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The Social Question at the Margins of the Arab Uprisings: Lessons from Lebanon and Morocco

By Myriam Catusse

most studies of the Arab 2011 uprisings seek to avoid what Michel Dobry has referred to as the “trap of etiology”.¹ Abandoning any attempt to seek the social origins of the revolution, these studies instead focus on the mobilizations themselves and the processes in which the actors participated.² In doing so, these studies clearly break with the nomological and structuralist approaches long favored by historical sociologies of revolution, often emphasizing the very ability of classes or groups to revolt.

The fact remains that the Arab uprisings, like some of the policies to which they have given rise,³ were anchored in substrata that can shed light on their form, their successes or, on the contrary, their unpopularity. Of course, demands for socio-economic rights based on perceptions of justice and injustice correspond to real difficulties experienced by large swaths of the population: impoverished

1. Michel Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 1986.

2. For a detailed discussion of these approaches, see Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi and Olivier Fillieule, “Pour une sociologie des situations révolutionnaires: Retour sur les révoltes arabes”, *Revue française de science politique*, 62 (5-6), 2012 p. 767-796.

3. Like the emergency plans launched in 2011 by the Moroccan, Saudi and Algerian authorities (public hiring, housing assistance, a rise in consumption subsidy rates and, in Saudi Arabia, the establishment of unemployment insurance).

workers, the unemployed (including university graduates), old people with no pension, housewives, domestic servants, the sick, school age children and so on. But such demands do not spontaneously express themselves in the public sphere. Rather, their expression is politically constructed by mobilization entrepreneurs in the service of various interests.

During the structural adjustments of the 1980s and 90s, the social demands that were voiced were rapidly suppressed, especially by several *ad hoc* concessions. Describing the (oftentimes urban) revolts⁴ that accompanied these demands as “bread riots” – as if they were no more than feverous bouts of violence in quasi-mechanical reaction to increased prices and policies of reduced public spending – allowed their political dimension, and the crisis of leadership to which this corresponded, to be denied. Aggravated by the policies of Arab governments, the problematic of social injustice subsequently took a back seat with regards to issues of economic performance. Gradually, however, and in more or less explicit fashion, there were signs of a common concern emerging across the societies of the region. These first stirrings of a “social question” in the strongest sense of the term – to wit, *the expression* of shared concerns regarding social cohesion and the solidarities that hold it together – took shape at the intersection of two forms of discontent: discontent with the development policies (particularly recent reforms promoting economic liberalization) that had accompanied the creation of the modern states of the region, especially with their promises of welfare; and finally discontent with forms of governance that offered little in the way of protection, merely fueling social insecurity and exacerbating inequality.

In this regional history, Lebanon and Morocco took nearly opposite paths. At the regional level, Morocco offers what is perhaps the most obvious vantage point for observing the emergence of a public debate regarding the social consequences of politically-driven economic choices. Comparatively, in Lebanon, where in the aftermath of civil war political instability has been a source of major concern, this “social question” does not seem to have been a real preoccupation. For different reasons, these two regimes have apparently withstood the political demands of 2011. While, in both cases, the wave of regional uprisings gave rise to new movements, these expressed themselves in the interspace of dissident innovation and more routine demands for rights without spreading beyond a revived activist constellation. In this, the “social question” played an interesting role. Examination of the various ways in which social problems have been politically constructed and addressed by public action, as well as the various types of mobilization at play reveals the emergence of differentiated regimes of protection. The latter have fueled demands for rights, relating to the destabilization of social compromise, expressed through an array of actions that go beyond simple revolt.

4. Didier Le Saout and Marguerite Rollinde (eds.), *Émeutes et mouvements sociaux au Maghreb: perspective comparée*, Paris, Karthala, 1999.

The *Isqât an-nizâm* Movement in Lebanon and the 20 February Movement in Morocco: Run of the Mill Revolts?

Between winter 2010 and fall 2011, the Lebanese and Moroccan movements explicitly followed the lead set by protests in Tunisia, Egypt and other countries of the region. Lebanon's *hirak isqât an-nizâm at-tâ'ifî* movement (Movement for the Fall of the Confessional System, henceforth *Isqât an-nizâm*⁵) drew thousands of protesters in Beirut, Sidon and Byblos. Similar crowds turned out for Morocco's 20 February movement (*barakat 20 fabraye*, henceforth M20F, as it is known on social networks) in protests staged in and around a hundred towns throughout the Kingdom. While both movements doubtless benefited from a contingent effect, each presented local particularities reflected through their organization and their place within a history of mobilization, as well as their subsequent outcomes.

Although they brought together newcomers as well as a large number of political unknowns and outsiders, the Lebanese and Moroccan movements were for the most part led by experienced activists. The political organizations that came together in these heteroclitic and unprecedented coalitions ranged from those who were well-established and authorized to organizations that were merely tolerated by regimes formally more pluralist than others within the region. They included far left groups, labor unions, anti-globalization and human rights organizations⁶ as well as Islamist movements (the powerful *al-Adl wa al-Ihsân* – Justice and Spirituality – association in Morocco and Lebanon's Amal Shiite movement) and secular organizations (the Communist Party in Lebanon as well as Arab nationalist organizations).

