

XV Convegno SeSaMO

Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale

22-24 giugno 2022



SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

**TITOLO/TITLE: SOCIAL MOBILISATION IN MOROCCO. LESSONS FROM A HISTORICALLY INFORMED ACTIVISM**

Napoli, 22 of June 2022

**PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/s:** NATALIA RIBAS-MATEOS (COORD) WITH LAURA FELIU AND FERRAN IZQUIERDO

**ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):** DISCUSSANT: TIM KALDAS (UAB). [tekaldas@gmail.com](mailto:tekaldas@gmail.com)

**A CENTURY OF SOCIAL MOBILISATION IN MOROCCO:  
LESSONS LEARNED FROM A HISTORICALLY- INFORMED ACTIVISM**

**SPEAKERS** in order of presentation:

ODILE MOREAU (U. TOULOUSE), ANGUSTIAS PAREJO (U. GRANADA), BLANCA CAMPS (UAB), RACHID ARAB (UAB), LAURA FELIU (UAB).

A panel connected with the publications:

-Book in Spanish: Feliu, Laura, Mateo Dieste, Josep Lluís & Izquierdo Brichs, Ferran (2018) UN SIGLO DE MOVILIZACIÓN SOCIAL EN MARRUECOS, Barcelona, Bellaterra.

<http://www.ed-bellaterra.com/php/lLibresInfo.php?idLlibre=1446> –

-Book in English: in preparation with IBIDEM-Verlag, 2022. Edited by Feliu, Mateo, Izquierdo and Ribas-Mateos.

This work fills a notable gap in literature about activism in the MENA region and in globalisation literature in general. It is an instructive case study on the history of social mobilization intervening in contemporary societies to promote social change. Through this new publication on social mobilization in Morocco, we highlight activist and engaged academic research in social movements as well as use multidisciplinary tools and methodologies (from anthropology, geography, history, and international relations). The privileged theoretical and methodological framework used conforms with a crossroads between public policy approaches, the sociology of power and the theory of social movements and the practicalities of such social movements, with close links to activism, especially since the Arab Spring.

With this panel we would like to have papers which are able to stimulate reflections on the idea of social mobilisations from a theoretical point of view, in the study of social transformation as it has been applied to the region, and particularly to Morocco, and by questioning and problematizing the understanding and framing of social movements from a

historical perspective. Particularly, regarding the following dimensions: growing inequalities, unemployment, fiscal crisis, corruption, access to public health and social services, environmental crisis, food and water scarcity, social control, censorship and repression, violence (state violence, armed conflicts, etc.), political representation, participation, regimes' legitimacy crisis, identity politics, sectarianization, migration, borders and mobility.

With this panel we would like to have papers which analyse social actors and bottom up processes of change, both historical and contemporary. Papers which analyse how crisis and change are reflected addressing both the national and transnational level. Papers which explore the complexity of the methodologies (empirical and theoretical) used over the years to investigate crisis and change by, for instance, discussing research in difficult contexts, research ethics, research funding, etc.

- **Objectives of the panel and of the book in the English version**

**We approach new debates.** Our main objective, as academic activists, is to highlight through this publication the need to learn from each other's struggles, practice, debates, reflections – as well as sharing and documenting different experiences. How are social movements generated, how do they develop? How are they repressed? How do they die? What enables them to move beyond borders (Morocco or the Arab World)? What prevents them? What is their current shape, singularity, and when do they collapse? How do their original framed ideas, structures and social practices directly or indirectly affect their results in society? How can they best handle encounters with the authoritarian state and with the articulation with global capitalism? Bearing all these questions in mind, the book seeks answers, answers designed to provide a “longue durée perspective”, answers researched and elaborated by academics who are also activists.

**We look for new perspectives** on the understanding of global movements that are rooted in history but have become active in neoliberal times. The book contains both academic knowledge and solid grounding for activist-oriented political action, whether in the MENA region or beyond. With this book we address a key issue in the contemporary transformation of world politics. We need to research and think how to match academic knowledge, through theoretical and empirical exploration, with key action in social movements.

We are particularly concerned about finding how research paths for social movements in a consistent and elaborated manner from theory to reflection on social movement actions; it involves on one hand a trans-disciplinary approach to social sciences with a historical perspective across all, and, on the other, a tandem work with social movement academics and thinkers. This type of tandem work not only expands the body of work about Morocco but goes beyond Mediterranean societies to connect with social movement-activists with globalisation perspectives.

