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Plus ça Change? Observing the Dynamics of Morocco's 'Arab Spring' in the High Atlas

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ABSTRACT *This contribution focuses on the 'Arab Spring' in Morocco and on the interactions between the mainly urban-based activists that made up the 20 February Movement (F20M), and the population in rural areas. Based on six weeks of fieldwork between November 2013 and March 2014, mostly in the areas in and near Marrakech, we find that while the urban F20M events stimulated and inspired protests in rural areas, in practice there were only sporadic contacts based on the activists' personal feelings of belonging rather than their organizational membership. This is mainly due to discursive disconnects between the centre and periphery. As for the outcomes, in particular the new constitution, many respondents believe that nothing has changed so far.*

Introduction

This contribution focuses on the 'Arab Spring' in Morocco and on the interactions between the mainly urban-based activists that made up the 20 February Movement (F20M), and the population in rural areas. The 'Arab Spring' in Morocco is mainly represented by the F20M, which led a wave of protests against the widely perceived social ills (such as considerable levels of poverty, inequality, unemployment and widespread corruption) and raised the political consciousness of the average Moroccan citizen. However, the F20M did not lead to a revolution and to the overthrow of the regime as happened in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. This is mainly due to the swift constitutional response by the king,¹ who announced a new constitution in March 2011, and the subsequent referendum in July of the same year. The new constitution includes important provisions for 'advanced regionalization' as well as the recognition of *Amazigh* as an official language. The case of Morocco is interesting because, together with most of the Gulf States and Jordan in particular, it can be considered an exception on the 'Arab Spring' scene because the defensive

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democratization strategies that brought about limited reforms (Kamel & Huber, 2015) defused the opposition while the power bases of the central regime remained intact.

The monarchy and the power structures surrounding it called the *makhzen* (Willis, 2002: 7) are key actors in Morocco. The 2011 constitution did not change the fact that the king holds a powerful role as arbiter between the various forces in the population, intervening from time to time to (re)define the rules of the game (Desrués, 2013: 414). However, civic activism against authoritarian rule does know a long history in Morocco, including the 'bread riots' in June 1981 when the bread price rose due to IMF conditions. Since the mid-2000s, the number of riots and protests has increased sharply, thanks to the more liberal political climate. For example, local groups (called 'co-ordinations') affiliated with national human rights associations have regularly mobilized people to protest against increased costs of living as a result of cuts in subsidies, unemployment, or the privatization of water and sanitation services, both in urban and rural/peripheral areas (see Bennafla & Emperador, 2010; Bogaert, 2015; Lahbib, 2011: 18; Saadi, 2012). Some of these groups were or are still part of the coalition that came to be known as the 20 February Movement. The F2OM is thus the 'heir to earlier demonstrations and the culmination of a broad process in which a space of protest was formed' (Desrués, 2013: 416).

While quite a few studies have examined the F2OM, its strategies and outcomes (see Benchemsi, 2012; Dalmasso, 2012; Desrués, 2012, 2013; Fernández Molina, 2011; González Riera, 2011; Hoffmann & König, 2013; Pace & Cavatorta, 2012), this article focuses on centre–periphery relations, in terms of the organizational and ideological linkages and commonalities as well as on the divergences between activists in urban and rural areas. It also examines the main means of communications between these groups, and considers their perceptions in terms of outcomes, in particular certain provisions in the new constitution.

By analysing the differences between urban-based activism and rural protest, this article finds that while the F2OM tried to mobilize rural populations for its purposes, the rural populations did not try to mobilize the F2OM for theirs. As will be shown below, this divergence has its origin in the different understanding of what the demand for social justice represented in the two areas: while the urban-based activists focused on the constitutional arrangements and demanded mainly political change, the population in the rural areas prioritized access to basic infrastructures and services and economic development issues. Hence, peripheral populations did not discursively connect their mainly socio-economic demands to the civic democratic struggle of the central movement.

The article is organized as follows: the next section presents the methodology, followed by an analysis of the rural periphery's opportunity structure. The F2OM's main actors, demands and local organization are then introduced, before addressing the main topic – the mobilization strategies deployed by the urban activists in rural areas and the constraints they faced in doing so. The article then discusses the perception of the outcomes of the F2OM before concluding.

Methodology

This article is based on qualitative fieldwork. The aim was to interview at least one member of each of the most representative F20M associations, political parties and trade unions both in urban areas, namely Marrakech and Rabat, and in a rural area in the High Atlas, namely the Al Haouz province between the town of Ait Ourir and the Zat Valley, in particular in the municipality of Tighedouine. This area was chosen for two reasons. First, the town of Ait Ourir and the Zat valley can be considered part of a marginalized ‘periphery’ characterized by limited economic activities, dependence on the Marrakech urban area, as well as weak basic infrastructures in terms of transport and social services. The main sources of income are small-scale agriculture and small enterprises, and many young people work in Marrakech or on the large farming areas near Agadir.

