

The protest dynamics of Casablanca's February 20th Movement

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On February 19th, 2012, Casablanca's February 20th Movement (hereafter referred to as the M20) celebrated its first anniversary in more than 80 different Moroccan towns and cities. One year previously, following a call posted on Facebook, protests had sprung up in 53 different locations throughout the country.¹ During this interval of time, the Moroccan authorities took measures to break up the movement, without nevertheless being able to stop the protest.

If we are to believe both the national and international official discourse touting the 'Moroccan exception', the monarchy reacted by adopting a reformist attitude, which prevented both popular uprisings as well as a revolution. Initiated in the 1990s, it would thus seem that the country's 'democratization process' was hastened on July 1st, 2011 with the adoption of a new constitution, the organization of legislative elections scheduled for November 25th, 2011 and the nomination, on January 3rd, 2012, of a government presided over by the Secretary-general of the Parti de la Justice et du Développement² (PJD - *Party of Justice and Development*), until then the main Islamic opposition in parliament.

Several competing interpretations have been put forth to explain Morocco's trajectory during 2011. Some have highlighted the elements that make Morocco a country 'like any other', while others have emphasized its uniqueness. But regardless of whether these studies focus on revolutionary situations or the region's 'exceptionalism', four biases consistently reoccur. First of all, observers tend to concentrate on the 'causes' and 'results' of political crises, rather than on protest dynamics.³ Secondly, when attention is paid to the actors of these events, it tends to focus on outsiders, embodied by archetypes (depoliticized, disenfranchised youth, cyber-activists, etc.) and thus ignores the

¹ Morocco-wide, the police estimated 37,000 protestors, while organizers claimed 238,000. The mood of the protests was largely peaceful, barring a few incidents in a handful of cities (fires, destruction of goods, 6 dead and 128 wounded, including 115 police officers, and 120 arrests, according to the Minister of the Interior).

² See Table 1 and Khadija Mohsen-Finan, Malika Zeghal, 'Opposition islamiste et pouvoir monarchique au Maroc. Le cas du Parti de la Justice et du Développement', *Revue française de science politique*, 56(1), February 2006, p. 79-119.

³ For a historical point of view, see François Furet, *Penser la Révolution française*, Paris, Gallimard, 1978; for a political science perspective, see Michel Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 3rd ed., 2009.

heterogeneous makeup of the groups in question. In addition, these actors are observed and fixed at *t* time — an approach which neglects the indirect paths that lead individuals to protest, to increase their commitment, to convert their activist engagement, or on the contrary, to disengage. Finally, the boundaries between civil society and institutionalized politics, as well as those between social movements and conventional politics often become rigid and inflexible.⁴ This translates into a failure to address the processes of interpenetration between arenas, as well as the formation, reconfiguration and disintegration of coalitions during political crises.⁵

In this essay, we will instead focus on one main question: how is a field of alliances and oppositions configured in relation to external events, and is it then constantly reshaped throughout the unfolding of a protest movement? Following in the footsteps of other theoretical approaches,⁶ by field of alliances and oppositions we mean interaction networks that are: more or less stable over time; characterized by more or less formalized⁷ relationships based on mutual acquaintance and close ties and on the sharing, in the short- or long-term, of the same values, causes, enemies, participants, audiences and resources. This approach allows us to connect the meso level of (more or less) organized groupings and the micro level of individuals, whether they are ‘newcomers’ or multi-positioned actors, having already belonged to or participated in informal groups, Facebook debates, associations, unions, political parties, etc., either synchronically or diachronically. This methodology also allows us to go beyond organizational bias,⁸ and thus to re-establish the variety of organizational forms, the diversity of actors who are ‘participants’ rather than ‘members’, to comprehend the dynamic nature of ‘changing configurations of alliances’⁹ and to surpass the boundaries

⁴ For a critique of this problem, see Jack A. Goldstone, ‘Introduction. Bridging Institutionalized and Noninstitutionalized Politics’, in Jack A. Goldstone (ed.), *States, Parties, and Social Movements*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 1–24.

⁵ For example, Suzanne Staggenborg, ‘Coalition Work in the Pro-Choice Movement’, *Social Problems*, 33, 1986, p. 374–389.

⁶ This concept draws on the notion of the multi-organizational field (Russell L. Curtis, Louis A. Zurcher, ‘Stable Resources of Protest Movements: The Multi-Organisational Field’, *Social Forces*, 52(1), 1973, p. 53–61). Its development relies upon its connection with other concepts (cf. notes below) and reflections conducted with Olivier Fillieule.

⁷ See Frédéric Sawicki’s concept of the ‘socio-political environment’ (‘Partis politiques et mouvements sociaux’, in Simon Luck, Stéphanie Dechezelles (ed.), *Voix de la rue ou voie des urnes ?*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011, p. 31–46).

⁸ Pamela E. Oliver, ‘Bringing the Crowd Back In: The Nonorganizational Elements of Social Movements’, *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts, and Change*, 11, 1989, p. 1–30.

⁹ See the concept of ‘social movements organizations’ coined by Olivier Fillieule (‘De l’objet de la définition à la définition de l’objet. De quoi traite finalement la sociologie des mouvements sociaux ?’, *Politique et*

usually erected between social movements, partisan or union organizations and 'infrapolitical' groups.

We shall attempt to answer this central question based on our ethnographic observation of the M20's organization, conducted in Casablanca between February 2011 and February 2012. Following several calls to action posted on Facebook, the M20 was structured around a collection of demands, a pacifist attitude and a schedule of protest activities. This multi-situated movement was presented under the guise of a decentralized national coordination, characterized by 'weak ties':¹⁰ it grouped together organizations that were strongly permeated by the local circumstances in which they were embedded. In the wake of the M20, protest actions sprung up all over the Web as well as in the streets. We have chosen to focus on Casablanca, Morocco's economic capital and the country's largest city, as it has also inherited a long protest history that is inscribed in the memory of its inhabitants.¹¹ In addition, the majority of the country's elites are located in Casablanca or Rabat. More importantly, the fact that we had already spent time in the field there prompted us to conduct several immersions between April 2011 and February 2012, lasting anywhere between three days and one month.¹²

Investigation Protocol

The investigation protocol implemented followed three main criteria. Firstly, it seemed crucial to us to multiply the number of observational situations, both synchronically and diachronically, in order to comprehend protest dynamics in their density as well as their movement. Secondly, we wished to give ourselves the means to perceive the effects of these dynamics on participants as well as on the collective. Thirdly, we were careful to diversify the modes of data collection and analysis in order to reduce the biases engendered by the use of a single method. We ran two focus groups to deepen our understanding of the M20's genesis in Casablanca. During each immersion session, we observed protest actions, general assemblies and related events; we socialized with members of the coordinating committee; we conducted in-depth interviews with 103 individuals (M20 participants, national political players, observers, authority figures); we additionally followed several individuals more closely, with whom we repeated interviews. During marches and demonstrations, we collected leaflets, recorded slogans, conducted short interviews and took photos. By methodically archiving part of the exchanges between M20

Sociétés, 28(1), 2009, p. 15–36, here p. 25ff.).

¹⁰ Mark S. Granovetter, 'The Strength of Weak Ties', *American Journal of Sociology*, 78, 1973, p. 1360–1380.

¹¹ The uprisings in both 1965 and 1981 were violently repressed and turned into bloodbaths.

¹² M. Bennani-Chraïbi conducted seven immersion episodes (April, July, September, November, December 2011, January and February 2012). M. Jekhllaly conducted five immersion episodes (May, August, December 2011, January and February 2012).

members on Facebook, we expanded our fieldwork onto the Internet. Finally, we created a press kit, which included press releases and official positions taken by large associations, trade unions, Moroccan political parties and international actors and organizations.

In order to establish the sequence of protest dynamics, we conducted a thorough analysis of our data and formed a chronological timeline of about forty pages. This timeline documents the M20's various actions in Casablanca over the course of twelve months; how the group was shaped and reshaped; new support and defections at the national level, the responses of the authorities, regional events seen (according to our interviewees) as favorable or unfavorable to the M20, as well as international support for the M20 or, on the contrary, for the monarchy.

Working as a two-person team allowed us not only to collect a rich variety of data, but also to nuance our observations and establish different relationships with survey participants. In fact, being able to present ourselves as a Berber-speaking young scholar, socialized in a Casablanca university, or as a forty-something female embedded in the European academic world, respectively, helped to shape our individual 'games of distance and proximity'.¹³

On the basis of our observations, we would like to put forth two hypotheses. Firstly, it is when actors perceive 'a situation of political fluidity' that they may provisionally put aside social cleavages in order to express shared demands that are un-ideological and largely un-prioritized, and to concentrate on the implementation of an 'organization on the ground' (*tansiq maydani*). Secondly, in relation with the intersecting perceptions which play out on the regional and international levels, tension between protest space and the stage of institutionalized politics¹⁴ helped to reshape the M20 coalition, as well as protest dynamics in general. Starting with these hypotheses, we shall first describe the environment within which such an improbable coalition was formed. We will then show that this large protest movement was not the result of a domino effect, nor was it spontaneously generated: quite on the contrary, observing the genesis of the M20 movement revealed the diversity of its birthplaces, the interweaving of 'non-relational'¹⁵ mediations, both informal and organized, the synergies between new participants and seasoned activists. Finally, we shall focus on two processes: firstly, the

¹³ Stéphane Beaud, 'L'usage de l'entretien en sciences sociales. Plaidoyer pour l'"entretien ethnographique"', *Politix*, 9(35), 1996, p. 226–257, here p. 243.

