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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PUTTING THE MARGINS AT THE CENTER: AT THE EDGES OF PROTEST IN MOROCCO AND EGYPT

Brecht De Smet
Ghent University, Department of Conflict & Development, MENARG

Soraya El Kahlaoui
Ghent University, Department of Conflict & Development, MENARG

ABSTRACT: Almost ten years have passed since the Arab uprisings of 2011 turned the social-political equilibrium of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region upside down. Despite successful counter-revolutionary policies, protests continue to challenge the *status quo*. The main difference with the 2011 is that current and ongoing political and social protests are less "visible" as they happen at the "margins" of society. This paper investigates the role of marginality and marginalisation in the cycle of protests and the dynamic of revolution and counter-revolution in the MENA region. The continuous eruption of social contestations in the rural and urban margins of North Africa forces us to reconsider previous academic analyses which understood the so-called "Arab Spring" as a predominantly urban youth movement, principally from a middle-class background. Protests at the margins not only constitute the hidden history of revolts of 2011, they also continue these revolts in a less visible, less concentrated, and less articulated manner. Putting the margins at the centre of analysis allows us to conceive of a cycle of protest not only in diachronic terms, as a temporal ebb and flow of contestation, but also a socio-spatial process of converging and refracting protests – from the margins to the centre and back again. We take a closer look at events in Egypt and Morocco. For the Egyptian case we investigate rural and urban protests against the new Law on Building Violations. Through the lens of marginalisation, we are able to reveal the contours of a socio-spatial hierarchy of protests, which has been shaping social movements in Egypt long before 2011. The second case deals with Morocco and presents a counter-story of the post-2011 democratic transition

which has led, to everyone's surprise, to the uprising of the Hirak du Rif and Jerada. This counter-story traces the reconfiguration of power relations in society, thanks to mobilisations that took place often underground and at the margins.

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CORRESPONDING AUTHOR(S): brecht.desmet@ugent.be soraya.elkahlaoui@ugent.be

1. Putting the Margins at the Centre

A decade has passed since the Arab uprisings of 2011 turned the politics of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region upside down. Despite successful counter-revolutionary strategies, new waves of mass revolt in Algeria, Lebanon, and Sudan have shown that the movement for social justice, freedom, and dignity has not yet exhausted itself. Even in those countries where popular insurrections appear to have abated, regimes are still confronted with political instability and social upheaval. The main difference with the 2011 uprisings is that the current, ongoing political and social protests are often less "visible" as they happen at the "margins" of society.

The eruption of social contestations in the rural and urban peripheries of North Africa has forced scholars to challenge academic analyses which understood the so-called "Arab Spring" solely or predominantly as an urban youth movement, principally from a middle-class background (Bayat 2013; Ayeb and Bush 2014). What is striking about these movements – in contrast to many experts' predictions – is that they did not emerge from traditional political institutions such as parties, trade unions, and NGOs (Gause 2011; Zemni 2013). Such organisations were either incapable of representing alternative and sustainable political solutions or were they overtaken by popular demands and pushed towards a more radical course (Catusse 2013; Rivetti 2015). People coming from the impoverished rural and urban margins of society were, and still are, at the forefront of these movements (Rachik 2010, 2014; Bogaert 2015). It is therefore crucial that we revise and renew our analyses of the dynamics of contention and include "the margins" as important sites of political transformation and innovation (Tsing 1994; Bayat 2015; Martiniello 2015; Borras 2016).

In this article we do not deploy "the margins", "marginality" and "marginalisation" as strictly defined concepts, but as exploratory devices that allow us to ask new questions to existing case studies. Our main goal is not to present new fieldwork, but to reflect on these cases from the perspective of politics at the margins. The first case study opens with an investigation of the 2019-2020 protests in Egypt against the Reconciliation Law on Building Violations. We reject the notion that these rural protests are something new by disentangling the lineages of discontent in the countryside. We move on to workers' and middle-class protest in the mid-2000s, which brings us to the spatio-hierarchical dimensions of the recent cycle of discontent in Egypt. We explain these dimensions in terms of processes of marginalisation. The second case offers a counter-story of the post-2011 "democratic transition" in Morocco. Since 2011, Morocco has experienced a series of social upheavals that shook the political system and revealed important shifts in the forms of resistance that protesters adopted as well as in the regime's responses[1]. Through these two cases we place "the margins at the centre" of this analysis of the cycles of protest in the MENA. We discuss how the

[1] All data on the Moroccan case is based on Soraya El Kahlaoui's doctoral thesis (2018).

balance of power is being reconfigured through the ongoing resistance of marginalised communities, the articulation of resistance by political opposition forces, and the concomitant (re)actions of the state. Such a triangular relation informs the repertoires, resources, and subjectivities of the actors involved in contentious politics.

1.1 On Marginalisation

Since the 1990s the concept of marginalisation has been taken up by anthropology (Tsing 1994). Marginalisation is not used to demarcate a site of exclusion or deviance from social norms, but to "indicate an analytic placement that makes evident both the constraining, oppressive quality of cultural exclusion and the creative potential of rearticulating, enlivening, and rearranging the very social categories that peripheralize a group's existence" (Tsing 1994: 279). This anthropological interpretation helps us to understand how the 'margins' can also constitute a site of transformation, creating different forms of power within the global system. We want to reconnect this interpretation with the older political-economic literature on marginalisation, especially as formulated by Samir Amin (1976) in the 1970s. Here, marginalisation is understood in terms of the economic structure of the country and its relation to the global economy. While Amin originally developed his theory of marginalisation in the context of a (neo)colonial export sector restructuring the economies of the Global South, its application arguably extends to more recent transformations in the global capitalist economy. Global capitalist development consists of a continuous process of integration and exclusion of labour power. This generates specific social and ecological challenges for large sectors of the population that are excluded from new property relations. The breakdown of the developmental state through market liberalisation and privatisation went hand in hand with the exclusion of sections of the labour force, especially in the agricultural sector. The WTO Doha Round of 2001 initiated such a moment of exclusion for traditional peasant farming in the Global South. The introduction of capital-intensive, export-oriented, commercial agriculture based on fertilizers, pesticides, quality seeds, mechanization, and access to markets exponentially increased the productivity gap between "advanced" and "traditional" farming, excluding smallholding peasants from the agricultural revolution (Amin 2003).

Amin's concept of marginalisation through processes of integration and exclusion can be connected to Bair and Werner's (2011) more recent analysis of articulation and disarticulation of commodity chains. Their "disarticulation approach" focuses on "the reproduction of uneven geographies of capitalism as they relate to processes of incorporation and exclusion from global commodity circuits" (Bair and Werner 2011: 1000). They criticise the inclusionary bias in global commodity and value chain analysis, which presupposes that globalisation always entails growing participation and integration in economic networks and production chains. Instead, much like Amin, they point to practices of dispossession, disinvestment, and exclusion that go hand in hand with "development" and globalisation. Similarly, we argue that the transformations of global and MENA economies within that system have a direct effect on the political, social, and cultural exclusion of sectors of the urban and rural population from society. Since the 1980s, the policies of neoliberal dispossession and financialization have contributed to processes of marginalisation in the MENA (Ayeb and Bush 2014; Dillman 2001). The bread riots that took place in Morocco in 1981 and in Tunisia in 1984 illustrate perfectly the process, as well as the resistance it generated in the region.