Second, we chose this area because both of us have previously conducted fieldwork there (Bergh in 2005–06 and Rossi-Doria in 2012), and this has facilitated our access to local associations and people. This allowed us to gather data on the rural people’s perspectives and the linkages between urban- and rural-based activists and activities.

This research is based on six weeks of fieldwork conducted during November 2013–March 2014 by the second author. In total, the second author conducted semi-structured interviews² with 26 activists and respondents representing 17 organizations, as well as participant observation of some association meetings. The respondents were of various age groups, both male and female, and diverse professions. The interviews were conducted in French, English, Spanish and, with the help of an interpreter, in Arabic and *Amazigh*, mostly one-on-one but sometimes also with small groups.³

In order to select respondents for the interviews, a purposive sampling and snowball sampling strategy was used during the research fieldwork (Patton, 1990: 169–176; Albridge & Levine, 2001: 94–123). The choice of this sampling strategy was due to the structure of the F20M, composed of different socio-political groups in touch with each other, often in the same political area (trade unions, leftist parties and associations), or united by the same religious–political militancy (Islamist parties or groups), or by a common identity and cultural claims (*Amazigh* associations). This sampling strategy has been useful to identify the respondents among the F20M urban-based activists as well as those in the rural area and permitted us to get in touch with the village and town associations thanks to the previous contacts that the authors had made.

The Opportunity Structure of a Southern Moroccan Periphery

For this study, we chose the area south of Marrakech, including a municipality at the foot of the High Atlas (Tighedouine). The main village, where the municipal ‘town hall’ (*commune*) is located, could be understood as a centre to the other villages within its administrative borders, some of which are situated at very high altitudes or deep inside the Zat valley, and are difficult to access due to the lack of all-weather roads.

For our purpose, though, we consider the main village to be part of the periphery, dependent economically and politically on several centres: Ait Ourir, a larger town about 30 km away on the way to Marrakech, then the city of Marrakech itself where many villagers work or own property, and finally the capital Rabat, where important decisions on public services and development projects are made that impact on the village. Hence, rather than a linear centre–periphery relationship, we prefer to think in terms of concentric circles or spheres of influence at various scales which villagers can both act upon but are also impacted by. The notions of centre and periphery are thus always relational and relative.

Based on Rokkan (1999: 114), we adopt the notion of vertical peripherality (in addition to horizontal peripherality, which understands a periphery only in geographical terms) which draws our attention to the interactions between groups of actors.⁴ A periphery can thus also be described as an opportunity structure that offers various possibilities of action to its inhabitants (Rokkan, 1999: 115). These possibilities are constrained or enabled by the periphery's distance from the dominant centre(s), by differences in resources and feelings of identity, and by dependence on the centre(s) in political decision making, economically and with regard to culture. These factors can combine to create uncertainty, ambivalence and even division within the periphery's population as they may feel part of the system, yet are marginal to it, and feel that their sense of separate identity is being threatened by central agencies (Rokkan, 1999: 115).

This last point refers to the (real or imagined) boundaries between the periphery and the remainder of the territory controlled from the centre, and the degree to which they can be penetrated by transactions across them. According to Rokkan (1999: 116), such transactions can be of an economic nature (imports/exports of goods, services, labour, credits, investments and subsidies); cultural (transfers of messages, norms, lifestyles, ideologies, myths, ritual systems – we would also add communication technologies), and political (conflicts over territorial rights, blockades, alliances and conflicts or accommodations between elite groups). Going back to the idea of an opportunity structure, we can ask, 'how far do peripheral actors remain dependent on the resources of the centre and how can they realistically become more independent?' (Kühn & Bernt, 2013: 315).

In the Moroccan case, the opportunity structure of the periphery studied here (namely the mountainous areas south of Marrakech with a relatively high level of poverty⁵) was and still is limited in the sense that 'the power of the Moroccan state is thoroughly insinuated into mountain life' through officers employed by various ministries, notably the Ministry of the Interior (Crawford, 2013: 647–648, quote on 647).

Rural Morocco has historically been a de-politicized area, at least since 1960. As Hart (2000: 84) notes, apart from a series of three rural, mainly tribal revolts immediately after independence in 1956, all other riots were urban-based. Furthermore, Hart (2000: 86) argues that 'none of the post-independence tribal uprisings really threatened the Moroccan monarchy in any way'. This is probably also due to King Hassan II's strategy of preventing the emancipation of rural areas that at the time represented between 60 and 70 per cent of the Moroccan population,

keeping the rural areas less developed and disconnected from the urban centres. The strategy to control the rural population included co-operation with local notables, big landowners and local elites, as well as the threat and actual use of force by the king's local representative (the *Caid*) and the local police at the earliest signs of protests.⁶ As a respondent put it, 'the *makhzen* wants to keep the civic development out of the rural world'.⁷