- *Brief information about the book:*

The Spanish version of “A century of social mobilization in Morocco” is divided into twenty-five chapters, of which twenty-two are case studies, preceded by a detailed exordium and an initial chapter by the editors in which the process of shaping the Moroccan power regime is degenerated from its roots and its evolution to the present day. This introduction is essential to understanding the scope of the editors' proposal as it shows the reasoning

followed and prepares the reader to understand the rest of the work. It is therefore a kind of critical 'state of the question' in which the framework of research and the fundamental concepts of the work are presented. The selection of the twenty-two cases of popular revolts collected offers a rich diversity of actors and casuistic with a varied geographical representation, including urban, rural and peripheral. Thus, the main enclaves present in the work are Casablanca (1907, 1965 and 2000), Fez (1907 and 1990), the Eastern Rif (1909, 1921, 1958, 1984 and 2004), Meknes (1937 and 2011), Tangiers (1952, 2011 and 2015), Salé and its surroundings (1930 and 2008), Taza (1915) and Imider (2011).

The first of our arguments that underpin the book points out the great structural transformations that have shaped the current power regimes. We take a *longue durée* perspective, by understanding the emergence of capital and the state as central resources in the processes of power accumulation, and how these resources and the elites compete for control, and influence social mobilizations.

Secondly, the book covers the dynamics of social mobilization. The structure of the regime in power has a direct impact on both the type of regime response (strategy) and its possibility of survival (control of resources and capacities), as well as the configuration and dynamics of the mobilization. Different regime models provoke different reactions that, in turn, affect the dynamics and chances of success of social mobilizations. These dynamics can become a comparative tool in helping us understand why revolts have different processes and results. It is not enough to focus on apparent processes of democratization; the analysis should be extended to the entire power regime, not just the political. In this sense, the extension of the analysis to cover all actors and resources involved in the power regime, complements and enriches the analyses of the political system. Resistances are related to the processes of accumulation (economic, political, ideological etc.), by the elites and, ahead of these processes, to the population's objectives of improving their living conditions. Resistances mainly occur against these dominant processes of power accumulation.

Thirdly, the fate of social mobilizations, and even revolutions, is directly linked to the strength of the elites they face, what some authors have called 'the structure of opportunity' (see Tilly, 2006 and Kriesi, 2004), which is directly linked to the degree of concentration of power. Social mobilization is always embedded within a relationship of power, and as such is influenced by all actors involved in it. And, as in any social relationship, it is the actors with the greatest power that influence the most in their dynamics. These claim-making acts, collective or individual, have both practical and policy implications. Through direct action, people make themselves heard; they create realities on the ground that the authorities sooner or later have to come to terms with.

## PANEL to be PRESENTED

### INTRODUCTION TO THE PANEL

Activism, in the context of the panel is understood in a re-evaluation of practice and action (history), in a critical context where social structure is both a historical and sociological object. Thus, practical activism is understood as a way of timely historically informed interventions in complex contemporary struggles.

Protesting, advocating and demanding all have a role as forms of solidarity and of social mobilising. Activism here compels the parameter of space and time –or even multiversum- to establish a base on which to situate contemporary struggles; to establish the way in which they interplay with each other, in which struggles interconnect, how they interact as a process of interlacing community actions and the organisation of social movements. The “interlacing threads” of different case studies enable an expression of each spatial-temporal singularity.

The background of the panel is the book<sup>1</sup> which book investigates the ways in which historical knowledge supports current activism and advocacy in Morocco. The chapters give presentations on how their work on the historical question and how their selected case considers questions of authority and the challenges of historically-informed organising, and how that case has grappled with questions of the way history informs and empowers current activism. We reflectively think this way when debating the historical truth, when debating breaking the silence surrounding the use of iperita gas in the Rif, or when we consider the struggle of the families of political prisoners (Chafai 2021) or by looking at the cases presented in the panel by Aarab, Camps, Feliu and Moreau.

What is at stake in such historically informed activism and advocacy in contemporary Morocco? Critical interrogation is not simply revisiting these terms to theorise what place they might occupy in a contemporary debate, but rather to see if there is a new conceptualisation of the original terms and contradictions today.

Research on social movements cannot be limited to situating their object in the immediate context; instead, the true subject of study is society as a historical problem. The compendium of efforts in the book contribute in different ways to describing the complex attempts to transcend this separation of approaches, presenting perspectives, methodologies and direct applications for the study of power relations and systems of social classification, paying special attention to the reconstruction of colonial situations and emergent social movements today. Logically, researchers in the book face the challenge of memory – often violent, even legitimised violence, and extreme violence – but also the challenge of understanding history and its intersection with spatial urban power. What problematisations does this book present? The first critical problem encountered in this work is the way of dealing with the past. If authors in this book have chosen to immerse themselves in this imbroglio, it is because they believe that it is possible to learn from thinking about the past as an ethnographic/historical/sociological problem, a strange other, and to reflect on the present time as a historical problem. Therefore, the starting point of this book is an epistemological problem that has yet to be resolved: the way in which human beings in their cultural diversity interpret time and divide it into ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘future’ as one of the main concerns of how to think about the present moment, or as Coello and Mateo, would put it, in the ethnographic present (Coello and Mateo 2020), or in this case, the activist’s presence in 20th century Morocco (Feliu 2022) and its continuity in neoliberal times (Camps 2022).

