneth Perkins (eds.), *The Maghrib in Question. Essays in History & Historiography*, Austin 1997, pp. 201-211, here p. 205.

⁷See Sophie Wagenhofer, *Verorten, Partizipieren. Das j dische Museum in Casablanca*, Berlin 2012, p. 69f.

academia. One example is the foundation of museums dealing explicitly with the history and culture of minorities, such as the Bert Flint Museum in Marrakech, the Museum of Saharan Art in Laayoune, the Museum of Amazigh Culture in Agadir, and the Museum for Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca.¹²

The relationship between academic research and political activism was and still is reciprocal: Public debates trigger new topics in research; at the same time, they also influence conversations on the past, the nation, and identity outside the university. Although the constitution still defines the Arabic language, Islam, and the king as the cornerstones of the Moroccan nation, the discourse on identity has changed, especially since the 1990s. The diversity that was considered a threat to national unity in the years after independence is increasingly celebrated as an enrichment. The shift in understanding on what constitutes Moroccan identity was, of course, not only brought forward by scholars, activists, and representatives of marginalized groups; the king himself, as the uncontested authority in Morocco, implemented new representations of the Moroccan nation. The first moves towards the recognition and inclusion of marginalized groups began already under the reign of Hassan II (1961-1999).

For Hassan II, whose heavy-handed reign is known as the 'years of lead', this shift was an attempt to improve the kingdom's image in Europe and the United States. The idea was that criticism of his autocratic leadership style and human rights abuses should be refuted, and Morocco presented as a stable and open political partner in the Arab world. Referencing the country's location and history, the image of Morocco as a cultural melting pot and bridge between Europe, Africa, and the Arab world was promoted; this was a country predestined

to be a mediator on the political stage and an example for dialogue and the fruitful coexistence of different ethnic and religious groups. Hassan II took a first step in this direction in the 1970s when he offered himself as a mediator in the Middle East conflict, referring to the good and long-lasting Muslim-Jewish relationship in Morocco as a model for the entire Arab world. For Hassan II, Morocco's Jewish community served as a convenient and powerful means to demonstrate diversity and tolerance. In this context, it is not surprising that the king's Jewish advisor André Azoulay became a driving force behind the campaign to improve that image in the early 1990s, and to establish close relationships with Moroccan Jews around the world. It was a far bigger challenge for Hassan II to tackle the issue of the Imazighen and to respond to the demands of Amazigh activists. Making up almost half of the Moroccan population, their aspirations for cultural and political participation had a much greater impact on politics and Moroccan society. Nevertheless, in 1994 Hassan II gave a widely publicized speech, acknowledging that Amazigh languages should be taught in primary schools in Morocco. Despite the big words, actions remained small.¹³

In the end, it was Hassan's son, the incumbent King Mohammed VI, who became *the* hope bearer for change, pluralization, and democratisation in Morocco when he acceded to the throne in 1999. The new king did not „miss a chance to stress the religious, linguistic and cultural pluralism of the country“ as the political activist Simon Lévy observed.¹⁴ In 2001, the king opened the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture in Rabat, under the directorate of Mohammed Chafik, with the aim of including Amazigh culture and language in Morocco's educational system; since 2003, Tamazight has been a compulsory subject in Moroccan schools.¹⁵ Mohammed VI paved the way for the

raconté par ses femmes, Rabat 1983; Jamaâ Baida / Vincent Feroldi, *Présence chrétienne au Maroc, XIXe-XXe siècles*, Rabat, 2005; Jamaâ Baida, *La presse juive au Maroc entre les deux guerres*, in: *Hespéris-Tamuda* 37 (1999), pp. 171-190; Mohammed Ennaji, *Serving the Master. Slavery and Society in Nineteenth-century Morocco*, Cambridge 2013.

¹²See Wagenhofer, *Les musées au Maroc. Reflet et instrument de la politique historique avant et après l'indépendance*, in: Herbert Popp / Mohamed Ait Hamza (eds.), *L'héritage colonial au Maroc*, Bayreuth 2012, pp. 67-80.