Finally, marginality is related to processes of state formation and transformation. Although marginal communities are characterised by their exclusion from political and civil society and the "formal" economy, they nevertheless play an important role in state formation (Bellagamba and Klute 2008). Marginality does

not constitute a "borderspace", but rather it recomposes the state by creating internal dynamics between marginalised communities and state institutions (Agier 2012). Organisations such as communities living in spaces of urban informality or in tribes co-constitute the state by establishing a permanent conflict over the law (Balandier 2013). This conflict over legitimacy implies that the state enters into a negotiation process that is always subject to the evolving balance of power between these communities and state institutions. Hence, processes of state formation, marginalisation, and resistance appear as the three key elements explaining cycles of contention.

In this article we do not take the general political economy of marginalisation as our object of study. Instead, we zoom in on specific cases that reveal different dimensions of politics at the margins. We start our investigation of the Egyptian case study with the recent rural and urban protests against the Reconciliation Law on Building Violations. This leads us to comments on the often-invisible role of peasants in cycles of contention. Next, we discuss the role of middle-class and labour protesters in order to suggest a socio-spatial hierarchy of protests that is closely entwined with processes of marginalisation.

2. Egyptians thrown into the streets

On Sunday night 20 September 2020, protesters took to the streets in 17 different governorates in Egypt, demanding the departure of al-Sisi and an end to the Reconciliation Law on Building Violations, which would lead to fines and the demolishing of illegal housing in rural and urban areas. The protests pressured the government into delaying the implementation of the law until the end of 2020. Protesters also articulated their discontent with inadequate education, healthcare, infrastructure, and the rise of basic commodity prices. Mohamed Ali, the army contractor and whistle-blower whose widely shared videos about systemic corruption mobilised some two to three thousand protesters already in 2019, had called the protests. In his videos, Ali accused the al-Sisi family and army generals of using public money to build their own palaces. On 20, 21 and 27 September 2019, up to three thousand Egyptians had taken to the streets, calling for al-Sisi to resign. The protests were violently repressed with tear gas and live ammunition. In the biggest wave of arrests since 2013, some four thousand people were detained, among whom activists and opposition leaders who did not even participate in the demonstrations.[2] Ali himself, who resides in Spain, was sentenced to five year in absentia because of tax evasion.[3]

At first, Ali's call to protest a year later, on the anniversary of the September 2019 demonstrations, was heeded by small groups of protesters only. On 25 September 2020 hundreds of people demonstrated in a "Friday of Rage" in Cairo, Giza, Damietta, Luxor, as well as several provincial towns and rural villages. At least 496 protesters were arrested.[4] One protester was killed in al-Blida village in Giza.[5] Another man was

[2] See: https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200922-does-egyptian-army-contractor-mohamed-ali-really-have-a-magic-wand/

[3] See: https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2019/12/10/egypts-palacegate-whistleblower-gets-five-year-sentence-in-absentia

[4] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/3/amnesty-urges-egypt-to-release-detainees-after-rare-protests

[5] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/26/one-killed-in-egypt-as-protestors-demand-el-sisi-resign

shot in the head in Luxor on 30 September after he castigated a police officer for beating his father.[6] Although the 2020 protests were smaller in scale than the 2019 ones, they lasted for several days.

The main grievances of the Egyptian demonstrators revolved around the aforementioned Law on Building Violations, which threatened to demolish thousands of illegally-built homes, not only in shantytowns, but also in residential areas. Illegal housing is as much an urban as a rural issue, as people have squatted and built on agricultural reclamation land.[7] Despite having previously regularised illegal land squatting in 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2017, the state and especially the Ministry of Agriculture had attempted on multiple occasions to clear lands and evict squatters (El-Nour 2019: 554). In 2020, the government claimed that it wanted to stop the encroachment of housing on arable land and channel funds into much needed infrastructure and housing projects.[8] However, there are almost no houses in poor areas that meet building regulations, especially in rural villages. By April 2021 more than two million reconciliation requests had been submitted for a total of EGP 16 billion in fees.[9] Regardless of legislators' intentions, the law appears as campaign to extort money from the lowest income groups. An optimistic estimate of poverty in Middle and Upper Egypt puts 55 to 67 percent of people in the Asyut and Luxor governorates respectively below the poverty line. This estimate was made before the disastrous economic impact of the covid-19 pandemic[10] and the increase in the prices of electricity, drinking water, gas, and public transport.[11] Most people cannot pay even the lowest fines of 50 EGP per square meter for illegal residential housing and 180 EGP per square meter for illegal shops and other commercial buildings.[12] Moreover, in urban regions building licenses have been suspended since May 2020, which spells disaster for the income of about five million people who depend on the construction sector in Upper Egypt.[13] Hence it does not come as a surprise that in the Atfeeh neighbourhood in Giza, clay brick manufacturers led the protests.[14]

Although over the years unlicensed badly built or modified constructions have indeed resulted in fires and collapses, the current law appears as one of the state's many attacks on Egyptians' livelihoods since 2013, extorting fines and disciplining populations. Seven years after the 2013 coup, ordinary Egyptians have become poorer while the military elites have enriched themselves through osmotic public-private partnerships (Sayigh 2019). Furthermore, people do not have access to institutional venues to articulate their social grievances. Neither formal state structures, nor the old moral economy that was once in place (cf. Posusney 1993) offer ways to petition the regime, let alone to promote an alternative policy agenda. Since 2013, al-Sisi has worked to consolidate the power of the state through the strengthening of the military and of his leadership over the masses, promising stability and prosperity in opposition to the crumbling Muslim

[6] https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20201001-egypt-police-kill-luxor-man-then-shoot-mourners-at-his-funeral/

[7] http://marsadomran.info/en/policy_analysis/2020/01/1880/

[8] https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/10/5/egyptians-struggle-as-authorities-crackdown-on-illegal-housing

[9] https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/50/1201/408195/AlAhram-Weekly/Egypt/Amid-the-rubble.aspx

[10] https://timep.org/commentary/analysis/how-has-egypt-navigated-the-ongoing-global-economic-fallout-as-a-result-of-covid-19/

[11] https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200929-even-egyptians-in-rural-areas-are-protesting-again/

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibidem.