This explains to some extent why political parties have historically had their major activity in the urban areas. Even today, according to the rural respondents but also critical party members (Union socialiste des forces populaires (USFP), Parti de l'Avant-garde démocratique et socialiste (PADS) and Union nationale des étudiants marocains basistes (UNEM), see below) political parties are not present in the rural areas except during election campaigns, and voting decisions are based on the person and not on the party (see also Allaoui, 2010: 88; Bergh, 2010: 745). Leftist party and student union members argued that the high illiteracy levels in the rural areas (61 per cent in rural areas, compared to 29 per cent in urban areas)⁸ prevented their discourses taking root and limited their possibilities of engagement in the 'peripheries'. Another reason they cited was that their young age did not allow them to have much influence in rural settings (where young people are generally less heard compared to older persons).⁹

However, since the early 1990s the presence of sections of political parties and national associations, the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH) in particular, has increased in rural areas in the context of a general political liberalization of the country, whereby the associations (rural development, *Amazigh* or youth) are much more politically active than the parties in the rural areas. Cultural assertion in the form of *Amazigh* activists mobilizing for regional (territorial) independence and for the official recognition of their language is growing.

It seems that in the High Atlas, and to a much greater extent in the Rif (see Suárez Collado, 2015) local identities that emerged during earlier and more recent protests became a cohesive factor that allowed for greater political participation and in some cases enabled local associations to formulate clear political–territorial demands.

Indeed, some *Amazigh* associations have in recent years been building important networks linking local to international levels in order to address their requests to the central government (see Oiry-Varacca, 2012; Silverstein, 2013; Suárez Collado, 2015). In Tighedouine, there are two associations representing *Amazigh* interests: *Yagour* and *Tamaynoute*. The latter is a national association with local branches; in fact, a local branch was established in Tighedouine during the fieldwork period without permission from the *Caid*.

Moreover, due to 'participatory' development programmes (such as the National Initiative for Human Development, known as INDH) that all require the setting up of local associations in order for the population to benefit from projects, there has been a rapid increase of such associations in rural areas; in Tighedouine, the number has increased from 26 in 2006 to 45 in 2013.¹⁰ Since 2002, this development is also helped by a more liberal legal framework determining the right of freedom of association, even though

the widespread refusal to apply provisions of the law on associations in effect transforms the law from what is, on paper, a declarative regime, to one that is, in practice, a prior-authorization regime. [... This indicates] that these practices emanate from a policy decided upon at a high level to weaken certain categories of associations whose methods or whose objectives disturb the authorities. (Human Rights Watch, 2009: 4; see also Bergh, 2009)

Similarly, according to an AMDH member,¹¹ the associations benefiting from the INDH are clearly an instrument of power in the hands of the regime meant to control the critical civil society emerging in the rural areas (see also Bergh, 2012).

The Islamist Justice and Charity (*al-Adl wal-Ihsan*) movement also has an increasing foothold in rural areas, as they are physically very present and rely on oral explanation of their political thoughts (see also Hamimaz, 2003). According to Fathallah Arslane,¹² leader and spokesman for *al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, another important factor is that the rural society understands and accepts with greater ease the movement's Islamic values and political vision than the more abstract discourse of the political parties, especially leftist ones.

Given this opportunity structure, apart from the Islamists, most of the associations and organizations involved in the F20M and whose representatives were interviewed for this article found it much more difficult to play their co-ordinating and mobilizing roles in rural areas (or small towns in the vicinity of rural areas) than in the cities.

Mapping of the Actors, Political Demands and Local Organization

Similar to other movements that mark the beginning and continuation of the 'Arab Spring' in Tunisia and Egypt, the F20M originated from an online movement – the movement for 'Freedom and Democracy Now' – that had successfully called for demonstrations in several towns beginning on 20 February 2011 (with 240,000–300,000 participants according to the organizers; 37,000 according to the Ministry of the Interior, in more than 50 cities; Fernández Molina, 2011: 437).¹³ According to an AMDH member,¹⁴ out of the 300,000 protesters on 20 February 2011, 26,000 were in Marrakech. the peak of the protest is considered to be 24 April 2011, with 110 demonstrations across the country, including the major urban centres as well as villages, with approximately 900,000 people taking to the streets.

The founding members of the F20M were mostly young urbanites who were already politicized as they had previously been active in one or several grassroots movements including the local co-ordinations that fought against the high costs of living and for better quality local public services; the *Mouvement alternatif pour les libertés individuelles* (MALI), which campaigns mostly for religious freedom; the struggles of the political left, trade unions, Islamist movements, the *Amazigh* movement or the Unemployed Graduates (Emperador Badimon, 2013; Desrues, 2013: 416; Hoffman & König, 2013; Sidi Hida, 2011).

Thus, thanks to their previous activism in these groups, the young instigators of the F20M earned support from a broad-based coalition made up of older activists from human rights associations, left-wing political parties and their and other parties' youth sections, trade unions, the Islamists of *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* and *Al-Badil al-Hadari*, a significant part of the *Amazigh* movement, local 'co-ordinations', associations of emigrant communities in Europe, some noted intellectuals and even some big businessmen (Fernández Molina, 2011: 437).