¹³For a detailed analysis of the complex relation between Hassan II and the Imazighen see Maddy-Weitzman, *The Berber Identity Movement*.

¹⁴Simon Lévy, *Il y a encore des juifs au Maroc*, in: Paul Balta et al. (eds.), *La Méditerranée des Juifs. Exodes et enracinements*, Paris 2003, pp. 195-212, here p. 209.

¹⁵See Mohammed Errihani, *The Amazigh renaissance. Tamazight in the time of Mohammed VI*, in: Bruce Maddy-Weitzman / Daniel Zisenwine (eds.), *Contemporary Morocco. State, Politics and Society und Mohammed VI*, Oxon 2013, pp. 57-69. For

reform of family law, strengthening the rights of women in February 2004. In the same year, he appointed the Equity and Reconciliation Commission, a committee to deal with the human rights abuse of his late father. Mohammed VI also was visible on the international scene. His 2009 speech at the United Nations in New York, on the occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day, was widely received. He was the first Muslim sovereign who openly recognized and condemned the Holocaust, a gesture that helped to foster Morocco's image as an equal partner on shared and universal values.

Like his father, Mohammed VI had a significant interest in presenting Morocco as a plural, diverse, and tolerant country in order to be perceived as reliable political and economic partner for the 'West'. At the international level, the representations of Morocco as a tolerant nation were quite successful. A report published by the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation in 2003 attested that Morocco adhered to the values of democracy, pluralism, tolerance, and the dialogue of cultures.¹⁶ In its annual reports on human rights and religious freedom, the U.S. government repeatedly underlined positive developments in the North African state. A report from 2008 by the Congressional Research Service stated that „the Bush Administration views Morocco as a moderate Arab regime, an ally against terrorism, and a free trade partner“.¹⁷

The message of a tolerant and plural society has to be understood not only as signal to the West but also as a response to radical movements within Morocco. This became very clear after the bomb attacks in May 2003. On the night of 16 May, bombs exploded at five different

more information on the work and objectives of IRCAM, see the website of the institute <www.ircam.ma> (31.08.2021).

¹⁶Jan Senkyr, Marokko lanciert Kampagne gegen Islamismus. Länderbericht der Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Auslandsbüro Marokko, 2003, <<https://www.kas.de/de/web/marokko/laenderberichte/detail/-/content/marokko-lanciert-kampagne-gegen-islamismus1>> (31.08.2021).

¹⁷Carol Migdalowitz, Morocco. Current Issues. Report by the Congressional Research Service, 04 December 2008, <<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21579.pdf>> (31.08.2021).

locations in Casablanca: in a Spanish-owned restaurant, a five-star hotel, a Jewish-owned Italian restaurant, in the Jewish community centre, and on a street close to the Jewish cemetery that was presumably the actual target of the suicide bomber. 33 civilians died and more than 100 were injured.¹⁸ The Islamist attacks were obviously directed against a supposedly European lifestyle and against the Jewish community. But beyond that, the suicide bombers also attacked Morocco's political and social order, and above all the king himself as central representation of the Moroccan nation and as a protector of the social order and all his subjects. It is therefore not surprising that the king's reaction was both immediate and very decided. Accompanied by significant media attention he visited the sites of the attacks, as well as injured victims and relatives. His visit to the Jewish community centre and the meeting with Serge Berdugo, chairman of the Moroccan Jewish Community, were of great symbolic value. Mohammed VI demonstrated that any violation of his 'wards' was perceived as attack against his own authority. In autumn 2003, Morocco faced renewed antisemitic attacks as two Moroccan Jews were killed in Casablanca and Meknes.¹⁹ Immediately after the attacks, a personal letter from the king to Serge Berdugo was published the next day in *Le Matin*, a newspaper close to the government and the palace. The king described the murders as an assault, not only on Moroccan Jews, but on the core values of the entire Moroccan society, namely tolerance, coexistence, and peace: „We assure all Moroccan citizens of Jewish faith of our constant care and reaffirm, in our capacity as Amir al Muminine, as the supreme representative of the nation, as a symbol of unity and king of all Moroccans, our determination to protect their dignity and their rights as Moroccan citizens, loyal followers of the king, their homeland and to

¹⁸On the bomb attacks in Casablanca see for example Guido Steinberg, *Das Netzwerk des islamistischen Terrorismus. Der nahe und der ferne Feind*, München 2005, pp. 85-91.