¹⁴ By institutional political sphere we mean the sites of conventional politics on both the local and national level, as well as all the actors admitted within these spaces and whose participations is governed by law.

¹⁵ On 'non-relational means of diffusion', not founded on direct links and which favor the process of the 'attribution of similarity', see the psycho-sociological approach in David Strang, John W. Meyer, 'Institutional Conditions for Diffusion', *Theory and Society*, 22(4), 1993, p. 487–511.

process that underpinned the anchoring of the M20 coalition and the spread of protests within a field of alliances and oppositions and secondly, the process which prompted the coalition's reconfiguration and eventual disintegration. We shall defend the following thesis: these two processes do not automatically follow each other but are intertwined in a 'game of levels' between local, national, regional and international scales.

THE M20: AT THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN PROTEST SPACE AND INSTITUTIONAL POLITICAL SPHERE

If we were to refer to certain theses on authoritarianism and coalition formation in the Third World, the nature of the Moroccan regime would not appear to exhibit structural characteristics favorable to revolutionary uprisings. Compared to 'exclusive', 'interventionist' or 'repressive'¹⁶ regimes, Morocco would thus seem to exist in a 'grey zone'.¹⁷ Endowed with certain democratic attributes, the Moroccan regime nevertheless remains plagued by the 'syndromes' of 'irresponsible pluralism' or a 'dominant political power' which translate, among other things, into a break between those governing and those governed, as well as the general apathy of the latter with regard to institutionalized politics and its elites. On another level, the traits of the country's protest spaces would seem to present obstacles towards the spread of revolutionary fervor. The fact that part of the opposition could hope to have even limited access to state-run institutions would have thwarted such an impetus. Moreover, according to M. Parsa, the presence of strongly ideological and overly organized challengers incited such fears that it prevented the formation of interclass coalitions, especially among the upper classes. Nevertheless, the Moroccan monarchy tried to reorient the opposition towards institutionalized politics, while some protestors worried about ideological polarization and organizational imbalances between the stronger Islamist groups and a weakly anchored Left. It remains to be seen how actors were able to form a coalition sufficiently large enough to challenge 'despotism' and 'corruption' in a context which presented so many obstacles.

Institutionalized Politics in Morocco: Between Fragmentation and Renewal

¹⁶ Misagh Parsa, *States, Ideologies & Social Revolutions. A Comparative Analysis of Iran, Nicaragua and the Philippines*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

¹⁷ Thomas Carothers, 'The End of the Transition Paradigm', *Journal of Democracy*, 1, 2002, p. 5-21.

The Moroccan monarchy has often been presented as an ‘expert in survival’,¹⁸ enduring the vicissitudes of time by adapting to the transformations of its environment and observing its neighbors’ mistakes in order to better predict the future. Thanks to a ‘Makhzenian’¹⁹ strategy, the regime would thus have guaranteed the constant renewal of reformist discourse²⁰ as well as of client networks. According to this view, it would also have demonstrated the ability to ‘divide in order to better rule’, to transform ‘opponents to His Majesty’ into ‘opponents of His Majesty’, even at times into ‘friends of the king’. As the political scene was characterized by ‘a glut of players’,²¹ the recourse to repression was selective and isolated.

As soon as independence was proclaimed in 1956, one of the monarchy’s objectives was to fragment the polarized political climate by favoring divisions and encouraging the birth of so-called ‘administrative’ parties.²² Consequently, the country’s multi-party system and electoral mechanisms were thought to be the ‘political class’ instrument[s] of control used to confine potential rivals’.²³ Indeed, after having been allies in the fight for national independence, the monarchy and the Mouvement national (*National Movement*) quickly became rivals. Starting in the mid-1960s, revolutionary fervor grew within the ranks of the Left and anti-monarchism took the shape of urban riots (1965), as well as guerrilla attacks and attempted military coups (1971, 1972). This marked the beginning of the ‘Years of Lead’, a period of wide-scale repression. Negotiations between the monarchy and the left wing of the Mouvement national nevertheless continued, and the mobilization of the nationalist repertoire — prompted by conflict in the Western Sahara (1975) — marked the beginning of the regime’s stabilization and of the country’s alleged process of democratization. The recognition of the king’s hegemony, of Moroccan ownership of the Sahara and of Islam as the exclusive

¹⁸ Lisa Anderson, ‘Dynasts and Nationalists: Why Monarchies Survive’ in Joseph Kostiner (ed.), *Middle East Monarchies. The Challenge of Modernity*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 2000, p. 53–69.

¹⁹ In Morocco, the term Makhzen designates the Royal House, the territory over which it holds power as well as its administrative branches. ‘Makhzenization’ thus signifies the cooptation by the ‘Makhzen’, or the permeation of its spirit and style.

²⁰ In particular, see Myriam Catusse, ‘Maroc : un fragile État social dans la réforme néolibérale’, in Myriam Catusse, Blandine Destremau, Éric Verdier (ed.), *L’État face aux ‘débordements’ du social au Maghreb. Formation, travail, protection*, Paris, Karthala, 2010, p. 121–148.

²¹ Abdellah Tourabi, Lamia Zaki, ‘Maroc : une révolution royale ?’, *Mouvements*, 66, 2011, p. 98–103; Lofti Chawqui, ‘Le mouvement du 20 février un an après’, *Centre Tricontinental (CETRI)*, February 2nd, 2012: <http://www.cetri.be/spip.php?page=imprimer&id_article=2506>.

²² Rémy Leveau, *Le fellah marocain défenseur du trône*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 1985 (1st ed. 1976).

²³ Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi, ‘“Hommes d’affaires” versus “profs de fac”. La notabilisation parlementaire d’un parti de militants au Maroc’, *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, 15(2), 2008, p. 205–219, here p. 206.

domain of the Commander of the Faithful erected boundaries between the legal opposition, represented by the Union socialiste des forces populaires (USFP - *Socialist Union of Popular Forces*),²⁴ and on the other hand, movements mired in illegality (first Marxist- and then Islamist-leaning groups).

After a decade plagued by structural adjustment programs and urban revolts (1981, 1984, 1990), overlaid on a backdrop of promises of democratization in Tunisia (1987) and Algeria (1988), the Gulf War (1991) presented an intense challenge to the Moroccan king. However, at a moment of such disillusionment, it would appear that the failures of Morocco's neighbor Algeria prompted the country's various political players to exercise self-limitation. In a context where both the monarchy and the descendants of the Mouvement national feared the rise of Islamism, political openness meant resuming negotiations between the two camps and the gradual liberation of victims from the Years of Lead. Among the latter, many helped to give new momentum to associative organizations and/or joined radical left-wing groups as the latter became increasingly legalized.²⁵

Regardless of the theoretical approach adopted by different scholars, the 'consensual alternating of government' (1998) and the monarchy's succession (1999) have generally always been seen as turning points in the country's history,²⁶ marked by the following events: the partial integration of Islamists within the parliament (1997), the relative freedom of the press and the creation of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (2004–06), in the hopes of turning the page on the Years of Lead. Nevertheless, following the attacks on May 16th, 2003, the authorities resumed their repressive practices and reined in the media. Since 1998, the number of parties on the legal political scene has multiplied.²⁷ Little by little, electoral engineering replaced ballot-box stuffing: no political party obtained more than 11% of the votes during 2007's legislative elections, and the rate of abstention reached a all-time high of 63%. Coalition

²⁴ See Table 1.

²⁵ Éric Cheynis, 'L'espace des transformations de l'action associative au Maroc. Réforme de l'action publique, investissements militants et légitimation internationale', doctoral dissertation in the social sciences, Paris, Université Paris I-Panthéon Sorbonne, 2008.

²⁶ Myriam Catusse, Frédéric Vairel, 'Ni tout à fait le même, ni tout à fait un autre. Métamorphoses et continuité du régime marocain', *Maghreb-Machrek*, 175, 2003, p. 73–92.

²⁷ This tendency also translated into a growth in the number of parties represented in the house of representatives: 3 in 1963; 6 in 1977; 8 in 1984; 11 in 1993; 15 in 1997; 21 in 2002; 24 in 2007.

governments with hazy prerogatives brought together technocrats, former ministers of the Mouvement national and members of the former 'administrative' parties.

In 2008, the Parti authenticité et modernité (PAM - *Party of Authenticity and Modernity*) was founded, officially with the objective of reconciling citizens with politics by bringing together the kingdom's key players — and unofficially, to combat the rise of Islamism. The fact that the party was co-founded by a 'friend of the king', a former secretary of state, in addition to its meteoric rise in the polls and its appeal to the elected members of former administrative parties all worked against the coalition. The PAM's adversaries criticized it for just being a new 'administrative party' whose mission was to put the finishing touches on the lock-down of the institutional political stage.

It is on this backdrop that the protest dynamics instigated by the M20 emerged, blurring the lines between institutionalized politics and protest space.

February 20th: The Meeting of a Motley Crew of Players

The first M20 demonstrations took place on February 20th, 2011 all throughout the country and marked an unprecedented threshold in the protest history of independent Morocco. They brought together new players as well as individuals who had witnessed the Years of Lead, civil society actors, members of governing parties and parliamentary opposition, as well as activists from illegal organizations. Over the course of the past twenty years, the streets have almost continuously witnessed demonstrations and these protest spaces have become denser, especially in small and medium-sized towns. In 1991, unemployed college graduates with all sorts of political affiliations (left-wing, extreme left-wing, right-wing, Islamist...) chose not to fight each other but rather to build a common cause around the right to work, thus beginning a cycle of demonstrations which lasted by being regularly reconfigured.²⁸ Similarly, during the 2000s 'Arab' or 'Islamic' causes enabled the formation of coalitions bridging ideological differences. During the last few years, organizations against the high cost of living brought together civil society members, union activists and left- and extreme left-wing militants. Nevertheless, this was the first time that an attempt to go beyond the fragmentation of Morocco's political sphere was embedded within national policy: this excluded neither

²⁸ Montserrat Emperador Badimon, 'Les mobilisations des diplômés chômeurs au Maroc : usages et avatars d'une protestation pragmatique', doctoral dissertation in political science, Aix-en-Provence, Institut d'études politiques, September 2011.

an overlap with social demands nor connections between the transnational, national and local levels.