More exceptional in terms of the coalitions they assembled than for their size, these Lebanese and Moroccan movements did not exhibit the transgressive dimension that other protests elsewhere in the region maintained. Indeed, they were part of a political history that had contributed to routinizing the expression of conflict and “street politics”.⁷ In Lebanon, movements against the sectarian political system are not recent phenomena; street protest, in particular, does not have the same transgressive dimension as elsewhere, as collective mobilizations have become increasingly visible in recent years.⁸ The large demonstrations of 2005,

5. The Lebanese regime is consociational: the state is governed on the basis of consensus among representatives of the main, constitutionally recognized confessions in order to eliminate the risk that a minority segment be de facto excluded from decision making. Elizabeth Picard, “Le communautarisme politique et la question de la démocratie au Liban”, *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, 4 (3), 1997, p. 639–656.

6. Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi and Mohamed Jeggllaly, “La dynamique protestataire du Mouvement du 20 février à Casablanca”, *Revue française de science politique*, 62 (6-5), 2012, p. 867–894; Sélim Smaoui and Mohamed Wazif, “Étendard de lutte ou pavillon de complaisance? S'engager sous la bannière du “Mouvement du 20 février” à Casablanca”, in Amin Allal and Thomas Pierret (eds.), *Au cœur des révoltes arabes. Devenir révolutionnaires*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2013, p. 55–85.

7. Frédéric Vairel, “L'ordre disputé du sit-in au Maroc”, *Genèses*, 59, 2005, p. 47–70.

8. Karam Karam, *Le mouvement civil au Liban: revendications, protestations et mobilisations associatives dans l'après-guerre*, Paris, Karthala, 2006.

for example, brought together nearly a million people resulting in the departure of Syrian troops, a subsequent year-long sit-in in the heart of the capital as well as a polarization of the party scene between the Hezbollah-dominated “March 8th” coalition and that of “March 14th”, dominated by Saad Hariri’s Future Movement. In this country, where the political life is defined by its extreme instability, these movements showed the Lebanese capacity to mobilize and take up arms when needed. For these reasons, the scope of the *Isqât an-nizâm* movement seems less exceptional when compared to the less routine and predictable public protests then taking place in neighboring countries.

In the same way, numerous mobilizations took place in Morocco in the 2000s. Alongside election campaigns marked by the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party, attention was focused either on human rights protest movements,⁹ Islamist mobilizations or social and economic demands. The latter were championed by the movement of unemployed university graduates (which had taken off since the early 1990s),¹⁰ the anti-globalization movement (having gained more prominence in Morocco than in neighboring countries)¹¹ and many local committees who, in small and medium-sized towns across the Kingdom, raised an outcry against increased living costs, unequal development policies, lack of job security and the degradation of public services. Some of these movements were violently repressed when social dissatisfaction took on a more obviously dissident guise, as was the case in the Saharan provinces in 2008 and 2011.¹² On the eve of the 2011 uprisings, Morocco was nevertheless regarded as being at the “forefront of social protest” in the region.¹³

For various reasons, however, the Lebanese and Moroccan movements ran out of steam over the course of summer 2011. In the case of *Isqât an-nizâm*, this was due to not only internal conflicts but the imminent crisis in Syria, shifting social and political attention to other fault lines while at the same time exacerbating the country’s social and economic difficulties.¹⁴ In the case of the M20F, this was due to repression of the movement as well as counter-mobilizations that had been provoked by constitutional reform (approved by referendum in July 2011)¹⁵ and the scheduling of legislative elections for the following November.

9. Frédéric Vairel, “Le Maroc des années de plomb: équité et réconciliation?”, *Politique africaine*, 96, 2004, p. 181-195.

10. Montserrat Emperor Badimon, “Les manifestations des diplômés chômeurs au Maroc : la rue comme espace d’affirmation et de transgression du tolérable”, *Genèses*, 77, December 2009, p. 30-50.

11. Éric Cheynis, “L’altermondialisme au prisme marocain”, *Critique internationale*, 27, April-June 2005, p. 177-191.

12. Montserrat Emperor Badimon, Karine Bennafla, “Le ‘Maroc inutile’ redécouvert par l’action publique: les cas de Sidi Ifni et Bouarfa”, *Politique africaine*, 120, December 2010, pp. 67-86.

13. Lamia Zaki, “Maroc: dépendance alimentaire, radicalisation contestataire, répression autoritaire”, in *État des résistances dans le Sud -2009. Face à la crise alimentaire*, Brussels, CETRI, 2010.

14. International Crisis Group, *Too Close for Comfort: Syrians in Lebanon*, Middle East Report n°141, 13 mai 2013.

15. Abdellah Tourabi, “Réforme constitutionnelle au Maroc: une évolution au temps des révolutions” (http://www.arab-reform.net/sites/default/files/Morocco_FR.pdf).