¹⁹Media in Morocco as well as in the United States, Israel, and Europe reported on the attacks. For an overview of the events see Marvie Howe, *Morocco. The Islamist Awakening and Other Challenges*, New York 2005, pp. 339-342.

secure their holy institutions“.²⁰ The public affirmation of his support has to be understood as a demonstration of his power addressed to all Moroccans, especially to those questioning the king's authority.

Terrorist attacks in Morocco first and foremost weaken the Moroccan regime, above all the king, who is rejected as 'pro-Western' and regarded as too liberal and even un-Islamic by Islamist groups. In challenging the current social and political path in Morocco, Islamists refuse to accept the religious power of the king in his capacity as Commander of the Faithful. Instead, they aim for the strict Islamization of the nation. Radical religious forces are thus a veritable threat to royal power. The emphasis on pluralism and tolerance as values inherent to Moroccan identity and the Moroccan nation are therefore also a reaction to opposition representations in Moroccan society, like militant religious radicalism. In referring to his traditional role as protector of Jewish subjects, the king therefore re-affirms his position as Commander of the Faithful and sovereign of the nation.

The Nation and the People

However, the question of what and who constitutes the Moroccan nation has not been limited to official discourse. Within Moroccan civil society, many have spoken out for tolerance and diversity as important features of *Maroccanité*. After the bomb attacks in Casablanca, tens of thousands gathered in the city under the motto „Don't touch my country“ to demonstrate against Islamist violence and show their support for a pluralistic society. Calls for more plurality and diversity have been embedded in an increasingly critical involvement with representations of Moroccan society and established historiographic narratives. This has found expression in cultural productions, and later in recent historiography and school curricula. Civil society has not simply reproduced narratives implemented from above, but has sought a more differentiated approach. Culture, including theatre,

²⁰The letter was reprinted in a publication of the Jewish community. Conseil des Communautés Israélites du Maroc (ed.), *The Moroccan Jewish Community*, Casablanca 2004, p. 6.

cinema, literature, story-telling, and music, has become a vehicle to highlight sensitive issues and bring marginalized subjects to the foreground. The World Sacred Music Festival in Fes widened its scope and reintroduced Jewish, Andalusian, and African art as inherent parts of Moroccan music. Moroccan film producers created more central roles for previously marginalized groups; socially excluded people such as prostitutes, homeless people, and criminals been represented on screen; and sensitive historical topics were tackled, for example, the mass emigration of Moroccan Jews in the 1950s and 1960s. A new interest and awareness of historical representations evolved in civil society, outside of academia and beyond official narratives. Newly published memoirs targeting a broader audience offered very personal and unfiltered views on the past. In 2010, *Zamane*, the first popular history magazine in Morocco, was launched in French, and has been published since 2013 in Arabic as well. Journalists and scholars have investigated underrepresented and oppressed aspects of Morocco's past and presented them in a very outspoken and critical way, which is often a challenge to official narratives. The curricula in schools and universities have adapted a little more slowly to new approaches to Moroccan history, because it has not been easy to officially implement new narratives and representations, especially in public schools.