In fact, a seemingly unlikely relationship was established between two very different political networks: the Left and the Islamists. For these two groups, protesting together meant — at least temporarily — putting on the backburner the enmities and distrust present in both camps and which opposed ‘adherents’ and ‘independents’, those integrated within organizations of institutionalized politics and those marginalized or excluded (Table 1), not to mention the fracture lines running through parties divided by their past and present.

Table 1. Political Organizations Affected by or Involved in the M20

<i>Political organizations affected by the M20</i>			
Governmental Left	Union socialiste des forces populaires (USFP - <i>Socialist Union of Popular Forces</i>)	Born of a scission within the Mouvement national in 1959, and of subsequent split in 1975, the USFP embodied left-wing opposition in parliament until 1997. Within the context of the <i>Koutla</i> (a coalition formed with the descendants of the Mouvement national), it became a governing party between 1998 and 2011. Its history is littered with divisions.	In first position during the legislative elections in 1997 and 2002, it slipped to fifth position in number of seats in 2007 (38). Almost 40,000 members declared.

	Parti du progrès et du socialisme (PPS - <i>Progress and Socialism Party</i>)	Is affiliated with the Communist Party of Morocco founded in 1944. In the <i>Koutla</i> , it became a governing party in 1998.	17 seats in Parliament in 2007. Almost 40,000 members declared.	
Parliamentary opposition	Parti de la justice et du développement (PJD - <i>Party of Justice and Development</i>)	Islamist-leaning party created in 1998, after a long process of unification and legalization. It represented the main opposition in Parliament until 2011.	46 seats in Parliament in 2007. Almost 16,000 members declared.	
<i>Political organizations which support the M20</i>				
Legal opposition, both parliamentary and non-parliamentary Rassemblement de la gauche démocratique (2004- Democratic Left Coalition)	Parliamentary opposition Alliance de la gauche démocratique (2007 - Democratic Left Alliance)	Parti socialiste unifié (PSU - Unified Socialist Party)	Created in 2005 following the unification of non-governing left-wing parties. Its roots can be found in the Mouvement national and the Marxist movements of the 1970s.	6 seats in Parliament in 2007. PSU: almost 4,000 members declared. PADS: almost 1,100 members declared. CNI: Information not available.
		Parti de l'avant-garde démocratique socialiste (PADS- <i>Party of the Socialist Democratic Avant-garde</i>)	Result of a split from the USFP in 1983, legalized in 1993.	

		Congrès national Ittihadi (CNI - <i>Ittihadi National Congress</i>)	Result of a split in 2001 from part of the union branch of the UFSP (Confédération démocratique du travail, CDT - <i>Democratic Confederation of Labor</i>)	
	Legal non-parliamentary opposition Annahj Addimocrati		Created in 1995 and legalized in 2004, this party claims to belong to Ila Al Amam, a Marxist-Leninist movement from the 1970s.	Has a history of boycotting elections. Almost 1,000 members declared.
Political organizations not recognized by the authorities	Islamists	Al Adl Wal Ihsane (<i>Justice and Spirituality</i>)	One of the main Islamist organizations in Morocco, founded in the mid-1970s. It is characterized by its non-recognition of the king's status as the Commander of the Faithful and by the importance it attaches to spiritual education.	
		Al Badil Al Hadari (<i>Civilizational Alternative</i>)	These parties stem from the same Islamist fabric of the 1970s as the PJD and proclaim to be 'Islamodemocratic' and close to the Left. The first was legalized in 2005 and dissolved in 2008 following accusations of terrorism. The second did not become official until 2012.	
		Hizb Al Oumma (<i>The Party of Oumma</i>)		
	Extreme left-wing	Maoists		

		Trotskyists (Almounadil-a)	Present largely only on the campuses of several universities.
		Stalinists	

Table 2. Main Affiliations of the ‘Left-Wing’ Pioneers of the M20-Casablanca

Association marocaine des droits humains (AMDH - <i>Moroccan Association for Human Rights</i>)	Created in 1979 under the scope of the UFSP. After a standby period, in 1988 it experienced a rebirth thanks to the arrival of radical left-wing activists. In 2009, it had 91 local chapters and more than 10,000 members throughout the country.
Association nationale des diplômés chômeurs du Maroc (ANDCM - <i>Moroccan National Association of Unemployed Graduates</i>)	Created in 1991, this association has over a hundred local chapters. Claiming to be ‘progressive, independent, popular and democratic’, its demonstrations have helped to normalize the occupation of the streets in Morocco. The Casablanca chapter was reactivated in 2010 and led by extreme left-wing militants (Stalinists, Maoists, etc.).
Association pour la taxation des transactions financières et pour l’action citoyenne – Comité pour l’annulation de la dette du tiers-monde-Maroc (ATTAC- <i>Association for a Tax on Financial Transactions and for Citizen Action</i> ; CADTM - <i>Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt</i>)	Created in 2000 in Morocco, this anti-globalization organization is part of an international network collaborating around a shared platform. Since 2005 it has undergone restructuring which translated into the presence of a strong Almounadil-a (Trotskyist) current. It has almost 500 members.
Mouvement alternatif pour les libertés individuelles (MALI - <i>Alternative Movement for Individual Liberties</i>)	Created in 2009, first as a Facebook group to defend freedom of conscience, of religion, of sexual orientation and more generally, the instauration of a secular state.
Réseau des associations de quartier du Grand Casablanca (RESAQ - <i>Greater Casablanca Neighborhood Associations Network</i>)	Formed in 2003 with about fifty neighborhood associations by a former extreme left-wing political prisoner, this network seeks to build the capacities of local organizations and to function as a mediator with national and international partners.

In particular, the 'independents' warrant our attention. Within the M20, this self-descriptive label is used by cyber-activists, largely ordinary citizens and players in the neighborhood associations.²⁹ As the boundaries between associative space, trade unions and politics are not airtight, many individuals are multi-positioned and chose to put their adherence, past or present, to a political party on the back burner, expressing instead their suspicion with regard to the politics of 'organizations'. According to the most seasoned activists, the main dividing line separates, 'the traditional culture of politics' on one side, based on hegemony and the values of leadership, hierarchy and centralization, and on the other, a culture inspired by popular education and social forums which privileges horizontality, decentralization and the absence of leaders and spokespersons.

The 'independents'

All throughout contemporary Moroccan history, the terms 'independent' and 'unaffiliated' and 'non partisan' were bandied about in the context of many different types of political struggles. Starting in the 1960s, on the eve of each election, spokespersons for the monarchy used this repertoire to mobilize against the Mouvement national parties. However, this did not stop them from later being organized into the so-called administrative parties. The end of the 1980s saw the rebirth of advocacy organizations which then sought to recruit 'independents' in order to reach more than just activists from political organizations. Internal tensions rapidly crystalized, however, around the opposition between 'independents' and 'partisans'. Little by little, the use of the word 'independent' came to symbolize the vague unease regarding a formless blob with variable geography: the 'tainted', 'corrupted', 'Makhzenized' and 'divided' political class,³⁰ the voluntary sector 'clientelized' through the particularistic redistribution of the financial manna emanating from the Initiative nationale pour le développement humain (INDH - *National Human Development Initiative*); political organizations marginalized by institutionalized politics. Conversely, it is sometimes the case that political opponents are wary of 'independents' and believe them to be potential 'infiltrators'.

The Birth of the M20

Despite the intensity of the interactions characterizing the social and historical construction of the 'Arab world', the fall of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on January 14th, 2011, followed by that of Hosni Mubarak on February 11th, 2011 did not in reality produce a

²⁹ These are members of advocacy organizations, constituted around identity issues (the Amazighs) or special interests within a certain category of the population (unemployed graduates, shantytown residents, neighborhoods, etc.).

³⁰ I. Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi, 'Jeux de miroir de la "politisation" : les acteurs associatifs de quartier à Casablanca', *Critique internationale*, 50, 2011, p. 55-71, here p. 59.

domino effect. It is true that channels such as Al Jazeera encouraged feelings of belonging to a single, imagined community, and that social networks also helped to expand the possibilities for communication. Nevertheless, these elements did not suffice to automatically set off a wave of protests, or to short-circuit the other factors identified by social movement sociologists,³¹ or even to marginalize seasoned activists in favor of 'newcomers' (young 'depoliticized' individuals, cyber-activists). A description of the M20's creation allows us to identify the 'lived processes of diffusion', the diversity of the movement's birthplaces, the plurality of the channels via which connections were made between individuals and organizations, as well as the links and events which encouraged the mobilization to spread beyond its core group of pioneers.