In contrast to Lebanese authorities, the Moroccan regime had taken emergency social measures – wage hikes for state employees, an increase in the minimum wage, the recruitment of “unemployed young people” by state agencies, a bail out of the compensation fund – and attempted to restart the largely dormant “social dialogue” regarding trade union rights, the pension system and compensation fund reform.

In both countries, moreover, it proved difficult to find an obvious target for the movement. In contrast to Tunisia’s Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak, in Lebanon there was no single figure embodying “the system”. In Morocco the figure of the King remained largely off-limits,¹⁶ with the greater majority of protesters preferring to denounce the political and economic practices of the royal entourage. Indeed, the M20F’s agenda was very explicit in this regard: requests for constitutional reform were accompanied by denunciations of corrupt practices and demands for greater social justice. In Lebanon, the movement was split over the ultimate objective of its demands (indeed, was a religious/civil system (*madanî*) to be advocated or a secular one (*almâni*)?). And, despite the decisive role that far left organizations, communist activists and anti-globalizationists played in the mobilization, any demands that it put forward ultimately centered less on social issues than on the political issue of confessionalism. Nevertheless, the movement’s leaders mainly addressed less well-off categories of the population, whatever their confession. This can be seen in the routes followed by successive demonstrations. While some demonstrations traversed Beirut from east to west in order to cross the famous demarcation line that divided the capital during the civil war, others followed a path from one working class neighborhood to another or took place in front of the Electricity of Lebanon’s (EDL) premises, where a large social movement played out over a period of several months.

The 2011 protests in Lebanon and Morocco, therefore, took place in the context of local political histories in which “the social question” of the countries occupied what were *a priori* opposite positions: in Lebanon, it was inhibited by a clientelist form of governance that profited partisan and communitarian groups, whilst in Morocco it was exacerbated by the public agenda and the space of mobilizations. And yet even though “the social question” was embedded in different economic systems – the “laissez-faire” of the merchant republic of Lebanon¹⁷ and the “state capitalism” of the Moroccan monarchy – the objective socioeconomic grounds for revolt were ultimately not so different in the two countries. Indeed, they may even have been more serious than in other Arab states, which on the eve of the uprisings possessed more well-developed public assistance and insurance systems.

16. Abdellah Tourabi and Lamia Zaki, “Maroc: une révolution royale?”, *Mouvements*, 66, summer 2011, p. 98-103.

17. Carolyne Gates, *The Merchant Republic of Lebanon: Rise of an Open Economy*, London, Center for Lebanese Studies, I. B. Tauris, 1998.

In the Absence of Social States, Uneven Coverage of Social Insecurity

In contrast to Tunisia,¹⁸ Egypt, Syria¹⁹ and even rentier regimes like Bahrain and Muammar Gaddafi's Libya, a much-heralded welfare project played only a fitful role in the formation of the contemporary state in Morocco and Lebanon. To the degree that the latter did embrace such a project, it was via the tentative yet incomplete expansion of protection rights, above all in state employment or via forms of infra-state solidarity.

In Lebanon, a Not Particularly Stirring "Social Question"

In Lebanon, the social welfare system is largely based on philanthropy, with foundations and private institutions supplying aid, insurance and social services. In the name of "laissez-faire", schools, medical care and institutions of solidarity developed for the most part on the basis of a social-liberal and communitarian compromise that is in principle far removed from what is to be found in the interventionist economies of neighboring "developing states". In the course of fifteen years of civil war, this model became further entrenched, with collective services and para-legal social assistance systems established in the territories of the various militias. Created to buttress the war effort, these entities further stretched the link between citizenship and social security. By virtue of the services they offered populations with which they were in direct contact (responding to emergencies, treating the wounded, assisting displaced persons, reconstructing destroyed homes, etc.), these institutions acquired a legitimacy to intervene, that reinforced communitarian and territorial sociabilities. Having taken root, they continued to expand after the war.²⁰ Conjoined with constraints imposed by the extreme financial crisis in which the country finds itself today, "laissez-faire" policies of reconstruction operating in the absence of a market²¹ have vitiated the question of reinforcing social rights and "social security" for all. This despite the large number of people who died in the conflict – in proportion similar to the number of French casualties during the First World War – to say nothing of the wounded, missing and displaced persons, destroyed buildings and the spectacular

18. Michel Camau, "Tarajîl ya dawla ou la force de l'espérance. Propos sur le désengagement de l'État en Tunisie", *Bulletin du CEDEJ*, 23, 1988, p. 81-108.

19. Laura Ruiz de Elvira and Tina Zintl, *Civil Society and the State in Syria: The Outsourcing of Social Responsibility*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 2012.

20. Melani Cammett, "Partisan Activism and Access to Welfare in Lebanon", *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 46 (1), 2011, p. 70-97.