The first attempts to revise the curricula in Moroccan schools and to provide room for a more diverse and pluralistic image of Morocco in history lessons, as well as in Islamic education, again came from civil society. The political activist Simon Lévy, for example, developed an extracurricular educational programme highlighting the diversity of Moroccan society, which he offered to schools and universities. Between 2002 and 2008, he was invited to different educational institutions as a lecturer, among them the French High School in Casablanca, the Department for Educational Science at the University of Rabat, the School of Journalism, and the Faculty for Islamic Studies in Casablanca.²¹ Initiatives to adapt textbooks to include new perspectives, languages,

²¹See Wagenhofer, *Ausstellen*, p. 206f.

and topics also emerged from the Amazigh movement. Activists such as Ahmed Assid and the historian Hassan Aourid requested revision of curricula towards a more liberal and open approach and a wider historical narrative and to create space for previously marginalized aspects of Moroccan culture and history.²² One early initiative to reform history lessons was developed by a group of scholars and teachers meeting in the early 2000s at the Centre for Arabic Studies in Rabat, working on new textbooks for private French schools in Morocco. Another came from a meeting organised in 2004 by the International Society for History Didactics at the university of Rabat. Under the motto „Encounter with history—encounter with the other“ a group of scholars discussed steps towards an intercultural approach to the teaching of history.²³ At universities, new topics were not only introduced by senior scholars and professors but also by students, who began to deal with previously neglected research questions. The number of theses on Amazigh or Jewish history increased and marginalized aspects of culture and history became more prominent. Another example is the Mimouna Club that was founded in 2007 by Muslim Moroccan students at the Al-Akhawayn University in Fes, an initiative that highlights Jewish aspects of Moroccan history and culture.²⁴

It is difficult to judge the extent to which the constantly repeated narrative of a plural, diverse, and tolerant society has influenced Moroccan society. However, it has become increasingly important to

²²See Ellinor Zeino-Mahmalat, *Constitutional Reform and Constitutional Reality in Morocco*, in: KAS International Reports 2 (2014), pp. 113-147; see also the interview with Ahmed Assid in the weekly *TelQuel*, 02 January 2017, <https://telquel.ma/2017/01/02/ahmed-assid-ce-manuel-scolaire-deduction-islamique-erreur-fatale-du-ministere_1529362> (31.08.2021).

²³Christiane Kohser-Spohn, *Bericht über die Tagung 'Begegnung mit der Geschichte und Begegnung mit dem Anderen. Der Geschichtsunterricht als interkultureller Dialog'* in Rabat, in: *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 26 (2004) 4, pp. 455-457; Rita Aouad-Badoual, *School History and Political Openness in today's Morocco*, in: *CCDH Newsletter* 2 (2009); see also Wagenhofer, *Ausstellen*, pp. 64ff.

²⁴Errihani, *Amazigh*, p. 58; Wagenhofer, *Ausstellen*, p. 62f. and the website of the Mimouna project <<https://mimouna.org/projects/>> (31.08.2021). Mimouna is a Jewish Moroccan festivity, celebrated on the last day of Passover, when Jewish families host their Muslim neighbours and friends.

many people in Morocco to have a voice in global discourses and to be perceived as agents on a par with the West. New means of communication and knowledge transfer have had, and of course still have, a significant impact in this context. An analysis of online debates on the role of Morocco under the Vichy regime and the sultan's attitude towards his Jewish subjects shed light not only on circulating conceptions of history among laypersons, but showed how crucial it was for participants to be perceived by others as tolerant and open.²⁵ In interviews I conducted with Moroccans between 2005 and 2012, cultural diversity was also generally affirmed and described as a value. However, the extent to which demands for pluralism, political and cultural participation, or more personal rights—mainly vocalized by active participants in civil society, often from the Moroccan middle class—reach the majority of people remains an open question. How such debates and initiatives influence perceptions of the self and the other, and shape the understanding of the nation's character, likewise remains open to debate. We must not forget that in rural areas daily life remains very much burdened by the existential struggles of poverty and a lack of education (despite a significant rise in the literacy rate in recent decades, up to 30 percent of adults still cannot read and write). Not everyone can connect with the struggle for an inclusive and plural representation of the Moroccan nation and Moroccan identity; calls for equity and liberalisation simply do not have the same meaning and importance for all Moroccans regardless of social status and background.