Judging from the interviews we conducted, the fall of the Tunisian and Egyptian presidents just a few weeks apart led Moroccan actors to adopt a different strategic perspective than previously. First of all, the intelligibility frame of the political arena became blurred, thus widening the horizon of possibilities and feasibility. According to a 22 year-old ATTAC-CADTM member, 'After Tunisia, I said to myself: just imagine a similar thing happening in Morocco. But after Egypt, I told myself: something absolutely has to happen here in Morocco'. Through a process of 'attribution of similarity', the individuals we interviewed drew connections between the problems seen in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco: social and economic crises, high rates of unemployment for graduates, disdain for the 'political masquerade', the king and his inner circle's monopoly over power and wealth. From there, these individuals anticipated the more or less similar chances of protest movements being successful at home.³² At least during an initial period, the leaders of the M20 attributed Tunisian and Egyptian successes to four main factors: the emphasis placed on 'depoliticized youth'; the absence of leadership, hierarchy and centralization; the important role played by spontaneity and innovation; and most of all, the dissolution of identities (organizational, ideological, ethnic, etc.). It was within this framework that M20 pioneers framed the image of a 'young' movement that went beyond ideological cleavages and bolstered the inversion of roles between seasoned activists and newcomers thus ultimately making the leaders of the past seem like mere followers.

³¹ Dieter Rucht, 'The Transnationalization of Social Movements. Trends, Causes, Problems', in Donatella della Porta, Hanspeter Kriesi, Dieter Rucht (eds), *Social Movements in a Globalizing World*, London, Macmillan, 1999, p. 223-244.

³² On the concepts of 'assurance games' and the 'bandwagon effect', processes which drive followers to participate in a movement after having observed it and evaluated its chances for success, see: Dennis Chong, *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement*, Chicago, The University Chicago Press, 1991.

Although the media and social networks played a crucial role in various processes of identification, they were not a sufficient reason for protestors to take to the streets on February 20th. In fact, it was at the intersection between a wide variety of networks and locations that connections were made between cyber-activists³³ (including those who also participated in activist organizations), militants and other multi-positioned actors.

During the final days of 2010, Moroccan activists closely followed the demonstrations taking place in neighboring countries. The authorities were likewise on the lookout. On January 13th, 2011, the Coordination marocaine de soutien aux démocrates tunisiens (CoMaSoDeT - *Moroccan Committee Supporting Tunisian Democrats*)³⁴ organized a sit-in in front of the Tunisian embassy, which was violently dispersed — even though actions of solidarity with Palestine, Iraq and Libya were almost routine in Morocco at the time. After Ben Ali's downfall, demonstrations celebrating the Tunisian revolution finally began to be tolerated. Ultimately, associations, unions and political parties printed press releases and declarations, both as print media and on the Internet, initially to support the Tunisian people and then to offer them congratulations.

During this time, the fever spread to Moroccan Facebook users. The media's coverage of the revolutionary impact of the social network piqued the curiosity of novices. On January 14th, three young cyber-activists from Meknes created a Facebook group called 'Moroccans Discuss the King'. H.A. is one of these three individuals. Up until that point, the 22 year-old engineering student had never belonged to any organization whatsoever and his father, a teacher, rarely mentioned his own youthful dalliances with extreme-left wing politics. For the past three years, however, H.A. had engaged in political debates on 'progressive' discussion Internet boards.³⁵ On January 25th, he watched Al Jazeera in a cafe with a friend and became extremely frustrated. That night and the one following, he searched on the Internet, hoping to find a call to protest posted by one organization or another of the radical Left. Exasperated, he finally decided to take action with his two friends. On January 27th, the three youths rebranded their group as 'Mouvement liberté et démocratie maintenant' (*Movement for Freedom and Democracy Now*) and called for people to demonstrate on February 27th across the country in large

³³ See Driss Ksikes, 'Genèse du cyber-activisme au Maroc', *Economia*, 12, Cesem, Rabat, 2011, p. 80-83.

³⁴ Created in 2005 out of solidarity with the Tunisian hunger strikers, this committee brings together over twenty different associations, unions and parties — including the radical Left (RDG), but also the youth branch of the USFP and the National Support Group for Iraq and Palestine.

³⁵ Interview, December 18th, 2011.

public squares, in front of police stations and governor's mansions. On January 27th, the group had 3,000 members. By February 3rd, this total had reached 6,000 members. The call contained six demands of a unifying nature, going from the abrogation of the Constitution and the 'appointment of a constitutional committee composed of the most honest and qualified individuals, charged with drafting a new constitution granting the monarchy its natural size', to the creation of an unemployment benefit scheme. According to H.A., the implicit leaning towards a parliamentary monarchy was merely a 'rational' choice, a project that 'could be realized' and which had affinities with the signatories' condemnation of violence, 'anarchy' and 'Blanquism'.³⁶ The initial choice of date provoked the authorities attacks, as February 27th also happened to be the anniversary of the 1976 proclamation of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic by the Polisario front. In response, the date was moved up to February 20th.

On January 28th, Egypt's Day of Anger was met with feverish excitement on the Moroccan Internet group. An ex-affiliate of the USFP's youth group in Salé posted a video on YouTube in which he read the call of the Mouvement liberté et démocratie maintenant. Thus the February 20th movement was created and became a reference point for a whole host of groups on Facebook, scattered across all regions of the country. On February 3rd, the most widely read daily newspaper in Morocco, *Al Massae*, attacked the young people who posted the call and accused them of colluding with the Algerians and the Polisario. The smear campaign led by government ministers and the official media outlets prompted a surge of solidarity with 'the youth', while simultaneously hyping up February 20th as the political event of the moment.

In Rabat, demonstrations of support for the Egyptian people were the opportunity for groups of young people to meet on a regular basis. For the most part, these young people were the children of activists, supporters or members of left-wing organizations. From the beginning, the AMDH's support was crucial. Drawing on its pioneering role at the heart of multiple networks, the AMDH acted as both a transmission channel and a reservoir of human resources and logistical know-how. Moreover, it contributed to the socialization and generational renewal of the radical Left. It is therefore not surprising that its offices became the local headquarters for Rabat's youth. It is there that they created the video calling for 'action' on February 20th and that they posted the latter on

³⁶ Even though he claimed to have not been influenced by his father's political experiences, H.A. employed the same vocabulary as previous generations of activists.

YouTube on February 12th. Showing their faces, they started by identifying themselves without revealing any affiliations: 'I am a Moroccan'.

The broadcasting of this video gave a face to the movement, which thus ceased to be merely a virtual rumor. In response, the smear campaign sharpened its attacks: the members of the M20 were likened to 'traitors' calling into question the very basis of the nation (God, homeland, the king), to 'fringe elements' transgressing the latter's values (converted Christians, 'atheists', 'fast breakers', 'homosexuals'). Murky 'agents' started to act: anonymous phone calls were made, more or less 'courteous' visits were paid and pressure was exerted on families.

In Rabat, demonstrations of solidarity with the Egyptian revolution occurred almost daily and were thus tolerated. They encouraged dialogue between young and old, left-wing activists and Islamists from Al Adl Wal Ihsane, with the result that Saturday, February 12th's sit-in facing the parliament became a veritable forum for debate where a common goal was declared: 'Going down into the streets and marching together, on the 20th, all throughout Morocco'.

That same Saturday, a group of youths in Rabat met up at the AMDH headquarters to rewrite the M20's platform and to add new demands, this time delving into the political vocabulary of the left-wing opposition.³⁷ The monarchy was no longer mentioned and the political objective sought was now 'a democratic constitution which represents the true will of the people, drafted by an elected constitutional assembly'.

During this time in Casablanca, one meeting saw the collaboration of the national representatives of the youth branches of the radical left-wing parties (RGD). They published the first declaration of support for the February 20th call issuing from a political organization. The following day, their stance was adopted by the national leaderships of their respective parties; on February 14th, seventeen human rights organizations followed their lead.³⁸ During the same time, the Organisations et démocrates marocains (*Moroccan Organizations and Democrats*) issued the Call of Dakar at the World Social Forum (February 6th-12th), where they had the opportunity to dialogue with Tunisians, Egyptians and fellow citizens from other countries in full revolutionary effervescence.

³⁷ Since the country's independence, the constitutional question has been at stake for several generations of opposition members. See Jean-Noël Ferrié, Baudouin Dupret, 'La nouvelle architecture constitutionnelle et les trois désamorçages de la vie politique marocaine', *Confluences Méditerranée*, 78, 2011, p. 25-34.

³⁸ Created between the 20th and the 23rd of February, the Conseil national d'appui au M20 (CNAM20 - *National Support Council to the M20*) groups together political organizations, as well as large trade unions and a hundred or so other associations.

Islamist organizations did not wait long before joining the fray: Al Adl's youth contingent declared on February 16th that it intended to participate in the M20 demonstrations. Contingents from the PJD published a declaration of support on February 17th, then retracted it following the pressure of the party's higher-ups, who were in negotiations with the authorities.³⁹ Young people from the PJD nevertheless ended up rallying around a parliamentary member from the party to form the Baraka group.⁴⁰ Disappointed by their leadership's reticence with regard to the M20, members of the USFP published a declaration on the 18th signed 'the USFP-ists of February 20th'. After his initial skepticism, a USFP parliamentary member publically rallied to the cause, explaining that he felt that the movement was being subjected to a 'concerted attack' by ministers, political parties and the official media: 'When they take such positions, it seems to me that I should take the other side'.⁴¹

Driven by its more fringe elements, the protest movement spread quickly, causing the emergence of a configuration of alliances that appeared to upset the social and political barriers usually at play within 'routine' interactions. The radical and non-governing Left joined the movement at its inception and was followed by the Al Adl Islamists. The boundary between institutionalized politics and protest space became blurred: the main force at the heart of parliamentary opposition (Islamists from the PJD) and the parties of the governing Left (the USFP, the PPS) were shaken from the inside. The media coverage of the hitherto-unknown individuals amplified the dissemination of the 'young' movement's image as something that went beyond ideological cleavages. The majority of the M20's demands and platforms, as well as their vague and non-prioritized nature strengthened the movement's unifying dimension and encouraged collaboration with a wide variety of stakeholders, advocates for largely preexisting social and political demands, from the most 'universal' to the most sectorial. The public support of several intellectuals, artists, journalists and businessmen helped to create an image of social diversity. While the movement spread, 'non relational paths of diffusion' appeared

³⁹ On February 17th, the Secretary-general of the PJD announced that his party was boycotting the M20. The next morning, the prosecutor released a member of the PJD's general secretariat, arrested for corruption. On February 21st, the latter was nominated to the Economic and Social Council (CES).