[14] https://www.madamasr.com/en/2020/09/28/feature/politics/sisi-public-prosecution-acknowledge-protests-after-week-of-silence-68-minors-released/

Brotherhood-led presidency of Mohammed Morsi (De Smet 2016). After the presidential elections of 2014, however, his popularity and legitimacy plummeted. While externally the regime was stabilised by financial and diplomatic support from the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, internally there was a process of "hegemonic contraction", which "involves those moments when elites, for a variety of reasons, start to undermine existing forms of consent and sites of articulation, without replacing them with satisfactory alternatives" (Chalcraft 2016: 36). The current regime only conceives of political stability and social issues in terms of state security, leading to repression of political activism, critical journalism, strikes, and any other form of mobilization from below. This in turn magnifies the regime's unaccountability to the general public, as highlighted by Ali's condemnation of the regime's corruption.

2.1 The meaning of the demonstrations

The protests of September 2020 did not represent a general uprising against the Reconciliation Law on Building Violations. Yet the significance of these demonstrations was not in the numbers of protesters. Firstly, observers pointed out that demonstrators were "breaking the barrier of fear",[15] even though they risked fines between 5,000 to 30,000 EGP and prison sentences just for participating in protests. Currently, there is no space for genuine political opposition to the regime, let alone for building a popular movement or street activism. Social media outlets are monitored and censored. Hence Egyptian activists are understandingly sceptical about calls for mobilisation that come from abroad, such as Mohamed Ali's: people who spontaneously take to the streets would be crushed by the police. This leads to momentary explosions of popular anger without any real impact or movement-building strategy. However, the mobilisations showed to the larger population that even in the most adverse conditions protesting was still possible – and that the regime took it seriously. Discontent even turned directly against the figure of al-Sisi, with the tearing down posters of the president and chants of "Don't fear, Sisi must walk" and "Go Balhah"[16]. By targeting al-Sisi, for the first time since the 2011 SCAF-led "transition",[17] the military stood at the centre of popular outrage.

Second, unlike protests between 2014 and 2018, the demonstrations of 2019 and 2020 were national in scope, in the sense that they were organised in different localities all over the country. Moreover, observers were surprised to find the most militant protests in the countryside, and even nicknamed the events as a "Galabiya uprising"[18] in reference to the traditional rural dress. The independent advocacy platform *Egyptwatch*, for example, claimed that: "For the first time in decades, a popular movement began in Egypt from rural areas, which have previously been described by many political forces as stable and loyal to the ruling regime."[19] However, while Mubarak's reign was characterised by a degree of hegemonic policies that attempted to incorporate tribal and village leaders and their interests into the state, the stereotypical view of a more or less static countryside before and after 2011 is problematic. This prejudice is itself an ideological

[15] https://www.aljazeera.com/program/inside-story/2020/9/27/can-protesters-achieve-political-change-in-egypt/

[16] Balhah, meaning red dates, denotes someone who claims to be smart and wise but lacks these qualities.

[17] After Mubarak resigned, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces – i.e. military leadership – took over presidential executive and legislative powers to organise a democratic transition.

[18] https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20201001-egypt-police-kill-luxor-man-then-shoot-mourners-at-his-funeral/

[19] https://egyptwatch.net/2020/09/30/why-did-the-egyptian-countryside-rise-up-against-al-sisi/

product of the processes of rural marginalisation, which in turn reinforce this marginal position, hiding the role of peasants in the recent cycle of contention.

2.2 Kick-starting the cycle of protest

"Egypt's peasants have been mostly absent from narratives about the 'Spring' of 2011", Francesco de Lellis (2019: 583) underlines. They were invisible, not, of course, to specialised scholars or the involved communities themselves, but to the wider national and international civil and political community. Social (in)visibility is not only a function of the protests themselves, but also of their contexts: some protests are ignored or belittled and *rendered invisible* to those outside of the involved communities. The apparent invisibility of peasant struggles before, during, and after the revolutionary process led observers to the conclusion that peasants were at best passive, at worst rural auxiliary forces of Mubakarist reaction. This view harkens back to the time of the decolonisation struggle, when the native bourgeoisie, *effendiyya* (modern middle classes), and industrial workers were framed as the modernising forces against the "feudal" landlords and *fellahin* (peasants) (Beinin and Lockman 1987). Yet peasants in Egypt have a long tradition of resistance, going back to colonial and pre-colonial times (Chalcraft 2016). The liberalisation of agricultural prices and markets that began in 1987 provoked a new cycle of rural contention. The Egyptian government promoted "a US farm-type model of extensive capital-intensive agriculture driven by market liberalisation, export-led growth and tenure reform" (Bush 2007: 1604). The rationale of liberalisation was that rising prices of agricultural produce would attract domestic, regional, and international capital to invest in rural production. As small-holding peasants were seen as less productive, the state assessed that support to big landowners and large-scale farming was the appropriate way to conform to IMF-regulated free trade policies and cash crop production (Bush 2016). These policies pushed peasants to mobilise against the often-violent dispossession of their lands and other means of production by state-backed actors. The main provocation was Law 96 of 1992, which removed the price cap on land rents implemented by the Nasserist regime in the 1950s. While in the past the Egyptian government had largely resisted the socially destabilising economic reforms that came with IMF loan packages, with the 1991 Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program it fully embraced neoliberal recipes to avert a financial crisis. This episode illustrates how processes of rural marginalisation in Egypt are closely entwined with global and regional political-economic restructurings.

Before 1992 smallholding peasants had been subaltern allies of the broad regime coalition, offering their loyalty in exchange for rent control and protection of ownership rights. By the mid-1990s, half of the rural population lived in poverty, an increase of ten percent in comparison to 1990 (Mitchell 1999: 463). The attack on their means of existence forcefully shattered the rural moral economy, leading to protests in more than a hundred villages that took the form of "demonstrations, road blocks, sending telegrams to government bodies, organising about 200 'peasant conferences' (…) and setting up 'peasant committees' (…) to resist the law" (De Lellis 2019: 586). Peasants forged connections with leftist activists from outside of their communities, ranging from journalists, NGOs such as the Land Center for Human Rights and its splinter groups, to party committees such as *Tagammu*'s (socialist party) Egyptian Peasants' Federation. These activists organised solidarity meetings, informed the peasants about the Tenancy Law, gathered signatures for petitions, and attempted to unite the fragmented protests into a coherent social movement. However, in 1997, when the law was actually implemented, leading *Tagammu* activists got cold feet, fearing an open confrontation with the Mubarak regime. They called off a mass protest of thousands of peasants in Cairo, which could have brought their plight at the forefront of Egyptian politics. This failure, in turn, resulted in

the collapse of the peasant movement and a return to forms of "everyday resistance" and individual survival strategies (De Lellis 2019: 587-8). By 2007 the violent repression of peasant resistance had resulted in "119 deaths, 846 injuries and 1409 arrests" (Bush 2007: 1606), a rural drama that remained under the radar of most domestic and international observers.