The main actors in the F20M fall broadly into two camps. The first camp can be defined as traditional and reactionary, formed by Islamist and reactionary groups (mainly the Islamic group *Justice et Bienfaisance*, known as *Jamiat al-Adl wal-Ihsan*, and the *Parti Justice et Développement* – PJD), and the second as civic-democratic, aimed at the promotion of civic rights and rule of law, composed of student organizations and civil society associations,¹⁵ *Amazigh* associations,¹⁶ leftist parties¹⁷ and trade unions,¹⁸ among others.

The coalition of around 100 Civil Society organizations (CSOs) was soon structured under a 'National Council of Support for the 20 February Movement' (CNSAM20) in which the AMDH played a central role (Fernández Molina, 2011: 437). The CNSAM20 includes an executive committee of 16 members, and while it has no decision-making power, its main role is that of a financial backer (Hoffmann & König, 2013: 5–6).

The grievances and political demands voiced by the F20M through social media and demonstrations can be divided into those of a more socio-economic character and those that were aimed at political or democratic reforms. The first category includes grievances about the high costs of basic necessities and services, unemployment and low pay, poverty and exclusion, corruption and demands for social justice and rights, free education, housing etc. The more political demands included demands for the official recognition of the *Amazigh* language, profound constitutional and political changes to guarantee the rule of law and a free and independent legal system, embedded in a parliamentary (rather than executive) monarchy with a clear separation of powers. Many slogans called for the abolition of Article 19 in the then constitution, which stated that 'the King is the guarantor of the perennity and continuity of the State, ensures the respect of Islam and the constitution' and removes the king's decisions and actions from any judicial oversight (Faquih, 2011; Madani et al., 2012: 11; Transparency Maroc, 2009: 9).

Indeed, activists of the 20 February movement have increasingly dared to denounce the king and the *makhzen* more broadly by framing them as 'predators' and 'mafia', and highlighting the undemocratic nature of the current system. Some elements even questioned the king's religious authority (Darif, 2012; Fernández Molina, 2011: 436–437; Hoffmann & König, 2013).

According to the representatives of the AMDH,¹⁹ since the beginning of the protests, the movement refused to adopt a centralized structure, and the co-ordination between different groups was planned at the urban level by the different organizations. Even an association such as the AMDH did not have an overall plan, and the co-ordination between cities was limited to a national call for protest that was addressed to all the branches in the country.²⁰ The CNSAM20 operated at the

national level, while the associations and the parties acted at the local level without a real centralization of the movement.

We can thus argue that the movement had an embryonic structure with some connection between a national centre and local realities. There were bodies of consultation both nationally and locally. The first were addressing the latter, which in total autonomy organized events locally. In Marrakech, the F20M protest was organized by the *conseils locaux* that co-ordinated 14 different organizations among which were associations, parties' sections and trade unions. Through these *conseils locaux* the various groups formed a network and organized the protest actions that took place regularly on Sundays in Bab Doukkala square as well as in the streets and in other neighbourhoods. However, the *conseils locaux* acted as a consultative body which co-ordinated only the groups that decided to join it, while others who did not participate pursued their own actions independently.

Indeed, the split between the two camps described earlier at the national level was mirrored at the local level, and even within the camps the various demands never gelled into a cohesive force. For example, the AMDH protest was mainly centred on separation of powers, on social justice, on the need for constitutional reform and on the violation of civil rights; the UNEM advocated for students' rights and for youth issues, trade unions focused on worker's rights and *Amazigh* associations demanded the recognition of their culture and their social political rights, etc.

Hence, even though most of the groups found common ground in issues such as social justice, the division of powers and constitutional rights, they did not become a unified political movement. Rather, our respondents argued that the movement created a unique momentum that each group tried to exploit for its own benefit.

Mobilization Strategies in the F20M

We now turn to the question of the extent of interaction and mobilization strategies between the urban-based activist middle class and the rural population during the F20M. This implies an assessment of the extent to which this interaction is based on common socio-economic and political grievances and shared values, and hence we present the analysis by actor.

As for the AMDH, the regime had accused it of being behind the outbreak of F20M protests (González Riera, 2011: 41). Our findings²¹ show that the role of the association was significant but it cannot be considered the leader of the protest as the regime and some media have tried to show. According to the AMDH's activists interviewed,²² the association's role was important with regard to the co-ordination of certain fringes of the movement in urban areas and supporting the demands emerging from the protests in rural areas. It was thanks to the AMDH's national network of 92 branches, five preparatory committees and nine regional sections²³ that the AMDH's militants were able to get news about protests, arrests and rights violations all over the country, thereby creating a system of counter-information to the official discourse. Of particular importance is the function of communication among rural and urban areas. In this sense, the AMDH militants had the triple

function of activist, journalist and networker, alongside the organization's traditional role of defending arrested protesters.

The AMDH section in Ait Ourir supported the protest activities in the Zat valley by co-operating with an existing informal organization bringing together some of Tighedouine's youth, called *Tansikiyya Arbia Tighedouine*,²⁴ as well as local development associations. This is in line with Bogaert (2015: 131), who also stresses the importance of the *tansikiyya* (or *tansikiyat*) as a vital element in support of the F20M in small towns and the rural peripheries.