21. Reinoud Leenders, "Nobody Having Too Much to Answer for. Laissez-Faire, Networks and Postwar Reconstruction in Lebanon", in Steven Heydemann (ed.), *Networks of Privilege in the Middle East: The Politics of Economic Reform Revisited*, New York, Palgrave/Macmillan, 2004, p. 172 and after.

collapse of the Lebanese pound in a context of three figure inflation (487% in 1987, 62% in 1990)²². Indirect taxes – the most socially unjust form of taxation – have increased, notably via the (re)introduction of the VAT in 2002, while income and employer contribution taxes have been reduced. Today, wealth and poverty rub shoulders in close quarters.²³ Significant income disparities are also accompanied by unequal access to employment, education and public services. Indeed, dissatisfaction is above all focused on the issue of electricity, with strikes at EDL as well as occasionally violent protests (for example, in the southern suburbs of Beirut) staged against unequal rationing imposed by the public utility's grid.²⁴ Although its general rate seems to be diminishing, the poverty level remains high, with the poor getting poorer and the “middle classes” wasting away.²⁵ According to the ILO, the unemployment rate was at 8.8% in 2013. This figure, however, did not take the state of the labor market into account or precarious, short-term or occasional employment situations. Some have claimed that unemployment among 18-35 year olds has reached nearly 50%.²⁶ Furthermore, although inflation remains high (a 11% increase took place in October 2012), the minimum wage did not change between 1997 and 2008.²⁷ For a large number of citizens, healthcare and educational expenses remain out of reach (the Lebanese state contributes merely 20% of healthcare expenses, compared with 30% for Morocco, 40% for Egypt, 50% for Tunisia and Jordan, 70% for Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates and 80% for the countries of the European Union).²⁸

After the war, social unrest made itself heard on two occasions. Led by the trade union movement, the social protests of the 1990s were subjected to repression and political infiltration.²⁹ In the aftermath of the belt-tightening measures taken at the Paris III Conference (2007), the protests of the 2000s never succeeded in assuming the form of a general cause uniting the entire country and this despite some remarkable initiatives: in addition to the exacerbated environment of protest within public and private education and the public transportation sector

22. Boutros Labaki and Khalil Abou Rjeily, *Bilan des années de guerre*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1993.

23. Éric Verdeil, Ghaleb Faour, Sébastien Velut, *Atlas du Liban. Territoires et société*, Beyrouth, IFPO/CNRS-Liban, 2007.

24. Éric Verdeil, “Émeutes et électricité au Liban”, *Le Monde diplomatique*, February 2008.

25. It is today estimated that a third of the population lives in poverty in Lebanon (Minister of Social Affairs/PNUD, Poverty Survey and Living conditions Report, Beirut, MoSA, É.À.À.). Thierry Kochuyt “La misère au Liban: une population appauvrie, peu d'État et plusieurs solidarités souterraines”, *Revue Tiers Monde*, XLV (179), July-September 2004, p. 515-537.

26. Roger Nasnas et al., *Le Liban de demain. Vers une vision économique et sociale*, Beyrouth, Dar Annahar, 2007, p. 316.

27. In response to trade union mobilizations, it has been increased on several occasions (including October 2011) from around 250 euros per month to around 350 euros per month.

28. World Bank (<http://donnees.banquemondiale.org/indicateur/SH.XPD.PUBL/countries>) (accessed 10 July 2013).

29. Paul Khalifé, “L'infiltration par l'État de la société civile: le cas de la CGTL”, in Antoine Messara (ed.), *Syndicats et organisations professionnelles au Liban*, Beirut, Publications of the Lebanese Foundation for Permanent Civil Peace, 1999.

and a sustained strike at Electricity of Lebanon, a surprising and unprecedented movement took place in the major retail sector in 2011-12. Compared to other forms of protest and engagement in the country, these mobilizations have until now largely remained marginal and limited in scope.

The problematic of social insecurity thus appears to be simultaneously depoliticized (because it is rarely advanced as a cause of mobilization) and over-politicized (with the insecurity characterizing life in Lebanon fuelling a policy of clientelism, broadly favoring infra-state solidarities). Indeed, social insecurity, benefitting various political leaderships – family, party, local, national, even international – remains a regular tool of governance, a foundation for authority and a source of public action. Until now, the social and economic problems with which many Lebanese are confronted have not stoked collective revolt, appearing instead to have favored the defense of corporatist interests and the spread of a politics of patronage. In societies in which a welfare state has been institutionalized, protest breaks out when the state appears to fail. In Lebanon, on the contrary, social vulnerability appears a necessary condition for the communitarian regime whilst “ethnic or religious organizations use service provision as a means of building support.”³⁰

Morocco: At the Forefront of the “Social Question”?