Protests by poor peasants – one of the most marginalised social groups in Egyptian society – had constituted the first step in the chain of contention that would lead to the 2011 uprising. Much more "visible" scenes of popular mobilisation took place a few years later in Cairo when middle-class activists gathered around the themes of anti-imperialism and democracy in the first half of the 2000s, leading to the establishment of *Kefaya* (Enough) in 2005, which politicised a new generation of urban youth. The rise of Internet activism facilitated political debates, the dissemination of information, and street mobilisation (Hirschkind 2011). The activists and networks that emerged from this civil-democratic movement played a key role in organising the first, small-scale demonstrations on 25th January 2011 (Joya 2011: 369).

However, in addition to state repression and internal bickering, *Kefaya* lost momentum also because it could not mobilise beyond the social circles of urban students, intellectuals, professionals, and other middle-class groups (Mackel 2012: 21). The movement failed to integrate its explicitly political, anti-Mubarak rhetoric with the social concerns of the urban poor, the working class, and the peasantry. After *Kefaya*, the centre of gravity shifted to industrial protests, with the movement of textile workers in Mahalla al-Kubra reaching its zenith (De Smet 2015). The protests in the state-owned textile sector reveal another type of marginalisation in the wake of neoliberal reform, which tried to solve inefficiency due to chronic underinvestment by cutting labour costs. The successful strikes of the Mahalla workers between 2006 and 2008 encouraged workers in other industrial sectors and governorates to protest low wages, adverse working conditions, lack of representation, and the threat of privatisation, ranging from cement workers in Tura and Helwan, to Cairo subway drivers to bakers (Beinin and Al-Hamalawy 2007). Rural areas near industrial hotbeds such as Mahalla or Kafr al-Dawwar were also drawn to forms of collective resistance (De Lellis 2019: 589).

When Mahalla worker leaders planned a new strike on 6 April 2008, Cairo-based political activists, bloggers, and intellectuals seized on the event to call for a political "general strike" against the regime. The 6 April campaign was organised partly in genuine solidarity with the Mahalla movement, which had impressed political activists. Yet political activists also hoped to use the 6th April strike as a springboard for reviving a nation-wide democratic movement against Mubarak. Their usurpation of Mahalla's protests was legitimised by their observation that workers' protests remained "economic" and "uncoordinated" (Shapiro 2009: 3) – thus in need of an external "push" to become a real force for change. Labour activists worried that the adventurist calls for a general strike, instead of support for the workers' concrete demands, would provoke the state into harsh countermeasures, which was exactly what happened. On the day of the strike, security forces arrived to the factory before the workers. They locked them out and took over the machines (Al-Hamalawy 2008). Internally divided, strike leaders decided to call off the strike and participated in street protests as citizens, shifting their demands to the high price of bread (Beinin 2011: 199). They were met with violence and the revolt was quelled. While there were some symbolic solidarity actions in other cities, in general the adventurist calls for a "mass strike" was not heeded and the Mahalla uprising remained isolated.[20]

[20] Interview with S.H., 12 November 2010, Mahalla, Cairo.

Nevertheless, the Mahalla strikes had a lasting impact on class-based and civil-democratic struggles. The protests initiated a wave of labour actions that engaged the whole Egyptian working class. Between 2004 and 2010 some two million workers went on strike (Clément 2011: 71). Moreover, the workers' movement began to formulate more general demands, such as a minimum wage, and it started organising in trade unions independent from the regime. Conversely, as a network facilitating communication between activists, the 6 April movement proved to be crucial in the lead-up to the 25 January 2011 uprising. However, the 6 April movement, for example, failed to organise anything substantial on the ground until 2011.

From peasant struggles in the 1990s over middle-class protests in the early 2000s to workers strikes in the late 2000s, these two decades did not entail a linear, incremental process leading to the 2010-2011 revolutionary call of "we want the end of the regime". The uprisings in the MENA were the result of a long, contradictory and uneven process of resistance, which was itself preceded by other historical episodes of social and political struggle (Abdelrahman 2014; Hanieh 2013; Chalcraft 2016).

2.3 From revolts to revolution - and back to revolts

The salience and velocity of the events of the so-called "Arab Spring" demanded a novel interpretative framework that went beyond the dominant paradigms of persistent authoritarianism, religious obscurantism, and political backwardness (Beinin and Vairel 2011). As the protests endured, international observers, domestic opposition figures, and even regime forces began to cast "the youth" as the prime actor of an "Internet revolution" against the regime. This representation of the revolutionary process and its supposed agent was not only rooted in an immediate, superficial reading of the unfolding events, but it also built upon an already existing narrative about the development of political opposition in Egypt, which overemphasised the significance of the "virtual activism" of a small group of educated, tech-savvy, upper middle-class urban youth (cf. Vargas 2012).

Since the 25 January uprising, activists and scholars have criticised such a simplistic reading. Although it were indeed young men and women who initiated and spearheaded the protests (Al-Bendary 2011), the social composition of the protesting masses was not limited to young revolutionaries: "Protesters came from all walks of life – rich and poor, devout and secular, old and young" (Rashed 2011: 26). Defining the protests as merely an uprising of the youth narrows its scope and undermines its claims as a broad, popular movement (Winegar 2011). The image of the young revolutionary was a class stereotype, representing a *particular* youth: modern, urban, middle-class, and social media savvy, such as Google employee Wael Ghoneim – a typecast that, perhaps, reflected the predominant social composition of those who engaged in social media rather than that of the revolutionary actors themselves (Aouragh and Alexander 2011: 1355). The dissenting voices and interests of the rural, unemployed, poor, or uneducated young people were subsumed and homogenised under the catch-all category of "youth".

With regard to the notion of a "Facebook revolution", critical scholars quickly pointed out that Facebook was one of the many tools for the organisation and mobilisation of protesters (Aouragh and Alexander 2011: 1354). The roots of the revolution were traced back to the emergence of "political" and "economic" protests and movements during the past two decades, when human rights activists, anti-war protesters, students, political parties, radical NGOs, workers, peasants, and state employees assembled (Zemni, De Smet and Bogaert 2013). These real – as opposed to virtual – struggles created grassroots modes of collective action, networks, and resources that were successfully mobilised during the 25 January uprising.

The bulk of the protesters during the 18 day-long uprising in 2011 consisted of the urban popular masses - unemployed youth, street vendors, small shopkeepers, housewives, taxi drivers, and wage laborers, – who

demanded not only freedom, but bread and social justice too (Alexander and Bassiouny 2014: 12). The demands of different class-based and civil-democratic movements, which have been active in the previous decade, were fused in the streets. While workers had joined the protests at first as *citizens*, they brought the insurrection back into their workplaces and communities. They began to strike and demonstrate as *class* actors, demanding a national minimum wage, steady employment of temporary workers, the renationalisation of privatised companies, and so on (De Smet 2015).