Perceptions, interests, and objectives differ, of course. Whereas some groups, such as Islamists, consider the changing representations of Moroccan nationality and identity as a threat to the existing order, others disagree with the political direction because they regard

²⁵Sophie Wagenhofer, *Contested Narratives. Contemporary Debates on Mohammed V and the Moroccan Jews under the Vichy Regime*, in: *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History* 4 (2012), pp. 145-164, <<https://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/contested-narratives-contemporary-debates-on-mohammed-v-and-the-moroccan-jews-under-the-vichy-regime/>> (31.08.2021).

changing representations of the nation as insufficient. Many activists criticise the king for not delivering on promises of broader liberalisation and democratisation. They demand freedom of speech and of religion, including the right not to practice Islam, and claim the right of free sexual orientation; they challenge the sacrosanct position of the king and call for democratic reforms. In the vein of the Arab Spring, more than 150,000 Moroccans demonstrated on 20 February 2011 in different towns and cities for democracy and change.²⁶ Under pressure from the so-called February 20 Movement, Mohammed VI finally implemented the much requested—and also disputed—reform of the Moroccan constitution. At the beginning of July 2011, the new text was validated by referendum and enacted on 29 July. Although Morocco is still defined as a „sovereign Muslim state, attached to its national unity and to its territorial integrity“, and despite the affirmation of „God, homeland, king“ as the motto of the kingdom, the plurality of the Moroccan nation is explicitly anchored in the new constitution. „[...] the Kingdom of Morocco intends to preserve, in its plenitude and its diversity, its one and indivisible national identity. Its unity is forged by the convergence of its Arab-Muslim, Amazigh and Saharan-Hassanic components, nourished and enriched by its African, Andalusian, Hebraic and Mediterranean influences“. Moreover, the preamble stresses „the attachment of the Moroccan people to the values of openness, of moderation, of tolerance and of dialogue for mutual understanding between all the cultures and the civilizations of the world“.²⁷

The Nation and the King

²⁶Driss Maghraoui, Constitutional reforms in Morocco. Between consensus and subaltern politics, in: *The Journal of North African Studies* 16 (2011), 4, pp. 679-699; Lenie Brouwer / Edine Bartels, Arab Spring in Morocco. Social media and the 20 February movement, in: *Afrika Focus* 27 (2014), 2, pp. 9-22.

²⁷The text of the constitution can be downloaded from the official website of the Moroccan government <<https://www.maroc.ma/en/content/constitution>> (31.08.2021).

The constitution of 2011 codified a new understanding of the Moroccan nation and reflects changes in the representation of *Maroccanité* that were required, challenged, negotiated, and implemented since the 1980s. The constitution also implemented some basic human rights that had not been explicitly included in former versions of the Moroccan constitution.²⁸ However, one central aspiration of the February 20 Movement was not included, namely the sovereignty of the people. „The king reigns but should not rule“ was a widely heard motto during the demonstrations. To the disappointment of activists, Article 19 remained untouched, the king as Commander of the Faithful is still „the supreme representative of the nation and the symbol of the unity thereof“ who „shall be the guarantor of the perpetuation and the continuity of the state“.²⁹ This article—among others—does not only confirm the king’s unlimited power, it intrinsically ties the nation to the person of the king.

The king implements his vision of a strong nation very strategically. Not only by means of speeches and gestures; he actively steers the production and dissemination of knowledge. In 2006, Mohammed VI founded the Royal Institute for the Research of Moroccan History and commissioned the new institute for the publication of a comprehensive and universal history book. In 2012 *Histoire du Maroc. Réactualisation et synthèse* (History of Morocco. Actualization and Synthesis) was published in French and Arabic. More than 50 scholars participated in a project that brought together new perspectives, especially on pre-Islamic history and on cultural transfer and entanglement.³⁰ Another step taken by the king was the foundation of a central national archive,

²⁸See the analysis of the Moroccan constitution by Mohamed Madani / Driss Maghraoui / Saloua Zerhouni, *The 2011 Moroccan Constitution. A Critical Analysis*, Stockholm 2013, <<https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/the-2011-moroccan-constitution-critical-analysis.pdf>> (31.08.2021).