Morocco’s trajectory is different. In contrast to Tunisia and Algeria, the Moroccan social state did not have any more hours of glory than the Lebanese one. Weakly institutionalized, it developed in erratic fashion until the recent reforms. Growing public employment nevertheless contributed to the establishment of a solidarity-based social safety net in tandem with more philanthropic or clientelist systems of protection and redistribution. The latter were based on a neo-patrimonial use of administrative rents (for example, the distribution of taxi and bus licenses) and public resources (real estate, in particular) as well as, starting in the 2000s, the activities of private foundations affiliated with the monarchy, such as the Mohammed V Foundation for Solidarity, which was founded in 1999 (when Mohammed VI, nicknamed “the king of the poor” for his earlier charitable activities, ascended to the throne). In Morocco, the inequality of access to forms of social protection is more striking than elsewhere in North Africa. While little data is available regarding the state of social insecurity in Lebanon, much has been written about its Moroccan counterpart since the turn of the century, with some of this literature produced by the public authorities in collaboration with international agencies. The resulting assessments of the state of the “social domain” in Morocco have been far from flattering. The kingdom ranks low on

30. Melani Cammett and Issar Sukriti, “Bricks and Mortar Clientelism: Sectarianism and the Logics of Welfare Allocation in Lebanon”, *World Politics*, 62 (3), July 2010, p. 381.

the UNDP's Human Development Index, even relative to other Arab countries. While the 1980s were marked by a reduction in the available indicators of relative poverty,³¹ the following decade witnessed a nearly 50% increase in the percentage of the population living in poverty. According to the multidimensional poverty index employed by the UNDP, 28.5% of Moroccans were living under poverty in 2008, a figure comparable to the data available on Lebanon and greater than that for Tunisia and Egypt on the eve of the uprisings (in all cases, these figures are to be treated with caution).³² Unemployment rates also remained high, with very significant disparities between urban and rural areas, the various regions of the country, young people and adults and, finally, men and women.³³

In contrast to Lebanon, Morocco took a stance in addressing the “social domain” throughout the 2000s, though in a context that initially marginalized it. Indeed, while Lebanon slid into civil war, Morocco was the first country in the MENA region to undertake a policy of structural adjustment and macroeconomic stabilization with the IMF and World Bank (1983-1992). It subsequently embarked on a fast-paced program of privatization in all public sectors, a program amongst the most ambitious in the region. Finally, the country pursued gradual integration into a free-trade zone via agreements signed with the European Union (1996) and the United States (2003). The weak skein of social rights was thus gradually undermined: reduced public expenditures further decreased subsidies for the compensation fund while the contraction of public sector employment and the opening of the customs frontiers was a drag on wage costs. In 2000, Morocco nevertheless reached a turning point. In response to the increased tensions generated by liberalization and the world economic crisis, “human development” was proclaimed an “affair of the state”.³⁴ “The social question” assumed particular salience when it came to be seen as a threat to the regime following the 2003 Casablanca attacks (for which it was blamed) and then again in 2008, when large scale protests erupted against increased costs of living, inequalities and social insecurity.³⁵ In 2005, the Palace launched the “National Initiative for Human Development” as a new *jihad*, that is, as a collective effort for all Moroccans.³⁶ The initiative's reforms privileged outsourcing state services to private actors and institutions, with major changes taking place in areas such as self-employment

31. Irene Bono, “Pauvreté, exception, participation. Mobilisation et démobilité dans le cadre de l'INDH au Maroc”, in Myriam Catusse, Blandine Destremau and Éric Verdier (eds.), *L'État face aux débordements du social au Maghreb. Formation, travail et protection sociale*, Paris, Aix-en-Provence, Karthala-IREMAN, 2010, p. 229-250.

32. hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2010_FR_Tableau5.pdf

33. Noureddine El-Aoufi and Mohamed Bensaïd, *Chômage et employabilité des jeunes au Maroc*, Genève, BIT, 2005.

34. Myriam Catusse, “Le ‘social’: une affaire d'État dans le Maroc de Mohammed VI”, *Confluences Méditerranée*, 78, summer 2011, p. 63-76.

35. Larabi Jaïdi, *La protection sociale au Maroc*, Rabat, annual report “Espace associatif-Social Watch” 2007.

36. I. Bono, “Pauvreté, exception, participation. Mobilisation et démobilité dans le cadre de l'INDH au Maroc”, cited.

(especially with the promotion of a workfare state in which social assistance is no longer a right for all but is instead a right for the most deserving) and the welfare state, which was reduced to a shadow of its former self. On the one hand, social protection for wage-earners (a small proportion of the population) was extended via the creation of legal insurance coverage (particularly healthcare insurance); on the other, the manner in which non-insured individuals (the vast majority of the Moroccan population) were covered was reformed through changes to private insurance and public assistance as well as through the encouragement of self-financing. The development of two separate arenas of negotiation (labor market regulation vs. programs to address “poverty”) increased the existing gap separating the world of protected wage-earners from the world of non-wage-earning or undeclared workers – that is, the gap separating the issue of workfare from that of welfare.