In two events in August and November 2011, these organizations managed to mobilize between 200 and 400 people in Tighedouine to claim better public infrastructure and services. The first protest held on 9 August 2011 was aimed at alerting the authorities about the fact that the unfinished sewerage network was polluting the irrigation waters, as well as pushing for the completion of the road between Tighedouine and Ansa. The second protest was held on 14 November 2011, again aimed at the same road issue. The protests were held at the commune headquarters (town hall) and led to the promise that the requests would be granted. While the sewerage network had been completed at the time of our fieldwork, the improvement and expansion works on the Tighedouine–Ansa road had not yet begun.²⁵

However, due to the constraints in the opportunity structure outlined above, and the discursive disconnect between urban-based activists and the rural population, the AMDH was not able to mobilize rural populations on a large scale. For example, the AMDH section of Marrakech failed to organize significant demonstrations in Ait Ourir, which is only about 30km away from Marrakech, at best mobilizing 70 out of a total of approximately 20,000 residents. According to various local AMDH members, although education levels are fairly high, the local authorities kept a close watch on potential protesters.²⁶ The population also did not believe in the success of the F20M and therefore preferred not to take the risk of exposing themselves to the security forces. This difficulty in undertaking political activity in the rural areas was echoed by most of the leftist parties and other associations in our study.

Moreover, the contacts with rural areas were almost always facilitated by militants, usually young people, mostly students, who immigrated to the urban areas and tried to bring the discourses of protest to their rural homeland. Therefore, most of the actions were organized on the basis of the individual capacity of these militants, based on local feelings of belonging and 'social capital' rather than on the basis of their association membership. It could be argued that these activists exhibit multiple identities; while their activism in urban centres is based on membership in a group, in the peripheries their engagement is possible only on the basis of belonging to the area. Their support is often reduced to negotiating with the authorities and helping with technical-bureaucratic and legal matters, as in the case of Tighedouine.

This case is similar to many others in which urban-based activists have supported the protests in their native areas on a personal basis. A member of ATTAC had a similar role in trying to support and politically frame a protest in Kal'a M'Gouna, in the peripheries of Ouarzazate, where he comes from. According

to him, 'peripheries remain such, marginalized and underdeveloped, forgotten until they become useful, as in the case of elections or the exploitation of resources'.²⁷

The difficulty for associations such as the AMDH to mobilize rural populations also lies in the fact that while in urban areas the protest was based on issues such as civil rights, the separation of powers, freedom of expression, the rights of young people and the right to employment and fair wages – all strongly ideological and political issues – the rural protest was characterized mainly by material claims, such as infrastructural development or access to certain resources. Examples cited by a respondent²⁸ are protests against the exploitation of water in the province of Ouarzazate and Zagora. In Zagora (a town 330 km south-east of Ait Ourir), local people started to protest against the lack of drinking water due to high levels of salinity, pollution and priority given to irrigation (Bentaleb, 2012; and AMDH member²⁹). In Ouarzazate (a town 170 km south-east of Ait Ourir), there were protests against a multinational company that is exploiting drinking water for commercial purposes, affecting local people's access to the resource.³⁰ As a member of the *Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc* (ADFM) stated, 'where the stomach is empty, it is difficult to talk about politics',³¹ highlighting a lack of linkages between basic rural needs and the political parties' and human rights organizations' claims.³²

Turning now to the *Amazigh* associations, their quest for recognition of *Amazigh* rights and culture can only be partially framed within the events of F20M, as some aspects go beyond the *Amazigh* groups' participation in the political uprising in the spring of 2011 and include an international dimension. During the fieldwork, we interviewed a member of the 'Réseau National *Amazigh* pour la Citoyenneté' (AZETTA), which is active in regional and international networks and has several local offices,³³ another member who was involved both in the national association *Tamaynoute* and the local association *Yagour* in Tighedouine, as well as an independent *Amazigh* activist.

These groups and individuals had different degrees of participation and involvement in the F20M. All maintained an equidistant position from both Islamist and leftist activists, using the space created by F20M to carry on their struggle for recognition of the *Amazigh* identity, language and culture, the fight against social exclusion, the demand for a democratic constitution that recognizes their rights, and the call for new elections on a democratic basis. The central bureau of the AZETTA left the choice of whether to participate in the F20M protests to its activists. According to its representative,³⁴ only one-third of its sections participated in the protest. The *Amazigh* activism was based on a shared sense of ethnic identity and on the widespread opinion among the *Amazigh* population that their social and cultural rights have been historically denied in Morocco. This allowed the *Amazigh* association to mobilize people both in urban and rural areas, enjoying a substantial degree of participation during the height of the F20M and afterwards.

As for the political party, trade union and student union members whom the second author interviewed, they are mainly engaged in urban areas, with the exception of the Islamist parties and movements, in particular Justice and Charity (*al-Adl wal-Ihsan*) which is also quite active in rural areas.