---

<sup>1</sup> Social mobilization in Morocco. Lessons from a Historically learned Activism. Ibidem Press, 2022

The second problem is methodological. The book describes the complex attempts to present perspectives, methodologies and direct applications in the study of power relations and systems of social classification, paying special attention to the reconstruction of colonial situations. This book presents dialectical methodologies for the study of human relations, showing the variants at play, trying to go beyond not so much the ambivalences as the dualisms (nature-culture, subject-structure, tradition-modernity), but rather focusing on multi-faceted power relations. The study of power is central to this work because we consider it one of the engines of history, beyond focuses that are materialist or symbolist, agential or structuralist. In all these perspectives, the dimension of power emerges, shaping unequal relationships in the sexual division of work, in the organisation of subsistence, in redistribution and, obviously, in the forms of social organisation. Power also exists in the forms of symbolic significance found in the world, through legitimation and the social struggle to answer it and to define the world itself.

The third problem is identifying the key actor. Another of the common themes that runs through this book is the consideration of the history of the excluded. Contributions to microhistory such as Carlo Ginzburg (1976, 1993) have made it possible to incorporate plebeian (or subaltern) sectors into the historical drama, including the case of women. The emphasis here was on popular culture that did not seek to analyse tradition, understood as the persistence of traditional ways of life, but rather the cultural practices and forms that had been actively marginalised by the dominant culture. How can the data and facts collected in the various forms of revolts be classified (populist, political, religious, secular, cultural, ideological, revolutionary, or are they a mix of these forms)? Will it depend on the type of actor, protester profile, or the nature of the demands raised?

## **PAPER 1. Odile MOREAU (U. Toulouse)**

### **Social mobilisation in Northern Morocco during the First World War**

This paper discusses the issue of social mobilisation in Morocco from a historical perspective and presents a case study: social movements in Northern Morocco during the First World War.

Through this case study, we will consider new perspectives and approach new debates. Indeed, local dynamics in North Africa and particularly in Morocco during the First World War have been largely ignored for various reasons. We will highlight how these movements developed, the complexity of the interplay of their actors and how these movements were repressed.

Our case study will focus on the uprising that started in Taza in 1915 and lasted until after the end of the First World War. One of the main actors is Abdelmalek, the youngest son of Abdelkader who took refuge in these same territories more than a quarter of a century earlier. Thus, we will interrogate these social movements in Morocco from the perspective of the 'longue durée'.

**Odile MOREAU**

**Mobilisation sociale au Nord du Maroc pendant la Première Guerre mondiale**

Ce papier discute la question de la mobilisation sociale au Maroc, en s'inscrivant dans une perspective historique et présente une étude de cas : les mouvements sociaux au Nord du Maroc pendant la Première Guerre mondiale.

A travers cette étude de cas, nous envisagerons de nouvelles perspectives et approcherons de nouveaux débats. En effet, les dynamiques locales en Afrique du Nord et particulièrement au Maroc pendant la Première Guerre mondiale ont été largement ignorées pour diverses raisons. Nous mettrons en lumière comment ces mouvements se développent, la complexité du jeu de leurs acteurs ainsi que comment ces mouvements sont réprimés.

Notre étude de cas s'attachera au soulèvement qui se déclare à Taza en 1915 et qui va durer jusqu'après la fin de la Première Guerre mondiale. L'un des acteurs principaux est Abdelmalek, le plus jeune fils d'Abdelkader qui se réfugia dans ces mêmes territoires plus d'un quart de siècle plus tôt. Ainsi, nous interrogerons ces mouvements sociaux au Maroc dans la perspective de la « longue durée ».

## ***PAPER 2. ANGUSTIAS PAREJO (Presentation will be in French)***

### ***A Review of the stagnation of an authoritarian regime : the 1965 Revolts in Casablanca.***

This paper considers the strike, social mobilisation and revolts that took place in Casablanca between 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> March 1965. We will address the reaction and response of young people to a public education policy within a post-independence context of authority, and how they evolve into a mass mobilisation. The disproportionately harsh repression by the regime in Casablanca is one of the bloodiest episodes in the history of Morocco's social mobilisations in the last two hundred years. The favoured theoretical and methodological framework would be a mix between the approaches based on public policies, the sociology of power and social movement theory. The nature, actors and resources of mobilisation will depend largely on the public policies articulated by the political system and the reaction, force and degree of concentration of the elites in power.