Within this context, social mobilizations took various faces. Having been at the forefront of most protests since the country’s independence, the main trade union federations opted for a reformist stance, particularly following the start of inter-union “social dialogue” in 1996 and the nomination, in 1998, of governments overseen by parties with which they were allied. As elsewhere in the region, Moroccan unions had made only slim inroads into the world of work due to the increasing presence of informal labor, the large number of small and medium-sized businesses and the cost of trade union involvement – involving, in particular, the risk of dismissal – in a context marked by a very high rate of unemployment. Nevertheless, in contrast to many other places in the region, where until 2011 organized labor had been outlawed or overseen by corporations and single trade unions, the modest world of Moroccan trade unions remained lively and pluralist, particularly at the local level.³⁷ Since 2008, however, the number of social conflicts has increased, with symbolic movements taking place within both the public sector (healthcare, local government, justice, education) and the Office Chérifien des Phosphates (the country’s largest public enterprise and the world’s leading phosphate exporter). Although the frequency of such conflicts is exceptional, they have not had the same dissident impact as the Mahalla El-Kubra³⁸ and Gafsa³⁹ movements in Egypt and Tunisia, respectively.

37. Éric Gobe, “Les syndicalismes arabes au prisme de l’autoritarisme et du corporatisme”, in Olivier Dabène, Vincent Geisser and Gilles Massardier (eds.), *Autoritarismes démocratiques et démocraties autoritaires au XXI^e siècle*, Paris, La Découverte, 2008, p. 267-284.

38. Marie Duboc, “La contestation sociale en Égypte depuis 2004. Précarisation et mobilisation locale des ouvriers de l’industrie textile”, in Sarah Ben Nefissa and Blandine Destremau (eds.), “Protestations sociales, révolutions civiles. Transformations du politique dans la Méditerranée arabe”, *Revue Tiers Monde* special edition, 2011, p. 95-115.

39. Amin Allal, “Réformes néolibérales, clientélismes et protestations en situation autoritaire. Les mouvements contestataires dans le bassin minier de Gafsa en Tunisie (2008)”, *Politique africaine*, 117, 2010, p. 107-125; Vincent Geisser and Larbi Chouikha, “Gros Plan: retour sur la révolte du bassin minier. Les cinq leçons politiques d’un conflit social inédit”, *L’Année du Maghreb*, VI, Paris, CNRS-Éditions, 2010, p. 415-426.

As in these countries,⁴⁰ however, the participation of the Moroccan trade union federations in the 2011 movement was ambivalent. With the notable exception of the Democratic Confederation of Labor, the federations followed the line of the parties with which they were affiliated and did not call for a general mobilization. Trade unionists of all tendencies were nevertheless to be found in the ranks of the protesters. The same holds for the unemployed university graduates' movement, with the its National Association rapidly distancing itself from the M20F, most likely due to their inefficiency in enforcing “discipline in their confrontations with the authorities”.⁴¹

Social Rights in the Revolt, Political Exchange and Public Action

In the 2000s, social policy was elevated to the status of a “Royal Project” in Morocco, with the regime pursuing an approach that was solidly reformist. In Lebanon, however, political leaders gave little attention to such issues particularly following the civil war. Yet the relative place occupied by socioeconomic demands in the two countries – muted in Lebanon, strongly present in Morocco – must be understood as not necessarily reflecting an objective difference in living conditions between the two countries, but understood rather in terms of the way in which the rationales guiding, respectively, public action and mobilization contributed to conferring legitimacy upon the demand for social rights.

Routinized Practices and the Demand for Rights

Everyday reality in Morocco and Lebanon was only partly expressed by the M20F and *Isqât an-nizâm* protest movements. Although both countries were plunged headlong into the world economic crisis,⁴² these two episodes of protest only indirectly reflected this reality. The collective awareness of social injustice was barely audible in the official statements of the Lebanese movement and its presence did not suffice to federate that movement's Moroccan counterpart or prevent its disintegration. Nevertheless, the outlines of the political exchanges that supply the basis for rights to protection remained apparent.

40. Hé Yousfi, “Ce syndicat qui incarne l'opposition tunisienne”, *Le Monde diplomatique*, November 2012; Yassin Tlemali, “Pourquoi le syndicat UGTT a joué un rôle si important dans l'intifada tunisienne”, *Maghreb émergent*, 25 January 2011; Françoise Clément, Marie Duboc and Omar El Shafei, “Le rôle des mobilisations des travailleurs et du mouvement syndical dans la chute de Moubarak”, *Mouvements*, 66, Spring 2011, p. 69-78; Nadine Abdalla, “Egypt's Workers. From Protest Movement to Organized Labor: A Major Challenge of the Transition Period”, *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Comments* 32, October 2012.

41. Montserrat Emperador Badimon, “Ou sont les diplômés chômeurs? Un exemple de pragmatisme protestataire à l'époque du 20 février”, *Confluences Méditerranée*, 78, summer 2011, p.93.