⁴⁰ According to its founder, this word, synonymous with Kifaya ('that's enough') refers to the watchword of the eponymous Egyptian movement in 2004.

⁴¹ Interview conducted in July 2011.

intertwined with informal mediations, organizational locus and more or less 'abeyance structures'.⁴²

All throughout the momentum leading up to February 20th, the authorities sent ambivalent signals, which in turn fostered the impression among pioneers and potential followers of the M20 that the floodgates had finally been opened. In fact, after Ben Ali's fall, different measures were taken: negotiations with unemployed graduates and unions were sped up, in the hopes of putting an end to previous sectorial protests; the compensation fund was doubled; Friday preachers were encouraged to use their religious authority to preach against chaos, etc. On the one hand, the authorities tried to anticipate events, to gain some time, to discredit the youths who called for February 20th demonstrations and to discourage the creation of connections between Facebook users, actors in institutionalized politics, unemployed graduate movements and unions, and Islamists. On the other hand, the authorities also marshaled themselves to convey the idea of the 'Moroccan exception': reassuring announcements let people believe that there would be no repression on February 20th and that unlike its neighbors, Morocco would be a democratic country where social movements were frequent and normal.

Birth of the M20 in Casablanca

Since the beginning in Casablanca, the initiative was taken by 'organized' players. During the feverish excitement of the month of February, Casablanca's embryonic M20 was formed at the intersection between two structuring sociopolitical networks.

The first of these networks was the nebulous grouping together of all the left-wing organizations. One of its core elements was the Espace Casablanca pour le dialogue de la gauche (ECDG - *Casablanca Space for the Left's Dialogue*), a platform created in April 2008 by multi-positioned activists, for the most part on the fringes of their parties (the PSU and the USFP). After the defeat of the governmental and radical left-wing parties in 2007's elections, the organization's goal was to establish a place for reflection in the hopes of unifying the Left. It was the ECDG that called a meeting for hope on February 12th at the PSU's downtown headquarters, a space that was welcoming enough to host meetings of all sorts of activists. The majority of those present already knew each other, having collaborated in associative experiences before (cf. Table 2). Some had worked together

⁴² On this topic, see Verta Taylor, 'La continuité des mouvements sociaux. La mise en veille du mouvement des femmes', in Olivier Filleule (ed.), *Le désengagement militant*, Paris, Belin, 2005, p. 229-250.

during the previous five years with the Committee Against the High Cost of Living until 2009, and then again with the Youth Committees for the Liberation of Political Prisoners (2008–2009) and with the Housing Committee dealing with shantytowns until January 2011.

The second structuring pole, represented by Al Adl Wal Ihsane, was more closed-off. In reality, entry into this organization is governed by strict rules, and its militant discipline entails a large degree of self-selection.⁴³ An individual and collective pedagogical program regulates both the everyday and spiritual life of adherents, who are likewise encouraged to challenge themselves in all aspects of their lives, to train themselves both mentally and physically, to make substantial financial efforts for the good of the organization. This unauthorized political organization, very present on college campuses especially since the end of the 1980s, managed to branch out beyond its faithful adherents by casting a wider net, by engaging in charity work and contributing to social networks on the Internet.

The boundaries between these two networks were not completely airtight, as they were both rooted in the same urban, educated environment and comprised of relatively young individuals hailing from the lower or middle classes. The most visible dividing lines centered around political issues (a secular vs. Islamist state) and moral or religious matters (degree of adherence to religious duties, degree of support for individualist values, etc.). Reciprocal mistrust and prejudices were conveyed by the media and political tracts, or through first-hand experiences on campuses and in neighborhoods. Many remembered previous confrontations, including demonstrations for solidarity with Palestine which devolved into left-wing advocates and Islamists stealing the microphones from each other to chant 'Arab Palestine' or 'Islamic Palestine', respectively.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, a certain feeling of closeness was not unheard of among those rejecting institutionalized politics or monarchical hegemony, be they from the extreme Left or the Islamist camp. Finally, the existence of politically mixed families and of young individuals socialized in an Islamist environment but who had become leftists was not exceptional in our sample population.

⁴³ In particular, see Mohamed Darif, *al-Islamiyyun al-maghariba: hisabat as-siyyasa fi al-'amal al-islami 1969–1999* [Moroccan Islamists: Political Considerations in Islamist Activity, 1969–1999], Casablanca, Al-Majalla almaghribiyya li 'ilm al-ijtima' as-siyyasi, 1999, p. 67–76.

⁴⁴ Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi, 'Les conflits du Moyen-Orient au miroir des communautés imaginées : la rue arabe existe-t-elle ? Cas du Maroc', *A Contrario*, 5(2), 2008, p. 147–156.

Given Al Adl's highly centralized and hierarchical nature, the participation of its youth branch in M20 events was decided from the top-down. And it was only after this decision was published on February 16th that the leaders of Casablanca's left-wing organizations made contact with Al Adl youth representatives on a local scale. Nonetheless, the choice of the individuals in charge of forging this connection was not insignificant. Relying upon their ideological convictions, their past experiences and their personal dispositions, two Trotskyists from ATTAC-CADTM Casablanca played a crucial role in coordinating these two groups and maintaining the relationship over time. After having been active within small university groups, they became engaged with the protest dynamics on the ground in Casablanca the last few years. According to these two individuals, revolutionizing society required preventing conflict with other social and political forces. Enthusiasts of the slogan 'Walk Separately but Strike Together', they very early on defended the idea of integrating Al Adl members into the Committee on the High Cost of Living, but other left-wing contingents vehemently opposed it. One of the two had returned from Cairo, where he had undergone a CADTM training program until January 30th, 2011. He therefore experienced the events of Tahrir Square and witnessed the cooperation between Egyptian revolutionaries of all stripes. For the first few months, these two activists were seen as a unifying force, highly appreciated for their conciliatory nature and willingness to sacrifice. Like the other backbones of the M20, they were largely available due to their professional circumstances (one was unemployed, the other a teacher).

Very quickly, the leaders of Casablanca's M20 implemented measures to organize a shared action within the context of a highly varied coalition. Imbued with the successes and failures of the past as much as with the 'example' of Tahrir Square, they tried to determine beforehand which means would best allow them to resist repression, as well the regime's attempts to co-opt the movement. The more or less explicit watchwords of the movement were: unify, 'make particular identities invisible';⁴⁵ avoid hegemony or the misappropriation of the movement by a specific political contingent; discourage any proclivities towards individual or collective leadership. Emphasis was equally placed on the need to open up enough to welcome newcomers and encourage innovation.

⁴⁵ On the modes of self-representation in politics, see Annie Collovald, 'Identité(s) stratégique(s)', *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 73, 1988, p. 29-40.

Between February 15th and 18th, preparatory sessions delved into university activist know-how to instate two rules: any participation in a committee had to be confirmed by the general assembly; the sole official decision-making body of the movement was to be the general assembly. Participants in the general assembly on February 18th signed an attendance register; in the column for marking affiliation, all identified themselves as members of the M20. During the general assemblies that took place over the following few months, any person citing the name of an organization was brought to heel. In addition, the choice of coordinators (from ATTAC, the ANDCM, MALI...) approved by the general assembly during the formation of the first committees (logistics, slogans, mobilization, communication) seemed to obey to a few implicit criteria: favoring trusted persons, avoiding both unaffiliated actors and party members, in order to put forth individuals endowed with activist skills while guaranteeing the organization's independence vis-à-vis political parties. Members of political organizations were nevertheless encouraged to belong to the logistics committee, so that the latter could benefit from their contacts and connections, as well as mobilize sufficient funds to print tracts, make banners and set up sound systems.

Before Sunday, February 20th, the absence of the 'Facebook youth' worried the leaders of Casablanca's M20. Drawing upon the model of Tunisian and Egyptian cyber-revolutionaries, they thus decided to broadcast the general assembly's conclusions from February 18th on Facebook and to invite the young Facebookers to join them Sunday, February 20th at 10 o'clock in the morning, on Lahmam Square. The spacious nature and proximity to the prefecture of this centrally situated square in the administrative heart of Casablanca made it an ideal location for many of the sit-ins that occurred in the economic capital. In the tract distributed, the action was not explicitly 'named' — it was not a 'sit-in' (*waqfa*), nor a 'march' (*masira*). According to one ATTAC activist, the Facebook call suggested that 'different' people would be participating, and that therefore the newcomers should be left 'free' to 'do something different'.⁴⁶

February 20th was seen as a success by the leaders of Casablanca's M20 for three major reasons: the number of its participants, their diversity and the ambiance that prevailed until the organizers called for dispersion around 4pm. Indeed, according to the press, the square welcomed almost 6,000 individuals at the height of the protest.

⁴⁶ Interview, September 2011.

