

## **Territorialized social movements: the Maghreb, from the margins to the center**

### **The case of the Hirak Rif movement**



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#### **Abstract**

Starting from a long-term ethnographic survey (2016-2019) on the "Hirak Rif" movement, this article questions the modalities of politicization of marginalized communities. Located in the north of Morocco, On October 28, 2016 in Al-Hoceïma, Mohcine Fikri died crushed in a dumpster while trying to recover the merchandise that had been confiscated by the authorities. The 31-year-old was a fish merchant. He was accused of being in possession of nearly 500 kg of swordfish, which was banned from fishing during this period. He was killed opposing the destruction of his cargo in a dumpster. His death was the starting point for the protest in the Rif. It is a region of northern Morocco whose history is marked by the repression and marginalization it suffered during the reign of Hassan II. Then the events of 1958-1959, followed by the issuance of a military dahir to make Al Hoceïma a military region, and the unrest of 1984 and the disturbances of 1984 and called the Rif people a slogan (awbash) in an official letter from the late King Hassan II, and all these elements reflect the state of the rift between the region

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and the central authority continuing until today that the era of reconciliation could not erase it. Rif residents agree that the reconciliation experience did not succeed in folding the countryside file in a way that amounts to reconciliation, where memory and history have been surpassed, until 2016, many Rif youth were arrested, the emigration of others and accusing the population of seeking separation and “work” abroad these concepts are consistent with the historical concept that was described by the region before independence” bled Siba”; what this means is that the Rif protest practice Identity memory practice, governed by social frameworks. This was observed through the presence of the Amazigh flag (Tamazgha) and the flag of the countryside of the countryside (Bandu Nereef), and the adoption of a discourse based on the principles of local and regional identities: common language (Tarifit), race, and collective history: Muhammad bin Abdul Karim al-Khattabi)and the slogans he raised The demonstrators. In addition to "pledging allegiance to the protests," Whenever the population of the Rif contests the policy of power, the Makhzen<sup>1</sup> responds with violence and marginalization of the region, thus preparing the conditions for a new cycle of protest and repression.

This in fact explains, to a large extent, the motive behind choosing the subject of this study, it appears that focusing on the historical factor is also very important to understand of the protests and to move away from interpretations one-dimensional focusing on economic and social dimensions only. The objective of this article is to include the study of the mobilizations of marginalized communities in a more global sociological analysis.

**Key words :**

Margins, Social Mobilizations, collective identity -welfare state- social state-Uneven Development

**General introduction:**

This study raises some questions related to the relationship between the countryside region and the central authority, and the title deliberately stipulated this relationship, with the aim of explaining the role of the latter in shaping the features of the state's political practice towards the rural community, as this practice is based on historical foundations and includes political relations between Rulers and the Ruled. As it is known, the Rif region had a great role in the history of Morocco, and this role was embodied in multiple stations in which it was either a creator of events or an active party in its course, which allows studying its relationship with the state, and coming out with elements in the light of

which the economic and social aspect is understood as the fruit of the political system .<sup>2</sup>

For all these considerations, we will try through this paper to present some scenarios that would shed light on the causal relationship between the reality of development in the countryside and its political history.

### **The Hirak: a convergence of heterogeneous actors**

Since 2011, North African societies have seen political upheavals, Numerous political, social, economic and institutional crises have resulted in popular revolutions or uprisings, massive protests also affect Morocco from the 20th February. Indeed (According to a study by Abderrahmane Rachik (2014), the number of demonstrations in Morocco rose from an average of two occurrences per day in 2005 to eight in 2010 to reach fifty-two in 2012.)

At the end of October 2016, Morocco once again saw great protests in the Rif of what should be called a "movement of the margins" opposing the local populations to the state. New collective protest actions; in the Rif are the product of inequalities accelerated by the entry into a neoliberal "era", which reveals the misdeeds of the accelerated widening of inequalities.

The emergence of the Hirak in the Rif at the end of October 2016 and the popular enthusiasm it aroused during 2017 made visible the long process of maturation of what should be called a "movement of the margins". In a restricted territorial context like the Rif, collective action is based on community or mythical ties, kinship relations, blood ties, neighborly relations or spatial proximity. The community social bond becomes the fuel of social protest. In Rif's case, the collective emotional dimension remains the first step in causing social discontent. But the explanation that we can put forward is rather linked to the far-reaching public policy carried out by the state, each time causing individual and collective frustrations. To better understand the recent social protests that have shaken public opinion, we must read them in their modern historical context.