In Cairo, the occupation of Tahrir Square not only became the symbol of the 25 January Revolution, but also a hub for "delegations" from various Cairo neighbourhoods, provincial towns, and rural areas to meet and organise. Representatives of four independent trade unions decided to constitute the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) in Tahrir.[21] In the square, workers and peasants "enjoyed the freedom to debate the strategy of the movement and the future of Egypt. Farmers were not able to return home when the regime closed the roads and joined in the protests at Tahrir" (El-Nour 2015: 203). And when they returned to their own communities, they shared and diffused their experience. Moreover, the defeat and the, at times faulty, organisation of state security apparatuses opened up spaces and opportunities for social contention. On a scale comparable only to 1997, peasants began to demonstrate for their rights and occupy lands that had been taken away from them. Most of the villages that rose up during those 18 days had already been at the core of the peasant movement in the 1990s (see De Lellis 2019).

While the 18 days represented the apex of the civil-democratic movement, after the fall of Mubarak and the start of the SCAF-led "democratic transition", class-based struggles intensified throughout the whole country. Workers began to set up their own trade unions vis-à-vis the factory management and the state union. Trade unionism became popular not only among the traditional industrial sectors such as steel, cement, or textile, but included "hospital doctors, mosque imams, fishermen, Tuk-Tuk drivers, skilled craftsmen, intellectual property rights consultants, daily-paid labourers and the operators of the 'scarab boats' that take tourists on Nile river trips" (Alexander 2012: 114-5). Moreover, their social struggle acquired a political dimension with the demand of *tathir*, the "cleansing" of the public sector and the state apparatus from the petty dictatorships of the "little Mubaraks" (Alexander 2012).

While the workers' movement blossomed in 2011-2012, in early 2011 after Mubarak's departure, the local elites, their thugs, and state security forces quickly smothered the autonomous peasant resistance. Peasants could not rely on horizontal (between village communities) or vertical (between peasants and other social groups) networks of solidarity. External actors such as human rights organisations and political parties emphasised organising – especially unionisation and training – over movement-building. Some 700,000 peasants joined one of the four independent umbrella farmers' unions that emerged after the uprising (El-Nour 2015: 203-4). Other actors such as Socialist Popular Alliance Party and the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights preferred to support peasants "at the point of struggle", by helping them to fight eviction politically and legally. By 2013, however, nearly all peasant unions had been closed down because of state repression, but also because of internal disputes in and between the federations, and the top-down bureaucratic and reformist approach to social change typical of most NGOs (De Lellis 2019: 593).

Similarly, the workers' movement split in the radical Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) of Kamal Abu Eita on the one hand, and the Egyptian Democratic Labour Congress of Kamal Abbas on the other hand. The EFITU ran out of steam, imploding because of infighting and the lack of

[21] Interview with K.A.E., 15 March 2011, Cairo.

logistical and financial capacity to connect with local autonomous unions and strike committees. The appointment of Abu Eita as Minister of Manpower in 2012 quickened the disintegration of the EFITU. The EDLC survived as an NGO-type organisation, offering training and services to its members. On 3 July 2013 al-Sisi's military coup paralysed the workers' movement. On the one hand, workers tended to obey the call for social peace and economic stability, hoping that al-Sisi would improve their living conditions; on the other, they faced increased repression from a state apparatus that had regained its confidence.

2.4 The uneven spatial dynamic of discontent

This narrative of a decades-long social mobilisation in Egypt does not serve the purpose of simply showing that workers, peasants, and the urban poor did revolt on many occasions. It reveals important aspects of the cycle of contention that started in 1992 and ended in 2013. First, the cycle of contention clearly entailed spatially and socially different movements. The peasant struggle started the first phase of the 1992 cycle of contention, which lasted until its defeat in 1997. An urban, middle-class movement followed from 2000 to 2006, ending with the collapse of Kefaya. The centre of gravity then shifted to the industrial working class in provincial cities such as Mahalla, Helwan, and Suez. The 25 January uprising united these different moments of the cycle in a single mass movement, initially led by urban, middle-class protesters with political demands (Kandil 2012). After the fall of Mubarak, the civil-democratic movement was gradually demobilised, but class-based struggles continued, especially among workers. Instead of a linear development of struggle, the cycle of contention appears as a reciprocal, "sideways" process as different movements continuously "fertilize" each other (Alexander and Bassiouny 2014: 13; Zemni, De Smet and Bogaert 2013).

Second, the relative social "in/visibility" of specific groups and their demands indicates a hierarchy of protests, arranged along their spatial, social, and discursive characteristics.

Table 1 Hierarchy of protests

Visibility	**Geography**	**Class**	**Demands**
High	Urban-metropolitan	Middle class	"Political"
Medium	Urban-provincial	Industrial workers	"Economic"
Low	Rural / urban-slums	Peasants / poor	"Economic"

Our main hypothesis is that this hierarchy can be explained through the conceptual lens of marginalisation. Groups – such as peasants and slum-dwellers[22] – that have been subjected to historical (postcolonial) and contemporary (neoliberal) waves of marginalisation have been made invisible in the

[22] Unfortunately, here we cannot investigate the role of the *ashwaiyyat* in the 1990s-2000s protests.

recent cycle of protest. Conversely, in mainstream accounts of the 2011 uprising and its preceding decade of struggle urban middle-class groups with purely civil-democratic demands (free elections, freedom of press, freedom of organisation, etc.) have been placed at the centre of the protests. Industrial workers in provincial cities such as Mahalla, Suez, and Helwan are an interesting case, as they have been only marginalised in recent decades. Before the 1970s in the framework of the post-colonial Arab nationalist developmental state and its ideology, industrial workers were regarded as a productive, modernising force as well as a pillar of society. While subsequent neoliberal reforms marginalised them socially, culturally, and politically, their historical prestige and contemporary relevance to capitalist accumulation has not been erased.

3. Dispossession of housing and land in Morocco

In this second part of the article, we turn to Morocco, the politics at the margins taking place there and its relevance to larger reconfigurations of power relations within the Moroccan society.

In 2011, the 20 February Movement (F20M) was born in Morocco. In continuity with the Arab uprisings elsewhere, this movement radically criticised the process of reforms led by the king (Hibou 2011). The F20M denounced corruption and demanded social justice. It organised weekly demonstrations in Moroccan cities. As protests erupted throughout the country under the banner of the F20M, King Mohammed VI repositioned himself at the centre of the political scene. In his speech dated 9 March 2011, he announced constitutional reforms and democratic openings. Opting for a strategy of "royal democratisation", the king refocused the political debate bringing himself at the core of it, capitalising on the legitimacy of the monarchy to stabilise the foundations of the regime. On 1 July 2011, the new constitution was ratified in a referendum. Following this, early legislative elections were held. This resumption of institutional political life marked a split within the movement. Although the official position of the F20M was to boycott the elections, many activists were persuaded that the institutional political game was too important to be ignored and boycotted (Badran 2020). For example, Karim Tazi, a Moroccan businessman, and one of the mediatised figures of the F20M, announced his intention to vote for the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD), the main party of opposition. On 25 November 2011, the PJD won the majority of parliamentary seats and the king tasked it with forming a government. For the first time, the PJD accessed executive power, under the impetus of a social movement that had paved the way for it.