The two main Islamist groups that took part in the F20M are the *Parti de Justice et Développement* (PJD), since November 2011 part of the government, and the extra-parliamentary Justice and Charity (*al-Adl wal-Ihsan*) movement. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* was among the first to participate in the F20M, bringing a great number of participants into the movement and also qualifying themselves as one of the major forces.³⁵ But after the first four months, they abandoned the movement for two reasons. First, they felt distrusted by the organizations of the Left. While the Islamists accepted even the political lines of some atheist groups, they did not feel accepted as bearers of Islamic values. Moreover, often the slogans of other groups were also attributed to *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* both by the media and other F20M activists, and this was not acceptable to them. But the main reason is the fact that the constitutional response of the regime had weakened the F20M, and from that moment on, according to the Islamist leader, there were just two possible choices left: either the movement had to undertake a violent confrontation with the state, and this went against the non-violent principles of the organization, or it had to withdraw from the F20M. *Al-Adl wal-Ihsan* preferred to opt for the second choice.

Alongside the use of internet and of social networks such *Facebook* or *Twitter*, the diverse groups were organized through the massive use of mobile phones (the importance of which was underlined by all the respondents), as well as ‘traditional forms’ such as speeches in squares and leafleting. According to an AMDH member, given the still moderate penetration of ICT in Morocco, especially in rural areas, relying too much on the internet presented the danger of losing touch with the ‘lower’ and working classes who are less accustomed to these forms of communication and who prefer traditional means such as meetings and face-to-face discussion.³⁶ In the rural areas, therefore, the networking was based on personal contacts and the local and rural associations’ capacity to mobilize people.

In sum, while F20M urban-based activists tried to mobilize and support rural protests, the rural population did not look for a strong connection with the urban F20M to promote their interests. This can be explained by several reasons. First, the low level of political engagement in the rural area is the result of the socio-political disconnect between centre and peripheries as explained above. Second, the divergences between literacy rates and the nature of demands created a discursive disconnect between the centre and the periphery. A third reason is the *makhzen*’s control over rural areas. While the urban population has over the last decades experienced a greater freedom to demonstrate, rural people fear and distrust the political activity coming from the urban areas; this is linked to their perception that the F20M would not achieve their objectives.

Perceived Outcomes of the F20M

Reflecting a common sentiment in the population, a young student respondent³⁷ stated: ‘in Morocco, the constitution has prevented the protest becoming a revolt, and the revolt a revolution, like in other countries’.³⁸

Our respondents agreed that the *makhzen* was the real 'winner' of the F20M mobilization, establishing itself as the main actor and the only one able to promote change, and therefore probably emerged stronger than before, or at least not much weaker. The analysis that the swift announcements of structural reforms defused the protests and kept the regime's power base mostly intact is shared by several external observers (Dalmasso, 2012; Kamel and Huber, 2015; Maghraoui, 2011; Pace & Cavatorta, 2012; Silverstein 2011).

The respondents attributed this to the F20M's strategic errors, which they see as being a lack of leadership, leading to divisions and contradictions within the movement, no clear demands for change, and the inability or unwillingness of the movement to become an actor in the constitutional drafting process. The absence in the advisory councils involved in drafting the constitution delegitimized the protest on the one hand and, on the other hand, the constitution itself. The respondents from the trade unions and political parties (UMT, USFP, PADS, CDT) were generally happy with the new constitution,³⁹ only expressing some doubts and complaints about the delay in its application, while others (mainly the AMDH members⁴⁰) concluded that the F20M protests had been entirely in vain, given the contradictions in the constitution and the lack of its application. Nevertheless, most of them agreed that at least on paper, the new constitution is certainly an improvement compared to the previous constitutions. Only the UNEM rejected the 2011 constitution entirely since they do not consider it to be democratic or changing the actual political conditions, as it does not challenge the king's role. According to an AMDH member, the constitution 'is about everything but does not guarantee anything'.⁴¹

As for the recognition of *Amazigh* as an official language (article 5), it is mostly appreciated symbolically as an important first step for the recognition of *Amazigh* culture, although some respondents were sceptical about whether and how it could be made part of the national education system. The *Amazigh* groups recognized its importance, but they consider it mostly a populist move that will not end the marginalization of their culture, and this explained their boycott of the drafting process (with the exception of AZETTA that negotiated with the *makhzen*). They fear that their language will only be used in (propagandistic) official documents or alongside Arabic and French on certain road signs.⁴²

With regard to the establishment of the Consultative council on youth and associative action (articles 33 and 170), it was considered by several respondents⁴³ as designed to conceal the parliamentarians' inefficiency as well as a dangerous means of co-optation of the best youthful human resources of the parties. A young member of the USFP⁴⁴ who had been nominated by his party as a candidate for the council refused to accept the nomination and preferred to continue his work in the Marrakech branch of the USFP because his life 'would have changed, being co-opted by the regime, with a very high monthly wage', and this would mean that he would soon lose touch with the people's needs. He was conscious though that with 'that wage the life of my family would have changed, and many young politicians are attracted by this possibility'.⁴⁵

Finally, many consider the provisions for advanced regionalization (for directly elected regional councils, article 135) as a positive first step, but the fact that the

fundamental law has still not been drafted suggests to them that this, like many other reforms, will remain on paper. It is also likely that most of the population in the rural periphery is not aware of these provisions.