42. Samir Amin, “2011: le printemps arabe?”, *Mouvements*, 67, June 2011, p. 135-156.

In both countries, the routinization of public expressions of social and political dissatisfaction over the course of the preceding decade (and yet longer in the case of Lebanon) certainly contributed to watering down any dissident impact that the protests had. In Morocco, the public authorities had put “human development” at the top of their agenda – much as Ben Ali’s regime in Tunisia had made extensive use of macro-indicators to boast of the success of its economic and social policies.⁴³ Moroccan demonstrators simply took them at their word. Thus, their experience since the 1990s of confrontation and negotiation with the state helped trade unions and the unemployed graduate movement skillfully frame the “social” content of more recent demands. This experience divided spaces of negotiation into sectors and rendered exchanges between protesters and the administration commonplace. However, in a context of economic stagnation, it also led to the emergence of claims to newly emphasized rights that trade union and unemployed graduate organizations endeavored to defend: the right to public employment for young graduates and modest trade union rights for the workers and employees who had spent fifteen years involved in discussions with the employers’ union (this encompassing new labor regulations, a partial increase of the minimum wage, discussions regarding the retirement system). The M20F’s call for more social justice found little support from groups that preferred to act as free riders, consolidating the conquest of more particular rights via political exchange.

In Lebanon, the aftermath of civil war was marked by a policy that was extremely fragmented. In times of crisis, this impeded any thought of pursuing collective demands through decentralized and/or national mobilizations. Once again, negotiation was confined to corporatist or communitarian spaces. The absence of revolt does not mean that “the social question” was not a particularly salient matter but rather that it was overseen by the very political institutions against which the *Isqât an-nizâm* movement, the movement most involved with the question, had risen up: relations of communitarian and partisan power that have grown out of the ruins of a public system of social protection. Since the 1970s, it has mainly been Shiite leaders who, along with the Communist Party, have spoken up on behalf of the underprivileged and oppressed, colluding social and economic demands with the right of being represented as a community. But the entire political class is characterized by the leadership of employers and notables who rely upon their ability to protect the “community” from the social and political dangers with which it may be confronted.⁴⁴ Taking into account all confessions, a system of social institutions and religious or family foundations, both recent and longstanding, supply services on the margins of public action. Allied with

43. Béatrice Hibou, “Macroéconomie et domination politique en Tunisie: du ‘miracle économique’ benaliste aux enjeux socioéconomiques du moment révolutionnaire”, *Politique africaine*, 124, winter 2011, p. 127-154.

44. Elizabeth Picard, “Une sociologie historique du za’im libanais”, in Charles Chartouni (ed.), *Mélanges en l’honneur de Toufic Touama*, Paris, Geuthner, 2001, p. 157-172.

competing figures and political groups, the day-to-day activity of these institutions (healthcare, instruction, poverty relief, etc.) renders it more difficult to distinguish between things to which all have a right and the services and benefits offered by representatives of the state and their political organizations on the margins of official channels. Finally, it is not the existence of a confessional system based on primordial solidarities that prevents the emergence of a trans-communitarian collective awareness, born through the experience of social vulnerability; such awareness is precluded by the operation of public and private organizations that, in supplying *ad minima* services, segment solidarities and relegate demands for universal rights to the background. That being the case, what Marie Vannetzel has shown in regards to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt⁴⁵ as well as what many studies have similarly demonstrated in Latin America⁴⁶ also hold here: political patron involvement in client and protection networks may be a factor that, by turns, inhibits protest (e.g., the difficulty experienced by successive movements to mobilize against communitarianism) and fuels demand for the recognition of the right to be protected (e.g., one of the major components in the intense electoral bargaining that takes place between candidates and potential voters).

The Plural Meanings of Social Conflict

The neo-liberal policies that have, in recent decades, been pursued by the especially un-distributionist oligarchies of Lebanon and Morocco have brought about real social changes in these countries. While these changes have not given rise to generalized insurrection, they impel forms of dissidence, silent resistance⁴⁷ and more open instances of protest that put into question the notion that these societies are doomed to either passive obedience or violent revolt. Indeed, Lebanese and Moroccan political economies – and the comparison is certainly worth pursuing – do not inhibit social struggle, but on the contrary, encourage them. Recent mobilizations have exposed several types of fault lines, particularly when it comes to the matter of defining what is “unjust”: for instance the re-appropriation of the discourse of “class communities” (*tâ’ifa-tabaqa*)⁴⁸ by the *Isqât al nizâm* movement and left wing circles in Lebanon,⁴⁹ or the re-appropriation of

45. Marie Vannetzel, “Les voies silencieuses de la contestation: les Frères musulmans égyptiens, entre clientélisme et citoyenneté alternative”, *Raisons politiques*, 29, 2008, p. 23-37.

46. Javier Auyero *et al.* “Contestations et patronage: intersections et interactions au microscope”, *Revue Internationale de politique comparée*, 17, spring 2010, p.71-102.

47. Lamia Zaki, “Pratiques politiques au bidonville, Casablanca (2000-2005)”, Ph D. dissertation, Political science, Paris, Sciences Po, 2005.

