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# A Radio Report on Morocco's Rentier Economy and Democracy

Veronica Seltzer

SIT Graduate Institute - Study Abroad, proeq2006@aol.com

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**A Radio Report on Morocco's Rentier Economy and Democracy**

**By Seltzer, Veronica**

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**Academic Directors: Dr. Belghazi ,Taieb & Ms. Stucky, Mary**

**Advisor: Ms. Alami, Aida**

**Tufts University**

**Major: Classical studies**

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**Abstract :** Morocco seems different from other Arab Spring countries. There's been no revolution here and, while some people are protesting for more democracy, a lot more seem to dream of something else -- the chance to persuade the King to give them a business. In fact, the King -- who is the ultimate authority in Morocco -- has given businesses as gifts to thousands of Moroccans and many more are hoping in this country where fifteen percent of people are unemployed. Veronica Jean Seltzer reports from Morocco's capital, Rabat:

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**Introduction:**

Morocco seems different from other Arab Spring countries. There's been no revolution here and, while some people are protesting for more democracy, a lot more seem to dream of something else -- the chance to persuade the King to give them a business. In fact, the King -- who is the ultimate authority in Morocco -- has given businesses as gifts to thousands of Moroccans and many more are hoping in this country where fifteen percent of people are unemployed. Veronica Jean Seltzer reports from Morocco's capital, Rabat:

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**AMBI 1**\_seconds. Latifa Raâfat sings.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38Pd5OogLSc>

**Track/Veronica Jean Seltzer:** This is Latifa Raâfat, one of Morocco's most famous singers. This Youtube clip got almost a million hits. But Raâfat is not just a singer--

**AMBI 2**\_seconds. Bus pulls away.

**Track:** She also has a bus company---a gift from the King. The bus runs a coastal route from Casablanca to scenic Essaouira, a resort town on the Atlantic Ocean. And Raafat is not alone. She's just one of almost 4,000 Moroccans who were given transportation companies—actors,

singer, athletes, and friends of the King, who is said to give these businesses--or more accurately, licenses to run these businesses---as a reward for loyal service to the country.

### **AMBI 3** hawking in the Medina

**Track:** But it's not just famous Moroccans who want the King to give them the gift of a business. Here in the ancient marketplace in Rabat, Morocco's capital, thirty year old Rachid who wouldn't give us his last name, is one of many who hawks compact discs. He says even he is dreaming of a gift from the King.

**Cut 1:** Rachid: I want a license, why not?! I hope to get one; it's a dream. I wish I would meet the King and he would give me three or four licenses.

In fact, there is an organization of Moroccans whose sole purpose it is to throw hand written letters at the King during royal processions, begging him for gifts. Forty-five year old Kamal who also wouldn't give us his last name says he has tried that, so far without success, but he recommends it for everyone.

**Cut 2:** Kamal: You should try. You may find the King in a good mood. Maybe when you give him the letter he will give you money or a job.

**Track:** But for the King to hand out businesses as gifts is an unproductive system according to some economists. During a time of Arab Spring revolutions, many insist that Morocco too is changing and moving toward democracy. But Moroccan economist, Najib Akesbi, says the country's economic system, in which people dream of support from a monarch, is anachronistic, even feudal, and is certainly not a move toward democracy.

**Cut 3: Akesbi-** The King controls everything. This isn't a democracy. It's not a democracy. So before any economic reforms in agriculture, industry, or taxation, there need to be political reforms to evolve toward a true parliamentary monarchy.

**Track:** In fact, there were *elections* in Morocco last Fall, which put a moderate Islamist government in place. As a practical matter, the King still holds absolute power, but the country's officials have promised, among other things, an end to corruption.

**Ambi 4:** Rabbah [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JZGtd\\_puMY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JZGtd_puMY) ( "the publication of the licenses aims to get the economic system more transparency")

The new transportation minister, Abdelaziz Rabbah, says he released the list of Moroccans who had received bus companies as gifts from the King to prove that the new government is serious about providing more transparency. He says he's also about to release a similar list of beneficiaries of licenses for sand quarries, essential in making concrete. Still, the Moroccan economist Akesbi says even with this move toward transparency, the King and his coterie of

advisors and government officials-what Moroccans commonly call the Makhzen-- isn't likely to change the system any time soon.

**CUT 5:** Akesbi: I don't think the Makhzen is ready to give up its power.

And so for now, it looks like Moroccans can continue to hope for the gift of a business from the King. (**Ambi 5:** Latifa Raâfat sings) From famous singers like Latifa Raâfat, to the (**Ambi 6:** Hawking) poor vendors hawking these singers' music in the market.

For Marketplace, I'm Veronica Jean Seltzer in the Medina in Rabat, Morocco.

**Back announce:** Sara Ait Khorsa contributed to this story.