(Wall writing in Al Hoceima)

- **Hirak Rif; Are we facing a social movement?**

The social movement is defined as: "a combined action of a group, with the objective of modifying the existing social organization or the defense of institutions threatened by other social movements".<sup>3</sup> The sociological literature emphasizes three essential points in the definition of the concept of the social movement: the notion of grouping and organization, the notion of program, social demands or ideology and, the notion of mobilizing actor. For Alain Touraine the three essential factors to define the social movement are; the identity of the movement - its opposition to an oppressive power - the totality (the project of society). Furthermore, linked to the same context according to Erik Neveu the great problem of defining the social movement Centered on "The hyper-specialization" which is gaining in the social sciences. Fragmenting them into micro communities of specialists ... However, the analysis of social movements cannot do without connections to fields of research such as the media; public policies; international relations... A second obstacle is that; because of their challenges; social movements give rise to hybrid discourse between science and taking sides. It can therefore be useful to exercise a double critical vigilance: questioning the normative load or the poorly mastered commitments in certain scholarly discourses; but also know how to identify in explicitly militant approaches the presence of fruitful intuitions; of a practical sense of activists who can be rich in social intelligence ".<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, this component is the main explanation for the differences between the multiple movements. In this context Giddens underlines that the emergence of social movements in the West could be thought of as a passage towards democracy. That is, the citizens trying to move beyond classical liberal democracy.

Another perspective is provided during the sixties by Ted Robert Gurr (1970) which allows the analysis of collective discontent. This theory makes it possible to distinguish protest as a conflict between socially constructed expectations and between the actual satisfaction which creates certain cases of frustration.<sup>5</sup> Ed Robert Gurr defined frustration as: "a state of tension, an expected and denied satisfaction, which generates the potential for discontent and violence."<sup>6</sup> He sees the intensity of the frustrations as the fuel for social movements. "<sup>7</sup> this point of view very revealing in the Hirak. The people of Rif believe that they do not occupy the social position which should correspond to their expected social status. The lexicon used by the demonstrators reflects this situation of frustration. The notion of **al-Hogra** (الحكرة) expresses the feeling of not being perceived socially at its true value. According to us; taking into account these considerations. It is from this theoretical framework that we can examine the participation of women in the Hirak of Rif in Morocco, which integrates all social strata of Rif dominated by the Makhzen as the main antagonist.

#### - **The identity of the Hirak Rif movement**

For decades the Rif region suffered from social poverty; a very high unemployment rate (22% of the population) - Illiteracy - - Provincial poverty - low medical coverage (1 doctor per 2,000 inhabitants) - economic activity based on sea fishing and transfers from relatives living to the foreigner - delay in the implementation of "El Hoceima, flagship city of the Mediterranean" - (which raises social expectations and hopes) also suffers from spatial exclusion.

What we also learn, that after the tragic death of Mohcine Fikri, this young seller of fish crushed by a dumpster on October 28, 2016, King Mohammed VI demanded the opening of a thorough investigation, but that did not calm the anger of the demonstrators, who responded by demanding sweeping changes, launching programs to build hospitals and universities, and investments. By sacrificing ministers and executives to calm Al Hoceima's anger, the king has dealt a further blow to the lack of confidence already displayed by public opinion with regard to politicians. But by sacrificing them, the king dealt a further blow to the social intermediation in crisis and the lack of confidence already displayed by public opinion with regard to politicians. Because the royal decision

reinforces the already predominant feeling: the mediation institutions are no longer credible and therefore find themselves rejected by the protesters who demand the direct intervention of the king; meaning that the protesters are not framed by organized civil or political structures, rather what unites them is a common belonging to my - tribal - historical identities, which produced spontaneous field leaders that are independent of any political or union organization or Collectivist. Indeed, the possibility of "political affiliation" among the activists, was causing a lot of confusion. This issue was dealt with from a major perspective: It is considered that belonging is a test that raises the possibility of containment and penetration by the state and its representatives, which explains why the leaders of the movement made statements rejecting the organizational structure of the protests, to the point of distrust of the existence of real institutions representing the state, and this was clearly stated, when Activists demanded the king to intervene. The thing that indicates a complete departure from traditional institutions and their narrowness in the movements' demands, if not to say their inability to find adequate answers to their demands, The decline of the mediation channels is a sub-factor that contributed to the aggravation of the situation, mainly related to the absence of negotiation structures between the state and society, which researcher Aziz Khamleish talked about in relation to the movements of March 1965 and June 1981.