²⁹<<https://www.maroc.ma/en/content/constitution>> (31.08.2021).

³⁰See Daniel Rivet, Pour une histoire du Maroc revisitée, in: *Revue historique* 670 (2014), 2, pp. 377-384. The full text of the book is available on the website of the Royal Institute for the Research of the Moroccan History, <<http://www.irrhm.org/LangFr.aspx?r=17>> (31.08.2021).

the *Archives du Maroc* (Archives of Morocco). In 2011, the historian Jamaâ Baida was appointed as director of the archive; since 2013 it has finally been open to the public. The significance of the archive, which hosts partially un-researched documents on Morocco's contemporary history, was demonstrated by its declaration as an institution of public strategy (*établissement public stratégique*), a status only a few organisations receive. The new national archive also attracted interest outside of Morocco; in 2018 the *Archives* signed an agreement with the Holocaust Museum in Washington to share documents on the history of Moroccan Jews during World War Two.³¹ Besides historical research, the dissemination of knowledge and education policy have been focal points of interest. In 2015, Mohammed VI inaugurated the Institute for the Training of Imams in Rabat, with the aim that „the values of tolerance, balance and moderation are propagated“.³² One year later, the king instructed the Ministry of Education to revise textbooks for the teaching of Islam in order to promote the image of a tolerant Islam in public schools.³³ Thus, upon the king's orders, representations of a diverse and tolerant nation were introduced not only in political discourse but also in academic research and teaching activities in Morocco.

Even though representations of the Moroccan nation have radically changed from the early years after independence to the present, the political importance of the nation remains unbroken. It is still first

³¹See the website of the archive <<https://www.archivesdumaroc.ma/>> (31.08.2021); Graham H. Cornell, *Archive du Maroc*, in: *Hazine*, 8 July 2015, <<https://hazine.info/archives-du-maroc/>> (31.08.2021). See also the press release published on the website of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, 16 May 2018, <<https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-releases/museum-signs-archival-agreement-with-the-archives-of-morocco>> (31.08.2021).

³²Quoted from a speech given by the institute's director Ahmed Toufiq, <https://telquel.ma/2015/03/28/mohammed-vi-inaugure-nouvel-institut-formation-imams_1440204> (31.08.2021); see also Cédéric Baylocq / Aziz Hlaoua, *Spreading a 'Moderate Islam'? Morocco's New African Religious Diplomacy*, in: *Afrique contemporaine* 257 (2016), 1, pp. 113-128.

³³Senem Alsan, *Nation-Building in Turkey and Morocco. Governing Kurdish and Berber Dissent*, Cambridge 2015, p. 203; see also the interview with Ahmed Assid in the Moroccan weekly *TelQuel*, 02 January 2017 (note 22).

and foremost the king who defines and shapes the boundaries of the nation, with regard to territory as well as cultural, religious, and social identity. Of course, his action is embedded in a broader context and must be understood as a reaction to developments and demands from within Moroccan society, but also from abroad. However, the concept of a strong nation is first and foremost in the king's own interest. We have seen that the role of the strong nation remains as in the early years after independence, however, the representations have changed; the image of a homogenous society has been replaced by representations of a diverse and pluralistic nation. The „self“ is not strengthened by excluding the „other“, but by integrating the „other“ within the concept of the „self“. The representations of a pluralistic nation are meant to take effect within the country but also within a global context. They have proven extremely useful tools for the institution of the monarchy in Morocco. The narrative of pluralism as natural and essential to the Moroccan nation is the king's answer to the threats of radicalism, antisemitism, and religious extremism, as well as to criticism from the West. It is a „pluralism proclaimed from above“, as Simon Lévy has put it; and still, it opens up new possibilities to negotiate and shape the concept of the nation, from which various groups may profit.³⁴

³⁴Lévy, *Il y a encore des juifs*, p. 195.