Contrary to many other countries in the MENA, which have witnessed violent contention between the government and the protesters, in 2011 Morocco underwent what was marketed by the monarchy as a "peaceful transition". While lauded as a virtuous example by the international community for its ability to manage the crisis through constitutional change and electoral pluralism, Morocco showed signs of political instability on several grounds. For example, unnoticed by international observers even though transforming significantly the urban landscape, were the protests of el *'achwai*, or the workers employed in informal economic sectors such as illegal constructions and street vendors. A day after the PJD's victory, rumours about *el bni tatlak*, or the liberalisation of construction, began to circulate, suggesting that there was no need for authorisation to build a house or even subdivide a lot any longer. Morocco then rapidly witnessed a proliferation of *bni el' achwai* – informal housing – to the point that entire neighbourhoods appeared from anew in the cities' outskirts. This phenomenon led to conflicts between the inhabitants of these new neighbourhoods and public authorities. However, such conflicts did not discourage dwellers, who kept on building illegal housing. In some cases, this resilience was celebrated. For example, one of the districts located on the outskirts of Agadir was renamed by its inhabitants "Derb bzzez" meaning "the district that imposed its presence" after the riot they led against the local authority (El Kahlaoui 2015).

The building of illegal settlements always entails some degree of violence. Such conflicts unfold following a script which includes a set of rules and negotiations between the inhabitants and the authorities they challenge. In this sense, the practice of informal construction mirrors the shifting balance of power regulating the relation between the street and institutional political power (Bayat 2009). The 2011 wave of protests involved new forms of appropriation of the public space too, ranging from self-construction to illegal trade. In Morocco, citizens monopolised the street for two consecutive years (2011-2012) to the detriment of state power and its regulations.

Yet, since 2013, the state re-appropriated such illegal spaces. To do so, it outlawed self-built construction and proceeded to exclude self-built neighbourhoods from the provision of public services. After tipping the balance of power to its advantage, the state resumed its "normal" activities and, in particular, its role as the facilitator of private investments. The year 2014 was thus marked by the launch and implementation of major urban projects. Indeed, many of such projects – notably those concerning the Rabat-Casablanca metropolitan axis – had been put on hold during the 2011-2013 crisis, characterised by the social tensions that the evictions necessary to implement these projects had created. Although Morocco won the UN-Habitat award in 2011 for its *Villes Sans Bidonvilles* program, between 2011-2013 the country had fallen behind the objectives it had set for itself.

Being committed to modernisation, Morocco is experiencing a high rate of urbanisation, like other countries in North Africa. The city – erected as a showcase of modernity – takes shape following international standards which are however used as a pretext to privatise non-regulated land reserves such as slums, informal or communal habitats and collective land (Bogaert 2018). Thus, inhabitants are expelled from their shantytown to make room for mega-projects such as the redevelopment of the Bouregreg and the waterfront of Rabat. The Bouregreg project, with its luxury residential units, marinas, new shopping facilities, is a salient example of how the contemporary city is perceived as the primary motor for economic growth and how cityscapes are redesigned and restructured to satisfy the desires and interests of (global) capital, as Bogaert (2018) argues.

Since late 2013, a number of historic shantytowns in Casablanca – Carrières Centrales, Douar Krimat, Schneider – were subject to eviction procedures. These evictions were carried out with brutality yet faced a strong opposition by the residents, who refused to leave the area. The most striking resistance came from the inhabitants of Carrières Centrales in June 2014. The violence the state employed to evict the residents was mediatised and shocked part of public opinion. In particular the image of one inhabitant threatening to set himself on fire while on the roof of his house to stop the arrival of the police, widely circulated in the media and caused public outcry. During another slum evacuation, a woman expelled from Douar Krimat in December 2013 built a makeshift camp in the street for her and her five children. She wrote on a banner: "Those who have no housing, have no homeland, my ID number is BH00000".

In Rabat, eviction procedures were also enforced. In February 2014, state security destroyed the houses of residents of Ouled Dlim Douar, located on the agricultural land of the Guich Oudaya tribe. More than 36 homes were demolished, leaving residents without resources (El Kahlaoui 2017b). In March, the security forces intervened in Drabka Douar, also located on the land of the Guich Oudaya tribe, to destroy vegetable and fruit stalls. The case of the inhabitants expelled from Ouled Dlim Douar is not an isolated case in Morocco. Since 2004, Morocco has embarked on a policy of privatising land property. In this context, collective land, which is now estimated to be around 12 million hectares, is the first target of these liberalisation policies. The grabbing of land by private developers is part of the economic cycle connected to major urban projects. It destabilises the livelihood of rural populations, whose resources come directly from the exploitation of that very land. Thus, expropriation and liberalisation are often met with resistance.

Concomitantly to the mobilisation of Douar Ouled Dlim, the mobilisation of Douar Sbita, located in Bouknadel in the outskirts of Salé, was organised a few miles away. The lands of the Douar Sbita are collective lands, and they are governed by the *dahir*[23] 1919, which places them under the control of the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministry can cede them for public interest. In 2007, the property of these lands was transferred to a powerful property developer, Addoha, for the construction of a luxury real estate project. By the sea, the "Plage des Nations" project covers 500 hectares and includes a luxury seaside resort with apartments, villas as well as an 18-hole golf course. Not consulted during the negotiations for compensation, the residents of Douar Sbita said they were cheated. Furthermore, women and single men are excluded from any compensation. Since 2014, Saida, a woman who led the movement of the inhabitants of Douar Sbita, has organised a weekly Sunday protest to demand compensation. Today, part of the neighbourhood has been destroyed but the movement is still ongoing.

3.1 Dispossession as development

The struggle against expropriation, the privatisation of resources, and for the right to self-construction and trade – whether made illegal by the authorities or not - does not constitute, to use the words of Mohammed Mahdi, an "epiphenomenon" in Morocco (Mahdi 2018). As he points out, the question of land grabbing, including the privatisation of surface and underground resources, is a global phenomenon, leading to localised resistance from the population affected by the dispossession process. These mechanisms of dispossession, of which the rural populations fell often victim, must be connected to the struggles taking place in urban areas around the right of appropriation of space (Kipfer 2019). Urban or peri-urban struggles are not removed from struggles in the rural world. The issue of land dispossession, the right to resources and efficient public services go beyond the urban/rural dichotomy. While urban, peri-urban and rural populations often struggle for the same reasons and demand similar rights, the rural margins are able to mobilise more structured and militant networks, especially when such rural and marginalised communities share a strong common identity. This is the case for ethnic minorities and, in Morocco, the Amazigh population in particular.