The first objective is to locate the actors. Social mobilisation becomes a form of participation that calls for relational governance in order to give the social and political actors concerned a voice, enabling them to interact and criticise political decision-making.

A second objective is to determine whether, following a decade of independence, this highly significant social mobilisation wielded an influence in the political arena – in the alliances, breakdowns of alliances between the concurrent political elites and in the displacement of a power regime comprising somewhat diversified primary elites towards another in which they were grouped more tightly around a hegemonic actor.

A third objective is to draw a comparison. We consider concepts, problems and general theories (authoritarian regimes, public policies, public action, public criticism, collective action and social movements) in a discussion and analysis of Morocco's political arena. Our intention is to swim against the tide of specificity, exceptionalism and Arabic, Muslim, Maghrebi or Moroccan exoticism and to contribute to an awareness and understanding of the phenomena of public criticism, collective action and mobilisation within an authoritarian space. Our initial hypothesis posits that the forms of public indignation that multiplied throughout the controversial process of building the post-independence modern state in Morocco differ radically from the phenomena of demobilisation, apathy or de-politicisation described by Linz (2009b: 34-40 and 2009a).

The final reflections of the research are:

1. It is an exemplary case study of the emergence of social movements and their management by the established policy, in a period of transition from one authoritarian configuration to another; namely the shift from liberalised authoritarianism at the beginning of independence, which little by little incorporated mechanisms and dynamics of authoritarian understanding, gradually moving towards a tighter and more repressive authoritarianism (1963-1977).
2. Secondly, we consider Morocco to be a prototype for a colonial and post-independence regime characterised by a considerable degree of political mobilisation. Linz pointed to the lack of political mobilisation as one of the defining features of stable authoritarian regimes. Indeed, he classified the various types of regimes in accordance with the degree of mobilisation (Linz, 2009b: 34, 36).
3. Local ecology provided a movement driven by young politically aware students that successfully penetrate various social groups, forming a mass movement. The public space was shaken by large demonstrations that were sustained for three days, despite the regime's harsh repression, and which diagonally connect several of the city's symbolic spaces: the old medina, the centre, the new medina and the marginal periphery.
4. The relevance of this case study lies in the particular questions of time and space, two key dimensions for analysis in comparative politics. The political space for protest is the heterogeneous and bustling city of Casablanca, with a tradition of pre-colonial revolts dating back to 1907. The mobilisation must be considered as a process, associated with political learning and the spaces and actors – in short, a historically informed activism. Moreover, Casablanca is far more than a local micro-cosmos: it is Morocco's economic capital and therefore the political processes and phenomena that unfold in the city, frequently transcend local politics and impact on the national political arena, as occurred in this case. The regime's management of the mobilisation reveals a disciplinary method applied to the spaces and actors of protest. Particularly worthy of note is the application of a real public policy of control and violence, revealing the cohesion of the primary political elites and the secondary elites, and the consolidated political pact of the 1960s.

### **PAPER 3. Blanca CAMPS (UAB)**

#### **On the way from strike to intifada: the Fes events of 1990**

"A man was shot dead whilst trying to find an ambulance for his wife, who was in labour. Their daughter, who was born on that day in Bab Ftouh, is known in the district as "fourteen", in memory of 14<sup>th</sup> December 1990 when the strike turned into a massacre (from an account by a resident of Bab Ftouh)

Friday, 14<sup>th</sup> December dawned clear and sunny in Fes. The city was calm and still. Practically dead. The general strike called for the whole of Morocco by the Democratic Confederation of Labour (CDT) and the General Union of Moroccan Workers (UGTM), the two largest opposition trade unions, was supported by the majority of the city's businesses and stores. However, the success of the general strike was tarnished by the repression and

disturbances that spread through Fes. The forces of the regime fired bullets against the demonstrators and anybody who happened to be in the streets. Dozens of public services and administrative buildings, but also vehicles, stores and hotels were looted, set fire to and vandalised by the demonstrators. Armoured vehicles blocked access to the city for days, whilst helicopters flew menacingly overhead.