The Hirak (Movement) of the Rif focuses and reflects like a mirror the fight of all the oppressed of Morocco for another society. Indeed; we cannot understand what is happening today in this region of Morocco without appealing to the past. The memory of this region keeps traces of painful memories with all the powers that dominated Morocco (The Rif War (1921/1926 by Abdelkrim I-Khattabi) (the Rif is presented and considered as a region of "siba" "Bled siba";<sup>8</sup> The independence and integration of the region into the new state (the events of 1958 - 1959) and 1984 following protests against the rise in food prices - King Hassan II called them people of the region Nador, Al Hoceima, Tetouan and Ksar el-Kebir of thugs, "awbach", 1: "These are retarded thugs who live on terrorism and theft [...], who use the youngest to commit their crimes [...]. These are the young people who go out into the streets. [...] The order was given for them to suffer the same punishment as their elders. "





(An image permanently present in the Al Hoceima protests)

In 2011 ; a new movement born in the Rif which was the product of a national context which corresponds to February 20. Unfortunately each time that the population of the Rif contests the policy of power, the state responds with violence and the marginalization of the region has deemed the protest of the Rif as undermining its internal security and to foment a plot against the State and belong to a separatist movement.



(Slogan raised during the protests in Al Hoceima)

- remain visible: ex; Gender put to the test in the Rif: Hirak in the feminine

The participation of women in the Movement (Hirak), despite the social and religious constraints that characterize this conservative region, remains remarkable. Because the economic and social conditions of women in the Rif are beyond comparison with those of men. These women, in their majority, are victims of the trinity of misery: degrading poverty, oppressive illiteracy and "shameful" femininity. So, the frustration of Rif women finds its meaning in the disconnect between their personal aspirations and the reality marked by the existence of multidimensional violence; Their life is a frantic struggle for survival. The victims of this painful trinity suddenly appeared to protest, which is unprecedented with all the protest movements that the Rif has known at different historical stages. On the contrary, the Rifain woman has never participated in any protest rally that Morocco has known in general.

The specificity of the Hirak movement; this is its "territorial space", where collective action is based on community or mythical links, kinship relations, blood ties, neighborly relations or spatial proximity. That is, the community social bond becomes the fuel of social protest.

Social relations there are more spontaneous, more emotional, more united, warmer, on the other hand in large cities where social relations are more anonymous, utilitarian and rational; which means that there is a common element between men and women in the Rif which is perceived as an external aggression likely to fruit the feeling of frustration and territorial belonging. "The fight against the Makhzen" the main antagonist which perpetuates inequalities, social and economic inequalities. Makhzen - State "and" Rif "are designated as two entities whose objectives do not coincide. In our opinion, the protests in the Rif were not determined solely by internal factors (unemployment - absence from university ...) or by exogenous factors such as the pressure of the IMF and the World Bank on the State , which resulted in the freezing of public investments and the liberalization of the prices of basic necessities. However, the deeper reasons for the ongoing protests can be found in the political history of the region women chant with slogans "Long live the people" ('acha acha'b), "His Majesty, the people" (jalalat acha'b), "His excellence, the people" (fakhamat acha'b), "Freedom , dignity, social justice "“ we are not scum ”(hna machi awbach); with men; they have adopted different forms of protest; occupation of squares and streets - gatherings and demonstrations... etc. Women are also massively affected: said Nawal Benaissa "It is true that we are in a conservative society, but the arrest of our brothers, our husbands, our nephews left us no choice. We also had to go out to demand their



release... I am addressing all Moroccans: the Rif is bleeding; The state oppresses us. . But we will continue to fight this injustice. They can arrest as many activists, young people and women as they want, we are not going to give up "

Nawal Benaissa)<sup>9</sup> became one of the main spokespersons for the Hirak protest movement, following the arrest of its leader, Nasser Zefzafi, in May 2017.



**(Nasser Zefzafi, Moroccan activist and "Hirak" leader, at a demonstration in May 2017)**

It should be noted that Nawal was arrested four times between June and September 2017. In February 2018, she was sentenced to a 10-month suspended prison sentence and a fine in the amount of 500 dirhams (approximately 50 US dollars) for “participating in an unauthorized demonstration”, “insulting law enforcement officials”, and “incitement to commit criminal offenses”. Al Hoceïma Criminal Court confirmed the verdict on January 17, 2019

have therefore implemented a plurality of forms of action; Despite the arrests did not desert. These examples show that women in the Rif have never taken to the streets exclusively for their own rights. They were and still are an integral part of a larger agenda for more social justice. Or, their exit into the public space was only a tactic to show the capacity to frame the movement, and this does not reflect the nature of the Rifaine society, which remains a fundamentally conservative society despite the manifestations of creativity. (the article starts from a conception that

makes public space not only a physical space, but also, and primarily, a space for public debate and collective action).