The mobilisation of the Amazigh people served as a platform to create a common set of demands and to bring together many micro-mobilisations scattered throughout the territory. In August 2011, the now famous movement of Imider, a small rural municipality located in the Tinghir Province in the South East of Morocco, set up a camp on the Mount Albban and interrupted the provision of water to the construction site of the mining company Managem, which belongs to the royal holding Al Mada (Benidir 2017; Bogaert 2018b). This mining site is one of the biggest in the whole African continent. Today, Imider constitutes a symbolic struggle because it represents a multitude of scattered, small-scale rural struggles that are structured around Amazigh networks and mobilised around the question of the right to resources. In fact, since 2011, a multitude of micro-mobilisations for the right to land and resources took off, diverging from the more institutional trajectory taken by the F20M. Such rural community-based micro-mobilisations anticipated the Hirak in the Rif, which exploded in 2017 (El Kahlaoui and Bogaert 2019; Chapi in this Special Issue).

[23] A *dahir* is royal decree.

Between the beginning of the F20M and the Rif's Hirak movement of 2017, numerous mobilisations broke out all over the territory. While each had its own specific forms and demands, relevant to different circumstances, they all represented the struggle of marginalised communities against major state-led development projects, and demanded an equitable share of wealth and the right to land and resources, to housing, and to local development. Such mobilisations are linked to the development policies implemented in the country (Bogaert 2018). Morocco suffers from strong disparities in wealth and presents significant development inequalities between territories, in spite of the efforts that governments have made in the past through large programmes such as the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) or the Cities Without Slums (VSB) (Berriane 2010; Bogaert 2013). While contributing to an official reduction in the poverty rate (15.3% in 2001 to 4.8% in 2014), the implementation of major projects created development niches that do not benefit local communities at large and their development. Sometimes, they accentuated territorial imbalances. For example, in February 2016, King Mohammed VI inaugurated the first phase of what will become the largest solar energy project in the world: the Noor project (Cantoni and Rignall 2019). Solar energy represents a new "frontier resource" but it is in direct conflict with the interests of the local communities living in the territories where the project will be developed. The access to water of the local population has been jeopardised, and conflicts have erupted between national authorities and local communities (Bergh and Rossi Doria 2015). These major development projects fail to reach the standard of a proper national development strategy that equally values livelihoods in marginalised territories and metropolitan areas. On the contrary, they discriminate against marginalised territories and have worsened the conflicts between local communities and the state (Ayeb and Bush 2019; Bogaert 2015). Since 2016, the proliferation of major social movements fighting against development projects, such as the Hirak du Rif, Jerada or Zagora, signals a crisis of the state's development policy. Water stress, land dispossession, the overexploitation of mining and fishing resources, but also social and economic tension due to the accelerated urbanisation of Morocco, are causing an upsurge of social mobilisations by marginalised populations against the state.

3.2 Rise and Repression of the Rif's Hirak

It is in this national context that in April 2017 the Hirak of the Rif emerged. This movement originated by the death of Mohcine Fikri, a fish seller who was crushed by a dumpster while he tried to recover his merchandise, an illegal swordfish that was confiscated by the local authorities. Causing an unprecedented wave of indignation, Al-Hoceima, Fikri's town of origin, became the core of street protests demanding better access to public services and resources. The mobilisations spread throughout the country quickly. Rallies were organised throughout Morocco to pay tribute to Fikri's memory, denouncing the increasing social inequalities in the country. However, despite the scale of the initial mobilisations, at first sight the protests appeared to be stifled. Indeed, the media – busy with reports from the 2016 COP22 meeting in Marrakech – did not pay any attention to the Rif. In the eyes of the general public, the case of Mohcine Fikri's death appeared to have been quickly shelved away (El Kahlaoui 2017).

Yet during this time, silently and for months, the Hirak movement was gestating. Street politics in the Rif has a long and rich genealogy. During the colonial period, the Rif region was known for its resistance against European penetration and for its participation in the liberation struggle at the time of national independence. From this struggle hailed the famous figure of Abdelkrim El Khattabi, an independence fighter who later became an opponent of the Moroccan monarchy, which he considered complicit with colonial power (Aidi 2017). Condemned to exile in Egypt, El Khattabi continued to assert the need to decolonise Morocco and

achieve effective independence (Daoud 2020). After his death in 1963 in Cairo, El Khattabi's words continued to resonate in the Rif, which became a bastion of resistance against the authoritarian rule of King Hassan II. The Rif paid dearly for this opposition. In 1984, during the "years of lead"[24], King Hassan II very harshly addressed his opponents in a speech, describing the Rif in particular as "waste" or *awbach*. The Awbach, or the unemployed, are those who live on smuggling and theft, he said.[25] Years of repression and economic marginalisation followed the monarch's address.

The legacy of this resistance and marginalisation is alive in the Rif (Naimi 2020). Certainly, the political and economic context has changed. At the start of his reign, Mohammed VI had begun a process of reconciliation with the Rif region through a policy of investments. However, Hirak considers these investments to be insufficient and unproductive for the region. Indeed, caught in the neoliberal process, Morocco has embarked on development based on foreign investment and privatisation, which often increase inequalities and deprive the local population of its right to resources. The Rif has seen the quasi-totality of its fishing resources exploited by large foreign companies. Artisanal economic fishing activities have nearly disappeared. Local fish has become inaccessible to the population. Furthermore, such investments have not resulted into more employment opportunities for the local population, causing very high rates of youth unemployment.

On 26 May 2017, as a turning point in the crackdown against the Hirak and its activists, the Moroccan authorities arrested Nasser Zefzafi after he interrupted a prayer ceremony at a mosque in Al-Hoceima to protest the state's manipulation of religion and the preacher's anti-Hirak propaganda (Hamoudi 2019). The arrest of the Hirak leader spawned an unprecedented wave of arrest against Hirak activists, blogger, journalists and protesters. Indeed, between 26 and 31 May 2017, Moroccan authorities arrested more than 71 people in the Rif region. According to Amnesty International[26] and Human Rights Watch[27] over 400 people, including minors and women, were arrested during this one-off wave of arrests. More than 50 political prisoners, among them the Hirak's leaders, were transferred to the Oukacha prison in Casablanca awaiting a mass trial. A group of activists were put in a helicopter blindfolded. Some of the activists told their lawyers that during the journey, police forces threatened to throw them out the helicopter if they did not accept to cooperate. Once in Casablanca, the activists were sent to the headquarters of the National Criminal Police Brigade for interrogation. During this wave of arrests, the political prisoners were beaten, threatened with rape and subjected to police violence (Rhani et al. 2020). Moreover, Nasser Zefzafi was placed in solitary confinement for over a year in an empty wing of Ain Sbaa Prison, with access to the promenade yard only for half an hour, twice a day. The trial of 53 Hirak activists who were transferred to Casablanca started in September 2017 four months after their arrest. Most of the evidences presented and held against them were Facebook posts, articles written by some of the arrested journalists and videos and photos of them at demonstrations. Facebook posts brought as evidence against the prisoners included critiques of the state's discriminatory developmental policies, the Rif's marginalisation, state oppression, the militarisation of the territory and of the arrest of activists, or called on the people of the Rif to participate in the protests (El

[24] The "years of lead" refer to a period of massive repression during Hassan II's reign.