The events of December in Fes took place at the end of a cycle of political response, yet at the same time marked the start of social protests free from political party involvement within an ideological frame that was transforming the nature of popular reactions in the region. However, this extension of the mobilisations was used by other social actors who took advantage of the tensions generated, channelling them into formal protests and neutering the destructive force of spontaneous revolt. Although they mobilised the population, protests against the regime's alignment with the anti-Iraqi coalition against Saddam Hussein were another lost opportunity to use the street as a more belligerent form of opposition to the *Makhzen* (Feliu, 1994: 16). Clashes between the population and the forces of order were repeated in some cities such as Tangier, but the diversity, alliances and structured response (by universities and political groups, trade unions and even ulamas) shifted social tensions to the international stage and a crisis of a transnational nature.

#### **PAPER 4. RACHID AARAB (UAB)**

##### **Public Protest and Territorial Policy: Natural Disaster Stress in State-Rif Relations in Morocco**

The aim of this paper is to examine the reactions of the local population and elite to the consequences of the 2004 earthquake in the province of Alhucemas. The Moroccan regime's response to the humanitarian crisis and the demands of local actors was integrated within a repositioning strategy in Rif, based on the inclusion of a new Riffian elite within the circle of power, acting as an intermediary force between Rif and the State.

The consequences of the 2004 earthquake in Alhucemas mobilised both the local population and the elite (solidarity, attempts to increase social capital, defence of interests, etc.) in the wake of a catastrophe that impacted on various levels. The actors' reactions varied in accordance with their position in the power structure and the power resources within their reach. Firstly, the local population reacted by protesting against the inadequate response of the *makhzen* to the humanitarian crisis: anger and indignation converged, forming a crucial psychological factor that sparked demonstrations and protests in the province of Alhucemas. Secondly, associations formed a vanguard for the local elite that mobilised in response the consequences of the earthquake, administering humanitarian aid and protesting at the public authorities' lack of emergency plans. The 2004 earthquake was a turning point for these associations in terms of their objective of strengthening their position within the local power structure, enabling them to assume a leading role in the negotiations and agreements for the rebuilding and development plans.

#### **PAPER 5. LAURA FELIU (UAB)**

##### **Beyond the 20F activism in Tetouan: the emergency of peripheral cities.**

On 20<sup>th</sup> February 2011, a multitude took to the streets of Tetouan. Tens of thousands of people flocked from the city's districts to converge in the centre, which was brought to a standstill by this surprising human tide. Over the course of the year, 37 demonstrations and sit-ins were held, as well as numerous other initiatives that formed a new space for protest in the city. This

chapter offers a brief analysis of the events that took place in this city, which has a large population, but is located on the periphery of power.

In order to analyse the social mobilisations in Tetouan, primary online printed and audio-visual sources have been consulted. Around fifteen interviews were also conducted in the city at different times between 2013 and 2016, as well as a further thirty in other parts of the country

The study of the social mobilisation in Tetouan in 2011 and the specific nature of this geographical, social, economic and human space allow for a series of reflections that may be of use to future activists.

Firstly, the objectives announced in statements and slogans should be in accordance with the expectations generated. The aspiration is for substantial change, yet the slogans and demands are of a limited nature and can be used by the regime to introduce reform without modifying the structures. The second reflection is on the need to attract closer reformist sectors. In the city, the majority of the institutionalised political class and trade unionists distanced themselves from the demonstrations, placing them in a difficult situation, as they had to oppose their natural allies and remove themselves from wider social bases. This explains the attempts in interviews and conversations to justify this “non-support” and that no direct attacks were made on the 20FM-T, thereby implicitly conferring it with a degree of legitimacy. The third question is how to modulate times and spaces. Making the marches a regular weekly occurrence almost certainly did not strengthen the movement: whilst it did manage to consistently attract large numbers of people, it was unable to move beyond certain spheres and above all, it did not challenge a particular order. The question is its capacity to maintain more sustained pressure over time. Fourthly, there is a need to consider the power structure of the system, also on a national level, and to take into consideration not only coercive or institutional resources, but also capital or information. Finally, although the 20FM attempted to centralise slogans and demands, in consensus with the decisions taken elsewhere, their analysis reveals the difficulty of controlling them. In this sense, action to control these demands seems neither so practical nor possible.

**PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA/DEI/DELLE PROPONENTE/I – SHORT BIO OF PROPONENTS**

LAURA FELIU

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0979-6477>

FERRAN IZQUIERDO

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0403-3171>

NATALIA RIBAS-MATEOS

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1106-4467>

**INDIRIZZO/I EMAIL/EMAIL ADDRESSES:**

[N.Ribasmateos@gmail.com](mailto:N.Ribasmateos@gmail.com) (coordinator). BOOK AUTHORS: [Laura.feliu@uab.cat](mailto:Laura.feliu@uab.cat)  
[ferran.izquierdo@uab.cat](mailto:ferran.izquierdo@uab.cat)