More broadly, then, the articles proposed by the constitution are generally appreciated, but at the same time after almost three years with little sign of its application, many now believe that the new constitution will not bring the changes they hoped for. Opinions on the F20M legacy were divided between those who consider it a closed chapter and those who consider the movement to be latent and revivable. According to an *Amazigh* independent activist,⁴⁶ ‘the persistence of the social, political and economic needs of the population which were not addressed by the new constitution will ensure that in the future something like the F20M will resurface’.⁴⁷

However, it seems that at the time of writing (spring 2014), the level of political participation in rural areas has decreased to the levels registered before February 2011. Exceptions are the *Amazigh* associations. For example, in 2013, *Tamaynoute* founded the *Front Amazigh* in Meknes, a national network composed of more than 500 *Amazigh* associations for which it is the national contact point. In rural areas, the F20M has inspired a few protests, but mobilizations there started in the early 2000s and have continued afterwards as in the examples mentioned earlier, mainly to address urgent socio-economic needs. The number of localized rural/peripheral protests has increased over the last decade (see Bennafla & Emperador, 2010; Bogaert, 2015; Hadj-Moussa, 2013; Lahbib, 2011: 18; Planel, 2011; Suárez Collado, 2015), despite the fact that important national development programmes in the areas of rural roads, electrification and drinking water were implemented by the mid-2000s. In urban areas, the F20M has certainly left its mark. Many organizations are still active and use their networks to face the daily social struggles.⁴⁸

Conclusions

Starting from the notion of vertical peripherality, this article has focused on the interactions between groups of actors in urban and rural areas in Morocco. We found that the F20M was a social movement characterized by a decentralized structure with some connections between the national centre and local, peripheral realities. The movement was composed of diverse social and political groups that created a unique political momentum in and through which each group, with different degrees of participation and involvement, could address their own demands to the regime. The protests assumed different characteristics in the urban centres compared to the rural peripheries, not least due to the limits posed by the opportunity structure of the High Atlas region. In contrast to other areas in Morocco such as the Rif and the Western Sahara, this region’s opportunity structure did not include already existing well-organized and politicized structures of mobilization and opposition (see Suárez Collado, 2015; Fernández Molina, 2015; for the case of Syria, see Leenders & Heydemann, 2012).

In urban areas the protest was based on ideological and political issues such as civil rights, the separation of powers, freedom of expression, the rights of young people and the right to employment and fair wages, while the rural protest was

characterized more by material claims, such as infrastructural development or access to certain resources.

Although the urban F20M events stimulated and inspired protests in rural areas, in practice there was a low level of interaction, limited to sporadic contacts between urban-based activists and citizens in the rural areas. This is due to the lack of engagement in the rural areas, particularly by political parties, and the difficulty that the more active associations such as the AMDH encountered in framing the socio-economic rural demands in terms of larger political grievances that matched their discourses in urban areas. The urban activists' attempts to support and politically frame rural protests were thus often reduced to negotiating with the authorities and providing help with technical-bureaucratic and legal matters.

The outcomes of the rural protests can be measured in terms of the increased demand for infrastructures, services and economic development in rural areas that has been, according to our respondents, partially inspired by the F20M. The protests started before the formation of the F20M and continued afterwards, but the rural peripheries continue to be marginalized and rural people do not have a very positive view, if any, of the constitutional achievements brought by the F20M.

Although many respondents stated that the F20M has failed in bringing about the hoped-for change, they admitted at the same time that the movement has created the conditions for the emergence of hitherto unheard popular demands. For this reason, most of our respondents declared that theoretically the new constitution is to be considered progressive compared to the previous ones. For example, the 'advanced regionalization' and many of the reforms contained in the 2011 constitution were deemed 'worthy of a modern country'.⁴⁹ But, at the same time, our respondents asserted that nothing had really changed for them, due to the lack of participation by representatives of the F20M in the constitutional drafting, the constitution's internal contradictions, and the long delays in passing the necessary implementing laws.

Notes

1. This is in line with Desrués' (2013: 421) argument that the main achievements of the F20M may lie in pushing the boundaries in the discursive sphere (the 'red lines' Hoffmann & König, 2013).
2. All interviews were conducted in person, except for one telephone interview (Interview 20, 2014).
3. All interview quotes in this article are the authors' translations. Most interviewees requested that we protect their anonymity.
4. This conceptualization is similar to that put forward by recent works in urban and regional sociology which emphasize the concepts of 'exclusion' and 'marginality/marginalization' and share an emphasis on the multidimensionality of group-related economic, political, educational and other disadvantages. This literature also focuses more on the processes that explain socio-spatial disadvantages (i.e. the 'peripheralization' processes), shifting from static to dynamic indicators and from attention to individuals and households to communities. Periphery is thus 'generally studied as a social relation with spatial implications' (Kühn & Bernt, 2013: 310), reflecting the horizontal and vertical dimensions in Rokkan's (1999) conceptualization.
5. The poverty rate in Al Haouz province (rural areas) was 15.8 per cent in 2007, according to the poverty map produced by the Haut Commissariat au Plan (see http://www.hcp.ma/Indicateurs-provinciaux-de-la-pauvrete-et-de-la-vulnerabilite_a648.html accessed on 1 May 2014).