Business owners, famous artists, NGO and association activists, former political prisoners and even a few members of parliament were spotted among the crowd. Young people who had never taken part in any election or protest and who had never belonged to a political organization heeded the call: they came with their families, with their neighbors, or with their group of friends. The preparations undertaken days before the protest as well as the negotiations conducted on site by members of M20 committees helped to encourage a certain ‘unification’ of the action: barring a few exceptions, ‘the slogans and banners were unified in tone, different identities all blended together like in Tunisia or on Tahrir Square [...] the ambiance was good-natured’.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, after the organizers called for the demonstration to break up, people arrived from the Medina, a working-class neighborhood on the outskirts of town, following the end of a football match. According to some seasoned activists watching, they tried to prolong the event by a march much like the ‘chaotic’ ones seen exiting football stadiums. Some young people, on site since 10am, then called for an unlimited sit-in (*i’tisam*): they brought tents in the hopes of occupying the center of Casablanca much like Tahrir Square. The M20 members who had not already dispersed attempted to create a security cordon, but were rapidly overwhelmed. When the M20’s planned action ended at 4pm, security forces — hitherto relegated to the sidelines — started to intervene in a cautious manner; the evacuation was not complete until after 10pm.

After that Sunday, the M20 became a local and national phenomenon, with phases of ebb and flow. In an ‘interplay of levels’ between internal, local, national, regional and international scales, the intertwining of actions, interactions and events helped to consolidate as well as reshape the M20 (both synchronically and diachronically), at times favoring its spread and at others, contributing to its losing steam. For the sake of clarity, we shall separate our presentation of these two intricately linked processes.

The Consolidation of the M20 Coalition and the Spread of Protests

While it was not long before the seeds of discord were sown, a certain combination of elements enabled the M20’s consolidation in Casablanca and the continuing spread of protests. Some of these elements were linked to interactions with the authorities and self-

⁴⁷ Interview with an ATTAC activist, November 2011.

perception at the different national, regional and international levels; others were tied to the internal dynamics of the coalition.

Interactions Which Encouraged Fluidity

After February 20th, the authorities continued to broadcast the message of ‘the Moroccan exception’. Barring a few events deemed to be isolated, demonstrations occurred in a peaceful climate and attested to the country’s ‘maturity’ and ‘democratic’ nature.

The royal discourse pronounced on March 9th, 2011 was seen as both recognizing the M20 and attempting to pull the rug out from under the movement by offering appealing opportunities for reform. The speech proclaimed the acceleration of the ‘reformist momentum’ and the regionalization process, ‘global constitutional reform’, a constitutional referendum, etc. It was both preceded and followed by the implementation of an institutional framework for opening the country up: the establishment of the Social and Economic Council (CES) on February 21st; the transformation of the Consultative Council on Human Rights (CCDH) into the National Council for Human Rights (CNDH) on March 4th with the nomination, for secretary-general, of a former non-governing left-wing political prisoner and the former president of the Moroccan Truth and Justice Forum; the creation of the Consultative Commission for Constitutional Revision (CCRC) on March 10th and of the Ombudsman Institution on March 17th, etc. International reactions were not long in coming: the king was heralded as a model by Western powers and the European Union expressed its satisfaction by tangibly increasing its annual aid to the country.

During this period, the dominant media and political discourse adopted an enthusiastic tone: ‘the M20, those are our children’, ‘we’re all part of the M20’, ‘the M20 has managed to do what years of political struggle failed to do’. At the intersection between protest space and the institutionalized political scene, the M20’s dynamic continued to spread to a number of other domains, from the official media to municipal councils. The governing Left witnessed the exacerbation of internal tensions between ‘those who had adopted the habit of having the monarchy as their sole interlocutor’ and those who hoped to break with cooptative logic, which, according to them, had led to the impasse of institutionalized politics. These conflicts were expressed via traditional media

outlets, but especially in exchanges on Facebook, where the tone often betrayed the gradual blurring of lines between backstage transcript and public discourse. The royal discourse went beyond the first group's expectations, while not satisfying those of the second group. And with regard to the non-governing Left which supported the M20, and more specifically the PSU, these leaders largely chose not to play a mediating role between the movement and the authorities, leading their organizations to 'be swept away by the M20'.⁴⁸

The movement was thus confronted with two challenges: how to respond to a royal discourse in both an ideological and a practical, on-the-ground manner? How to impose the movement's continued growth? In Casablanca, March 13th's repression gave the coalition a way out of this dilemma. Clashes with the forces of law and order reached the entrance to the PSU's headquarters, where the party's National Council was held. The PSU's leaders joined forces with the M20, calling for an 'unlimited sit-in', until a hundred arrested activists were released. M20 supporters saw this episode as a message from the authorities: March 9th's royal discourse marked a certain form of closure, and demands now needed to be expressed in the context of the reform measures put forth. Following media coverage of the event, international organizations published declarations of support for the M20.

On another level, this intense period generated a strong sense of cohesion within the group. 'The left-wing activist has been attacked instead of the Islamist' and 'the lessons learned by the Egyptians on Tahrir Square were implemented'.⁴⁹ Al Adl supporters now began to appear on the frontlines. ATTAC activists continued to play their unifying role. It was in fact an ATTAC member who proposed that an Al Adl supporter give the closing speech at March 6th's sit-in; likewise this activist called for a sit-in on March 8th, in honor of International Women's Day, in the hopes of alleviating the fears of the secularists. At this stage in the game, no one contingent dared to take responsibility for a potential failure. Success was increasingly seen as dependent upon the effacement of specific differences.

When the M20 Won the 'Battle for Public Opinion': March 20th–April 24th

⁴⁸ Interview with a PSU member, December 2011.

⁴⁹ Interview with an Al Adl supporter, April 2011.

If, during the previous phase, the monarchy and the M20 seemed to be tied in the 'battle for public opinion',⁵⁰ the national marches⁵¹ on March 20th and April 24th officially consecrated the movement. All across Morocco, more than a hundred different committees organized protest actions on April 24th. For over a month, the movement gave the impression that it had 'won over' the Makhzen.

In Casablanca, the M20's coordination mobilized intensely to obtain the right to demonstrate without asking for authorization,⁵² in the hopes of demonstrating its ability to rally many people, to take over the streets and to hold rank. Starting on March 20th, the organization called for 'popular marches' (*masira sha'biyya*) to occur on an almost weekly basis, while, elsewhere in the country, other branches of the M20 continued to organize sit-ins. The apex of Casablanca's M20's activist self-discipline was witnessed on Sunday, April 24th, during a march that had between 10,000 and 35,000 participants (cf. photograph 1). That day, the protestors were more diverse than ever before, including not only the pioneers and followers of organizations supporting the M20, but also figures from the governing Left, members of the Baraka movement (led by a PJD parliamentarian), businessmen and artists. Individuals representing sectorial demands were particularly present: street vendors, shantytown dwellers condemned to eviction, retirees from the Auxiliary Forces, fruit and vegetable sellers gathered under a banner calling for the director of the wholesale market to 'get out', etc.

Between March 20th and April 24th, security forces kept a certain distance from the marches and demonstrations. Participants were aware of the fact that the authorities wanted to look good and avoid the use of repression, as much as possible, on the eve of an important event — the Security Council being due to decide by the end of April on the extension of the United Nations mandate regarding the organization of a referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). During this time, the authorities continued to try and buy the social peace, liberating 190 political prisoners on April 14th.⁵³

Internal Dynamics Fuel Commitment

⁵⁰ The expressions 'winning' or 'losing' the 'public opinion battle' were all part of the vocabulary used by our interviewees.

⁵¹ Monthly protest events were nation-wide, while others depended on their affiliated organizations.

⁵² The demonstration was presided over by the Dahir of civil liberties and, in principle, answered to the reporting system.

⁵³ Among these were Sahrawi activists and individuals arrested following the May 16th, 2003 attacks in Casablanca, whose members were assumed to belong to the 'Salafiyya jihadiyya'.

Between the end of February and April 24th, the most committed members of the M20 believed in the movement's ability to exert pressure on the Makhzen. The battles waged were seen as successful and generally helped to further encourage solidarity within the group. Many had the impression that they were living through a historical turning point, not to be missed. Harmonious relations between Al Adl supporters and left-wing activists were at their apogee. Young women in tight jeans and revealing tops associated with those wearing veils. One woman observed that Al Adl supporters finally consented to shaking hands with women.⁵⁴

In addition, the packed calendar of activist events produced a 'hyper-stimulating effect on commitment':⁵⁵ weekly marches, general assemblies, committee meetings, leaflet distribution campaigns, localized actions to protest specific administrations or demand the release of activists arrested. Moreover, the feverish excitement of the marches became like an addiction for many.

⁵⁴ One of the practices condemned by the Islamist movement's code of behavior outside of the activist world.

⁵⁵ On this topic, see Daniel Gaxie, 'Économie des partis et rétributions du militantisme', *Revue française de science politique*, 27(1), February 1977, p. 123–154.

Photograph 1. April 24th, 2011 March in Downtown Casablanca



The march was unified by the presence of one organizer every five rows, a megaphone every ten rows, a large M20 banner (6 by 1.2 meters) every 600 meters and four audio-enabled vehicles every kilometer. Photograph given to the authors by a member of the M20-Casablanca's Communication Committee.

Moreover, the M20's vitality depended on new or revived social relations which were formed, primarily among peer groups, at the headquarters of the organizations that supported the M20, within the M20 itself, or in local cafés in the center of town. Under the auspices of the more experienced activists, neophytes (both young and old) became familiar with a new world of meanings and practices (activist, artistic, etc.). Among them, some took the next step and joined one of the organizations supporting the M20; others experienced the feeling of belonging to a new family, and still others lived beautiful love stories. When one of these love stories culminated in a marriage, February 20th slogans were chanted alongside the traditional *youyou* cries.