48. Elizabeth Picard, “De la ‘communauté classe’ à la résistance ‘nationale’. Pour une analyse du rôle des Chi’ites dans le système politique libanais (1970-1985)”, *Revue française de science politique*, 35(6), 1985, p. 999-1028.

49. Marie-Noëlle Abi Yaghi, “L’altermondialisme au Liban : un militantisme de passage. Logiques d’engagement et reconfiguration de l’espace militant (de gauche) au Liban”, Ph D. dissertation, Political science, Paris, Université de Paris 1-La Sorbonne, 2013.

colonial trope of “useless Morocco” in attempts to coordinate movements along the kingdom’s borders. The latter can be found at work, for example, in Sidi Ifni in the provinces of Western Sahara or in Bouarfa on the Algerian frontier, where the population associates the social and economic difficulties it has experienced with the long-standing policy, within the country’s own development plans, of the provinces’ marginalization. It matters little that, according to recent data for Lebanon, the distribution of wealth has in the postwar years clearly re-stabilized⁵⁰ or that the town of Sidi Ifni has been particularly targeted by development policies, for geopolitical reasons relating to the conflict with the Polisario Front. What this reveals is the manner in which conflict remains anchored in a local history that has forged or legitimized a right to express one’s indignation – in other words, the degree to which conflict, far from being a superficial reaction to state action, belongs to the history of political consciousness. The same can certainly be said of the demand for public employment on the part of unemployed Moroccan graduates: it must be understood not only as the expression of a right to work that is justified by individual and collective investment in university education but also as a demand for protection in a society in which public employment offers by far the most abundant access to social rights.

For at least a decade, Arab societies have experienced profound economic, demographic and social disruption, phenomena that are far from having been fully studied. Combined with often predatory modes of governance in the service of minimally redistributionist “buddy capitalism”, the economic reforms that have been undertaken have accentuated social inequalities, undermined the world of work and favored the enrichment of those in power rather than the emergence of an entrepreneurial middle class. In the 1990s, these issues received extensive attention from scholars interested in political economy. Initially claiming that business circles would spearhead regime transformation, they subsequently sought to show how the reforms that had been undertaken instead served to concentrate wealth and power. The attention devoted in political economy to the reorganization of elites, on the one hand, and the complex logics of relations of dependence, on the other, did not always enter into dialogue with the sociology of mobilizations that had developed in the same field in the 2000s. Where the political economist above all attended to techniques of control, oversight and circumvention in production, exchange and accumulation, the sociologist focused on the individual and collective processes that govern public speech and protest. In the gap that separated these two approaches, little attention was given to the possible relations between economic agendas and the multiple forms of mobilization. Yet in many countries of the region the last decade has been characterized

50. Salim Nasr, “The New Social Map”, in Theodor Hanf and Nawaf Salam (eds.), *Lebanon in Limbo: Post War Society and State in an Uncertain Regional Environment*, Baden Baden, Momos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2003, p. 143-158.

by an intensification of resistance, revolt and protest against inequality and in favor of social “dignity” – all of which might be understood as belonging to a cycle of mobilization. Because they interposed “social” demands with demands for freedom or regime change, the 2011 uprisings have once again brought this issue to the foreground.

In this respect, comparison of recent Lebanese and Moroccan trajectories casts light on several questions. First, it emphasizes the contingency of mobilization and questions the nomological explanations revolving around the study of uprisings. Revolts cannot really be barometers for social issues. Whereas issues relating to social insecurity have in recent years found wide expression in Morocco, they have largely been passed over in silence in Lebanon. In neither case, however, do these social policies in themselves suffice to explain the onset or containment of protest. Rather, they fall under the aegis of forms of governmentality that may fuel resistance and protest just as much as they inspire the loyalty and compromise that are at the basis of the demand of rights. The possible impact of demands for social rights (in the areas of housing, electricity, employment, education, health-care, etc.) is determined neither by the reformist action of the Moroccan state, which fuels anti-establishment activity as much as it defuses it, nor the obvious indifference of the Lebanese authorities towards what concerns the social domain. In these two countries, where the state has never, in reality, been or even claimed to be a welfare state, the latter remains anchored in practices specific to everyday life. These practices supply the foundations of networks of infra-state solidarity and demands for new rights, for instance the “illegal” occupation of residences, recourse to local mutual aid networks, or demands for access to public employment and rights of migration. These forms of exchange have little impact on formal law, which is rarely applied, for example in workplaces where the exception is most often the rule. Rather, they contribute to shaping shared norms in regards to what counts as just or unjust, a cause that is worth collectively defending or instead a matter of particular domestic difficulties. Located at the margins of the 2011 uprisings, the recent trajectories of Morocco and Lebanon demonstrate that widespread collective concerns regarding the nature of social solidarities can express itself in either the language of revolt or that of allegiance. A comparison of these two cases allows an in-depth reflection on the exacerbation of a “social question”, as well as revealing the degree to which this question is manifested in diverse forms of resistance, all dependent upon the particular histories of the different policies within this domain. ■

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