6. Interviews with members of *La Voie Démocratique* (Interview 13, 2014) and USFP (Interview 14, 2014). Leveau (1985) shows convincingly how the monarchy restored the power of local elites to ensure it the support of the rural areas. See also Tessler (1981, 1982), and see Combs-Shilling (1989), Hammoudi (1997) and Garon (2003) on the importance of religious prestige and allegiance to explain the monarchy's survival. More recently, Hegasy (2007) shows how the habitus of youth is a major contributing element to the stability of the Moroccan monarchy.
7. Interview with a member of the AMDH central bureau (Interview 2b, 2013).
8. Data for 2004 for the population above 10 years of age, obtained from http://www.hcp.ma/Analphabétisme_a413.html (accessed on 25 March 2014).
9. Interview with a member of the AMDH (Interview 1b, 2013); interview with UNEM members (Interviews 4 and 5, 2014); and interview with an ATTAC activist (Interview 17, 2014).
10. Based on Bergh (2008) and according to the president of Tighedouine commune council during a brief visit in December 2013.
11. Interview 1c, 2013.
12. Interview 15, 2014.
13. For an elaborated article on how an online movement overflows to the 'real world', see Elghamry, 2015.
14. Interview 2a, 2013.
15. The most relevant F20M associations are the *Association pour la taxation des transactions financières et pour l'action citoyenne* (ATTAC), the *Association marocaine des droits humains* (AMDH), the MALI and the *Union nationale des étudiants marocains basistes* (UNEM).
16. Prior to the F20M, they were active in promoting the Amazigh language and culture in public arenas, such as schools and the media, calling for its official recognition as a national language in the constitution, and some even claimed regional autonomy (Layachi, 1998: 57–58). The fact that the king established a Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) in 2001 can be seen as one of their most important achievements to date, but this arguably also led to the co-optation of their demands and discourse by the *makhzen* (see Silverstein & Crawford, 2004).
17. The main parties involved in the F20M are the *Parti Socialiste Unifié* (PSU), *Parti de l'Avant-garde démocratique et socialiste* (PADS); the *Jeunesse Ittihadi*, the youth branch of the *Union socialiste des forces populaires* (USFP) and *La Voie Démocratique*, an extra-parliamentary party that does not participate in national elections.
18. Mainly the *Union Marocain du Travail* (UMT) and the *Confédération Démocratique du Travail* (CDT).
19. Interview with AMDH members (Interview 1c, 2013 and Interview 2a and 2b, 2013).
20. See also Desrués (2013: 416) and Hoffman and König (2013).
21. According to various AMDH members (Interviews 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3b, 19 and 23, 2013 and 2014) and other activists (Interviews 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 14 and 18, 2013 and 2014).
22. Interviews 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3b, 19 and 23, 2013 and 2014.
23. See <http://www.amdh.org.ma/en/about-amdh> accessed on 20 March 2014.
24. Interview 23, 2014.
25. Interview 24, 2014.
26. Interviews 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, 19 and 23, 2013 and 2014.
27. Interview 17, 2014.
28. Interview 1c, 2013.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Interview 21, 2014.
32. This resonates with the conclusion by Bennafla and Emperador (2010: 86). See also Oiry-Varacca (2012: 53) on this point for the Amazigh associations.
33. See <http://www.reseauamazigh.org/?lang=fr>, and Human Rights Watch (2009: 18–19).
34. Interview 10, 2014.

35. For strategic reasons and to avoid further control and repression by the authorities, the representatives of *al-Adl wal-Ihsan* did not want us to publish details about its organizational structure and mobilization strategy in rural areas. Interviews 15 and 16, 2014.
36. Interview 2b, 2013.
37. Interview 5, 2014.
38. Of course the constitution is only one of out of many dimensions of the regime's response to the protests (see Desrués, 2013; Fernández Molina, 2011; Hoffman & König, 2013).
39. Interviews 12, 14, 20, 25, and 26, 2014.
40. Interviews 1b, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, and 23, 2013 and 2014.
41. Interview 1a, 2013.
42. Interview 24, 2014.
43. Interviews 1b, 2a, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 18, 2013 and 2014.
44. Interview 18, 2014.
45. The civic spirit expressed here confirms the findings by Desrués and Kirhlani (2013) on young people's activism in political parties in Meknes.
46. Interview 11, 2014.
47. See also Benchemsi (2012) for this point.
48. Interviews 1a–c, 2a–c, 3a–b, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 18, 2013 and 2014.
49. Interviews 10, 12, and 14, 2014. Quote from Interview 10, 2014.

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