Reconfiguration and Disintegration Processes of the M20 Coalition

The phases of reconfiguration and disintegration experienced by the M20 coalition did not automatically stem from the organization's laying down of roots or the spread of its protests. In the jumble of occurrences perceived as decisive, or barely perceptible micro-events, it is sometimes the case that interactions favor a movement's development in the short-term, while carrying in their wake the seeds of what will be its eventual disintegration. Nevertheless, if we limit our analysis to the sequencing related to the main defections suffered by the M20 in 2011, we can identify two important turning points. Following April 24th's march, the movement experienced a number of relatively definitive defeats, losing actors at the intersection between institutionalized politics and protest activity. On December 18th, 2011, after the results of November's legislative elections were announced, Al Adl, a powerful organization entirely on the margins of institutionalized politics, declared its defection from the M20.

Interactions Weakening the M20

Even as the M20 linked the conditions of its success to its ability to blur the particular identities of its members and shape an 'us' fighting against a 'them' associated with the Makhzen, offers of reform and pressures exerted on the Movement started to attack the very foundations of this 'us'. In addition to defections, the coalition's members began to feel threatened by both the official Makhzen and what they thought was a 'Makhzen within', composed of infiltrators and co-opted individuals.

Perceived as so many acts recognizing the M20, the measures taken by the monarchy to drive the debate out of the streets and onto the institutionalized political scene actually served to expand the spread of protests. But in so far as they encouraged the expression of more horizontal differences (issues regarding the Commander of the Faithful, the Islamic nature of the state, the status of the Amazigh language, the role of women, etc.), these measures sorely challenged the M20's attempt to construct a face-to-face debate between 'those governing and those governed'.⁵⁶ The Constitutional Revision Council was initially boycotted by the M20, the AMDH, ATTAC and two parties very active at the heart of the M20, the PSU and Annahj. On the other hand, thirty or so parties, five important unions and a dozen NGOs accepted the invitation proffered by the CCRC. More significantly, at the very moment when the M20 was experiencing its finest hour, these parties were participating in the CCRC consultations while loosening their grip on their younger members, who continued to participate in M20 protests. Some individuals believed they were seeing the inverse of the movement's initial processes. Instead of revolutionizing their parties from the inside, the adherents of the February 20th movement within these organizations seemed to have become the pawns of their respective parties, which sought to strengthen their positions in the world of institutionalized politics by demonstrating their ability to cause trouble in the protest space. The PJD's Baraka movement and USFP members of the M20 were among the first to defect from the organization, following June 17th's royal speech announcing the constitutional referendum; they did, however, threaten to rejoin the movement if these reform processes did not meet their expectations. In passing, let us emphasize the fact that the leaders of these parties believed they were well placed to influence the constitutional reform process and eventually, to help reshape institutionalized politics to their advantage. As for the labor unions, they maintained an intermediate position. Consequently, some M20 members concluded that ever since the union's participation in the politics of 'social dialogue' begun in 1996, these organizations were no longer capable of mobilizing the working masses by calling for general strikes, as had been done in 1981 and 1990 — and even less able to block the systems of production and distribution.

⁵⁶ See J.-N. Ferrié, B. Dupret, 'La nouvelle architecture constitutionnelle', *art. cit.* More generally on the 'lessons learned' by the region's regimes following Ben Ali and then Mubarak's fall from power, see Steven Heydemann, Reinoud Leenders, 'Authoritarian Learning and Authoritarian Resilience', *Globalizations*, 8, 2011, p. 647–653.

Simultaneously, the 'March 9th Youth Movement' and the 'Young Royalists', unprecedented counter-currents in Morocco, began to try to discredit the M20 as one of their main goals.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, security forces continued to rely on tried and true techniques. 'Profiling' M20 members allowed the security forces to know numerous intimate details about the activists, and they consequently 'established files on them' in order to intimidate or buy off individuals, and infiltrate or play upon the contradictions of the movement, thus tarnishing its unified public image. It was not long before suspicion crept into the movement, leading members to mistrust anyone 'too well dressed', or who owned fancy cameras or snapped pictures like the cops.

Additionally, centrifugal forces were seen as 'police maneuvers'. As early as March, they were expressed via the creation of the Collectif des indépendants du Mouvement du 20 février (*The February 20th Movement Independents' Collective*). At the head of this initiative, the president of one neighborhood association accused 'organizations' (*hay'at*) of having established a 'hard core' in order to work in the shadows and wield their influence over the M20. This 'neighborhood son' (*weld ad-derb*) explained that during every one of his partisan, electoral, or associative experiences, others 'exploited his local popularity' to 'get ahead'.⁵⁸ Once again he felt dispossessed.

Even more than defections and repression, what shook the movement were the 'nuisances' caused by some of the group's members, which in turn exacerbated suspicions regarding 'the internal Makhzen'. Those suspected of being agents of the Ministry of the Interior or of local elected officials received the epithet of 'the *baltagis* within'.⁵⁹ General assemblies grew longer and longer, in an increasingly hostile environment of verbal and sometimes even physical confrontation. In an almost ritualistic manner, every time tempers flared during a general assembly, participants would chant two specific slogans. The first was accompanied by a gesture designating the enemy within, 'Makhzen get out!' (*wa al-makhzen ytle' barra*). The second was an attempt to restore the peace: 'United in solidarity, we will achieve our goals'. With hindsight, many activists have realized that all their energy was channeled into these 'disturbances'.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ For the first time, the 'royalists' became visible via social networks and counter-demonstrations, not as a consolidated embodiment of 'the people', but as a contingent in conflict with a movement attacking royal prerogatives.

⁵⁸ Interview, November 21st, 2011.

⁵⁹ As of January 2011, in Egypt this word designated the 'thugs and hoodlums' recruited by the security forces to intimate protestors and opposition members.

⁶⁰ Interview, September 18th, 2011.

Consequences of the Internal Struggles Against the Makhzen

According to our hypothesis, the struggles waged by the M20 against both the official Makhzen and the 'Makhzen within', as well as the reorientations designed to compensate for defections, gradually altered the coalition's original balance, both strengthening the positions of those with the greatest activist capabilities/resources and, in the medium term, sowing the seeds of discord.

First of all, the 'organized' M20 activists — or the 'hard core' — very quickly got into the habit of meeting outside of the general assemblies to 'solidify' and 'protect' the movement. The desire to have a 'successful March 20th demonstration' led to the intensive mobilization of activist know-how, the human and logistical resources of the most seasoned organizations to distribute leaflets, to provide an 800-strong security force during the march, to set up the sound system and to ensure the march's unified nature (cf. photograph 1). Whereas some people marveled at this famous march's organization, one videographer expressed the feeling that 'the M20's youth had been robbed'. That day, observers got the impression that Al Adl supporters were 'flexing their muscles' during the march. Later on, M20 members would reveal that except for ATTAC, from this day forth, the left-wing contingent of the organization began to delegate more and more logistical tasks 'out of laziness'. During the following months and especially during the summer of 2011, the unease felt by some M20 members — especially the 'independents' — only grew when faced with the 'quasi paramilitary organization' of the organization's demonstrations and marches.

Next, to compensate for the early defections and play 'the numbers game' in preparation for the constitutional referendum, May 3rd's general assembly decided to move the marches, generally held in the city center, to the poorer districts. Other considerations justified this change in the eyes of most of the 'hard core' activists: weekly demonstrations in the city center had become 'repetitive' and no longer surprised people; the movement's voice needed to be heard in all neighborhoods, even reaching those who had never heard of Facebook; and protests would be more 'effective' in denser areas. Some individuals reevaluated their perception of similarities with Egypt and came to the conclusion that the M20 was in fact in the same position as the Egyptian Kifaya movement in 2004. Spreading to other neighborhoods was thus an ideal opportunity to 'root itself in the hearts and minds of the people' and expand its popular base in preparation for

future struggles. This choice provoked internal tensions, in particular after the repressions that occurred on May 22nd and 29th.⁶¹ 'Unaffiliated' participants, members from the governing Left and even the PSU believed that Al Adl supporters and radical left-wing activists were trying to 'provoke the Makhzen' by enflaming poorer neighborhoods, thus losing the support of businessmen and the 'middle classes' involved in the M20. Specifically, they accused Al Adl of organizing marches within its bastions and thus increasing its hold over the M20. More generally, activists interpreted May's repression as a reaction of the authorities threatened by the M20 protesting in 'hard to control' areas: the specter of the 1981 riots was effectively raised. These individuals also perceived a certain desire to curb the protest momentum before the constitutional referendum and the summer holidays.

The repression experienced during the month of May also affected the group's performances in a different way. It disorganized the coalition, encouraged spontaneity and allowed new hierarchies to emerge. Certain activists did not wait long before declaring that 'as soon as blows make the cameras retreat, those who like to strut about will also step back'. Just like during on March 13th,⁶² the 'radicalization' of slogans was first prompted by the circumstances of the protest itself. The lack of high-tech sound systems emphasized the reactive nature of the slogans chanted by activists who were propped up on the shoulders of the strongest among them. The trend towards radicalization was equally linked to the M20 coalition's new configuration. A member of the slogan committee affiliated with the non-governing Left explained that he stopped exercising self-limitation once the UFSP announced its participation in the constitutional referendum: 'it was to spare them that we avoided certain slogans'.⁶³ During this phase, the tone taken vis-à-vis the king became increasingly transgressive. Starting in June, however, when faced with the international community's reaction to the repressive incidents of the previous month, Moroccan authorities began to favor 'sub-contracting out repression'.⁶⁴

⁶¹ During these episodes, security forces tried to prevent the use of lethal force. During the period stretching from February 20th to October 27th 2011, however, the AMDH counted ten 'martyrs of the February 20th Movement'.