[25] See the discourse of King Hassan II on 22 January 1984, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lNHR7Zh5QR4&t=5s

[26] See https://www.amnesty.be/infos/actualites/article/maroc-il-faut-liberer-les-manifestants-les-militants-et-les-journalistes-places

[27] https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/05/morocco-king-brushes-evidence-police-abuse

Kahlaoui and Yousfi 2020). In June 2017, the court sentenced all 53 prisoners to sentences ranging from 1 to 20 years of imprisonment and fines. The charges held against them involved harming the state's internal security, criminal arson, rebellion, attacking police officers while performing their duty, damaging public property, and staging unauthorised protests.

The heavy and brutal state repression of the Hirak marked a turning point on the Moroccan political scene. Different political parties and civil society actors began to mobilise, demanding the immediate release of all political activists arrested during the Rif uprising and an end to the militarisation of the region. Moreover, this unprecedented wave of arrests led to the emergence of an international solidarity movement with the Hirak's political prisoners and demands for justice (El Kahlaoui 2017; Bousetta 2018).

3.3 The politicisation of the Hirak

While these prison sentences shocked the public opinion, who feared a return to the "years of lead", it is important to highlight the relation between the severity of the sentences and the claims of the Hirak. The Hirak demanded the "lifting of the economic blockade and an end to marginalisation" of the Rif region, describing the latter as a "policy of revenge" implemented by the state since the Rif revolts (1957-1959). The Hirak centres the political history of the Rif and the Amazigh identity in the analysis of the economic exclusion the region suffered (Masbah 2017; Mouna 2018; Esmili 2018). Most of the demands the Hirak put forth relate to economic and social justice. Apart from demands for better public services (education, health), the vast majority of other demands focus on the right to resources and autonomy over the management of the region's resources. It is important to emphasise that these demands, which formally are less political than those made by the F20M, led to a deeper destabilisation of state structures. It was on the basis of socio-economic demands and of entirely peaceful demonstrations that the Hirak was judged to be a separatist movement undermining internal security and the integrity of the state (Wolf 2019). The political upheaval that the Hirak of the Rif caused, mirrors the conflicts underlying the construction of the Moroccan modern state. This process of state formation has generated a profound conflict between on the one hand, a population (still) structured along tribal lines and the question of Amazigh identity, and, on the other hand, the central state which declared itself, in the name of a legal modernism inherited from the colonial period, the legitimate owner of tribal territories and their resources. This explains why the repression of the Rif Hirak has not quieted the wave of social protests in the country.

The crisis – which is both institutional and social– appears to have become a permanent feature of Moroccan politics (Batten-Carew et al. 2017). Indeed, in October 2017 mobilisations resumed, particularly in Zagora (South East of Morocco) where the inhabitants took to the streets demanding their right to water. Severely repressed, this mobilisation has been mediatised not only in the press but also through social media. Then, in December 2017, the Hirak of Jerada too broke out. A former mining town in decline, Jerada's protest movement is similar to the Rif's Hirak. While the trials against the leaders of the Rif's Hirak in Casablanca were hitting the headlines, on 22 December 2017, in Jerada, a mining town in the East, two brothers, Houcine and Jedouane Dioui died in the collapse of a well caused by a water leak in a coal mine. Like Mohcine Fikri's death, this news triggered an uprising in the town of Jerada. Inhabitants gathered to form a human chain in front of the morgue to prevent the authorities from burying the two bodies before opening an investigation. For months thereafter, Jerada became the stage of massive demonstrations

against socio-economic marginalisation. Like in the Rif, Hirak activists in Jerada were arrested. According to Human Right Watch, in May 2018, 69 protesters were charged.[28] Their prison sentences, which were less severe than those inflicted to the activists in the Rif, range from 2 to 4 years in prison. Similar to the political prisoners of the Hirak du Rif, some of the Jerada detainees were released by royal grace in 2019. The Jerada social movement did not run out of steam and significantly weakened the authorities' political power.

The emergence of *al-Hirak al-Sha'bi* (Popular Movement) in the Rif at the end of October 2016 and its subsequent growth at the regional and even national level highlighted the maturation of what could be called a "movement of the margins" (El Kahlaoui and Bogaert 2019). Telling this counter-story highlights the reconfiguration of power relations between the centre and the periphery, building on the analysis of the mobilisations that took place at the margins. The communities living at the margins are diverse and include inhabitants of informal urban settlements as well as rural populations struggling for the right to land and access to resources. By destabilising existing relations of power, such movements of the margins question the very foundations of the state.

4. Conclusion

The Egyptian and Moroccan cases show that the often microscopic and seemingly non-political conflicts at the edges of society are directly interwoven with global and regional transformations. Instead of focusing on the broader political-economic context of these processes, we have highlighted the forms of social contention that have originated precisely "at the margins" of society: those spaces and groups that have been excluded by processes of dispossession and disinvestment. At the same time, the gradual accumulation of these protests and the networks and repertoires of action they forge, have propelled movements in the (urban, middle-class) centre into action and/or offered these movements a larger social base (from which) to mobilise. Protests at the margins not only constitute a largely hidden history of the revolts of 2011 in Egypt and Morocco. They also *continue* these revolts in a less visible and less concentrated manner than the preceding "democratic" demonstrations and uprisings in metropolitan urban centres.

Putting the margins at the centre of analysis has allowed us to conceive of a cycle of protest not only in diachronic terms, as a temporal ebb and flow of contestation, but also as a socio-spatial process of converging and refracting protests, from the margins to the centre and back again. Finally, we highlighted the uneven and hierarchical character of these socio-spatial dynamics. The social "invisibility" of protest movements in Egypt and Morocco is an effect of implicit and explicit processes of marginalisation. While these movements are crucial links in the chain of protests, their social invisibility poses political and ethical challenges to more visible and less marginalised actors to properly recognise them and support them in solidarity.

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[28] https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/04/morocco-another-crackdown-protests

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Authors' Information

Brecht De Smet is a lecturer and researcher at the Department of Conflict and Development Studies, Ghent University. Since 2008 he has been studying strike movements and political protests in Egypt from a Marxist perspective. De Smet is the author of several academic articles and opinion pieces about the workers' movement in Egypt. He is the author of *Gramsci on Tahrir* (2016) and *A Dialectical Pedagogy of Revolt. Gramsci, Vygotsky, and the Egyptian Revolution* (2015).

Soraya El Kahlaoui is a postdoc researcher at the Center for Conflict and Development Studies, Ghent University (Belgium). Her research focuses on land struggle and dispossession. Her project aims to offer an innovative re-reading of the dynamics of social and political transformation in North Africa, more specifically in Morocco and Tunisia. She is also the author of documentary *Landless Moroccans*.