(After nighttime protests during Ramadan, Rif activists set up new forms of protest, such as beach rallies)

### **Summary**

The conclusions of this paper lead us to assert that the protests that the rural community is experiencing today have a large part of the "historical grievance" because the rural population has always been looking for the possibility of establishing a social relationship with the state apparatus through "conflict" because this factor is its only way to emphasize the necessity dealing with society in all its groups and preserving its dignity. Which explains why the rural protests were a mixture of two generations of protest movements: a generation whose demands were tied to what was materialistic of an economic and social nature, and the last post-material linked to symbolic demands of identity. As we have indicated, social suffering is not necessarily linked (to the poverty line ...), but is seen as a state of misery and a gap between the constructed social expectations and the perception of the present. Rif's experience can actually help us understand what is happening in the margins allows, in our opinion, to better understand larger forms of mobilization while inscribing them in a historical process of constantly evolving political protest. Returning to our topic briefly, we can say that all the slogans carried by the demonstrators reflected the anger of the rural population and their rejection of the state's policy in the social and economic fields. What distinguishes these slogans is that they do not refer to any ideological background except that they are based to a large extent on

"history". This new expression of protest reflects a discourse in which belonging to a specific group (the Rif) and the feeling of belonging to Moroccan society are intertwined. It should be noted that identity has long been a source of meaning and social significance, especially since our Moroccan society, like many societies, is going through a historical stage characterized by the disintegration of institutions and the loss of their legitimacy. The endeavor of rural people, through their behavioral embodiment, is to gain recognition and lift the marginalization of their region. They are also constantly looking for a tactic to suppress the hegemonic ideology and symbolic components of the state. As for the separation accusation they face every time they go out to protest, it remains just "improvisation from the state", which exacerbates the situation in the absence of all the material elements for this charge.

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<sup>1</sup>There are many studies that dealt with the Makhzen institution in different contexts, most of which were concentrated in the nineteenth century, most notably the colonial school, (E. Doutté-H. Gaillard- Michaux-Bellaire- R. Montagne-Reynier...)

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<sup>3</sup>E.Willems, Dictionnaire de sociologie. Paris : Librairie Marcel Rivière et Cie, 1970, p. 206

<sup>4</sup>E. Neveu ; Sociologie des mouvements sociaux ; La découverte ; collection Repères . P 128.

<sup>5</sup> This theory is valid for the study of recent social protest movements like the Rif movement.

<sup>6</sup>T.R. Gurr, Why men rebel, Princeton University Press, 1970

<sup>7</sup>E. Neveu, Sociologie des mouvements sociaux, Paris, La découverte, 1996. pp. 40-41.

<sup>8</sup>Said charles- André Julien « le Rif avait été ; de tous temps ; un pays siba ; dont la révolte de Bou Hamara ) avait accentué le caractère aux يوحمارة (Jilali ben Driss Zerhouni el Youssefi surnommé Rogui Bou Hmara, yeux des Européens. A la fois bastion et refuge ; ce massif montagneux ; qui sé'étend au nord du Maroc sur une longueur de 300 kilomètres et une largeur de 50 à 80 ; était d'accès difficile ; soit par une cote



inhospitalière ; avec de rares ports ; soit depuis les vallées de la bordure méridionale. Le cloisonnement et la raideur des versants favorisaient l'isolement des tribus sédentaires ; dans des vallées compartimentées ; généralement surpeuplées ; ou les cultures ne suffisaient pas aux besoins et contraignaient une partie des montagnards à l'émigration. Le particularisme aboutissait à un régime de conflits meurtriers entre les individus ; les clans ou les tribus d'une intensité telle que seul le jour du souq mettait une trêve temporaire aux vendettas. Ni les impositions frappant le meurtrier ; suivies de sanctions drastiques s'il se dérobait ; ni les amendes prohibitives imposées aux fractions de la tribu ; ni les interventions arbitrales des cheiks ; destinées à maintenir une acéphalie organisée ; ne réussissaient à empêcher les tueries qui épuisaient le pays » Charles –

André Julien. *Le Maroc face aux impérialismes 1415-1956*. Paris . 2editions J. A. 1978. P121.

<sup>9</sup> Nawal BenAissa, 36 years old - mother of 4 children -. She was Hirk's mouthpiece for quite a while .and also Nasser Zefzafi's mother is one of the women who supported Hirk from the start. She was the one who inspired many women to come out which allowed the passage towards a feminization of the movement.

**Silya Ziani** ; young activist has developed an interesting feminist approach by inviting women to go out and occupy the streets like men.