⁶² That day, as soon as blows began to rain down on demonstrators, the slogan that had been 'A king who reigns but does not govern' became 'A king who does not reign and does not govern'.

⁶³ Interview, September 2011.

⁶⁴ With this expression, M20 activists referred to the attacks perpetrated (stone throwing, stabbings) by the 'thugs' they accused of being recruited by the authorities or local elected officials.

Defections, the struggle against both the inner and outer Makhzen and acts of repression fostered two different dynamics. On the one hand, the choices favored by the M20 were interpreted by a number of actors, both within and without the movement, as signs of its 'radicalization' — this perception in turn engendering new sources of internal tension. On the other hand, the positions and complicity of those with greater activist capital were reinforced within the coalition, to the detriment of the 'independents': Al Adl supporters and some radical left-wing activists mutually perceived each other as 'safe bets', individuals belonging to organizations that 'had paid their dues and would continue to pay' for the price of their commitment to the M20.⁶⁵ But it was primarily in a process of 'de-assurance' and due to a counter bandwagon effect that internal conflicts reached their apex.

'De-Assurance', Counter Bandwagon Effect and Demoralization

During the sequences occurring from February to April 2011, we observed the effects of 'assurance games' and the 'bandwagon effect': the process started by the pioneers of the M20 — and before them, by the pioneers of the 'Arab Spring' — was gradually strengthened, thanks to the rallying of followers who participated in the movement after having witnessed or anticipated its successes. Conversely, the following sequences were marked by the opposite phenomenon: the impression that the movement's chances for success were dwindling prompted more and more people to jump off the bandwagon.

First and foremost, the adoption of a new constitution following July 1st, 2011's referendum dealt a very hard blow to the supporters of the February 20th movement. After this date, some individuals admitted that 'the movement [had] lost its ability to steer the debate, when faced with the Makhzen's war machine, whose sophistication had been underestimated'.⁶⁶ During this period, when the media did not completely ignore the M20, it was busy proclaiming its demise — even though the movement was at the time organizing summer marches in Casablanca that were larger than ever before (almost 80,000 protestors, according to the organizers).

M20 supporters likewise had the impression that what was happening at the regional and international levels was doing them a disservice. The predominant

⁶⁵ Interview with an Al Adl adherent, July 2011.

⁶⁶ Interview with a blogger, July 2011.

international discourse touted the avenues for reform proposed by the monarchy as a better alternative to revolutionary options. The European Union and the G8 both underscored the need to support the ‘encouraging developments’ made in countries such as Morocco. Certain ‘friends of the king’ were invited to represent the country at summer conferences on the subject of Arab revolutions, held at numerous universities across Europe. In addition, some of those interviewed expressed the feeling that the images of civil war and bloody repression coming from Libya and Syria, as well as the reconstruction difficulties experienced in Tunisia and Egypt, deterred much of the Moroccan population.

Little by little, demoralization gnawed at M20 supporters, even despite attempts to revitalize the movement and the advent of new struggles which temporarily gave it new life (the impressive marches during the summer nights of Ramadan, the campaign to free the M20’s rapper, the boycotting of November 2011’s legislative elections, etc.). As successes were slow to trickle in, the feeling of living through a historical turning point faded. Certain weary supporters became convinced that the ‘fossilizing’ practices of the organizations involved had stalled the M20’s momentum and, most importantly, that the struggles waged by the movement had only benefited certain contingents rather than the population as a whole.

In fact, after the referendum on July 1st, internal conflicts peaked within M20 in Casablanca. These conflicts largely became public during the general assemblies and on Facebook; the media was quick to echo them in its own, often distorted way. Antagonism occurred in a wide variety of formats, including arguments, discrediting attacks, insults and physical violence — which, despite being condemned by the movement, remained a constant in Morocco’s protest history. Regardless of the enemy’s political identity, s/he was always accused of being an agent of the Makhzen. If the tone no longer sought to smooth over ‘cultural’ differences between ‘Islamists’ and ‘leftists’,⁶⁷ the main dividing line had also significantly shifted. PSU militants and ‘independents’ demanded a ‘debate of ideas’ and expected Al Adl supporters and the radical left-wing contingent to ‘reassure the middle classes’ by clearly expressing their adherence to the parliamentary monarchy. On the contrary, the main members of the ‘hard core’ — Al Adl supporters and other segments of the radical left-wing — refused to grant the movement a ‘threshold’ or limit

⁶⁷ Epithet used by some ‘independents’.

and argued that ideological debates created dissension. They wanted to concentrate on what unified the group: action on the ground. During the same period, all those pushing an alternative political culture criticized the 'hard core' for continuing to work 'in the shadows' and bypassing the general assembly — the main instrument of participatory democracy — even though the '*baltagis* within' had been neutralized. More than ever before, many accused Al Adl supporters of receiving orders from the top down and of imposing their hegemony on an organizational level, in complicity with a segment of the radical left-wing contingent. Mainstream supporters saw signs of this control in a number of details and incidents: notable absences during discussion workshops led by 'independents'; the calendar established for marches during Ramadan; the fact that Al Adl supporters prevented young girls whose appearance they did not like from getting into the audio-enabled vehicles participating in the demonstrations, etc. Some individuals even went so far as to identify a 'power grab' in their leader's manner of walking during demonstrations: 'He looks like the master of the house during a marriage ceremony (*mul al'ars*)'. Even more significantly, variations in the number of protestors were interpreted either as a 'boom' in Al Adl participation or a 'retreat', each time with the same goal: demonstrating the group's central position to its adversaries within the core of the M20. All these accusations were rejected by members of the 'hard core', who in turn appropriated this externally imposed label for themselves. According to one Al Adl member, 'the accusations of hegemony [made by certain left-wing M20 members] are only the reflection of their fear: they have seen Islamists win by a landslide in Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt...'.⁶⁸

Shortly after the PJD's victory on November 25th, 2011 in the legislative elections, Al Adl announced its defection from the M20 on the national level. Some saw in this act a friendly hand proffered towards their 'Islamist brothers'. Others argued it was simply Al Adl's refusal to continue to invest in a coalition which wanted to set limits to the movement. Beyond the official press release, however, interviews revealed that Al Adl leaders felt that their 'sacrifices' had benefited the PJD and that the population was not 'ready' yet. The defection of this powerful organization affected the performance of the remaining M20 contingents in Casablanca, as well as the coalition's recomposition.

⁶⁸ Interview, November 2011.

Weekly demonstrations continued to be held and to include social demands of varying specificity. They also periodically drew back to the M20 some activists who had left to condemn the movement's 'radicalization under the auspices of Al Adl'. Nevertheless, the number of participants dwindled woefully. Moreover, although the organizational measures originally put in place had allowed marches to be unified, centrifugal forces to be contained and less ideological slogans to be favored, from December 25th, 2011 on, ideological identities erupted onto the scene and began to fight each other for audio-visual territory. This was particularly evident during the march on January 1st, 2012. At the heart of the official M20 demonstration, slogans and banners expressed left-wing sentiments and photographs of leftist martyrs from the Years of Lead were numerous (cf. photograph 2). On the sidelines, the families of Salafist prisoners, surrounded by members from the Independents' Collective, began to chant religious slogans for the first time and to brandish a banner which read 'There is no other God than God and Mohammed is his prophet'. Finally, on January 1st, 2012, the slogan 'The People Want the End of the Regime' was first chanted via the sound-system on top of the M20-Casablanca's official vehicle.

Photograph 2. January 1st, 2012: March to Derb Ghallef in Casablanca



In the foreground, the calligraphy reads 'There is no other God than God and Mohammed is his prophet' on a banner. In the background, photographs of leftist 'martyrs'. © Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi

At the level of the M20's Casablanca headquarters, Al Adl's defection did not inverse power relations between 'independents' and those affiliated with political movements, nor did it serve to 'moderate' the movement. On the one hand, this defection was a decisive turning point in the M20's reconfiguration, which saw the shrinking of the coalition around the core of the radical left wing. On the other hand, it destroyed all attempts at self-limitation, which had sought to preserve the coalition's unity and to maintain a collection of demands in tune with existing power relations and circumstances. In reality, thanks to their discipline, their organizational abilities and their capacity to mobilize others, Al Adl supporters had been able to hold the streets just as well as the 'hard core' line. In other words: they had helped to channel the movement, and in a certain way, to 'moderate' it.

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On February 21st, 2012, in a Facebook post, H.A. (who had contributed to drafting the M20's first call) invited the movement's followers to suspend their participation: 'The dinosaurs have transformed the M20 into something which is different only in name from other movements that have failed in the past. In new ways, they have committed the same

old errors, produced the same illusions. Those who say that the movement is still going strong are only paying attention to labels...’.

After a year of blows exchanged with the authorities, the M20 was left weakened. Far from being the product of a domino effect, it depended on a process of identification and attribution of similarity, on the reactivation of organizational links and more or less abeyance structures. A large coalition brought together newcomers and seasoned militants within a field of alliances and oppositions that was located at the intersection between institutionalized politics and protest space, above and beyond the cleavages separating Leftists from Islamists. In the interplay between internal, local, national, regional and international levels, an ensemble of actions, interactions and events helped both to anchor the coalition as well as to hasten its disintegration. The protests spread and drew new energy from several factors: the regime’s reactions; the regime’s quest to maintain its first-class position in the region; the protestors’ belief in their ability to ‘win over’ the Makhzen; their impression that they were living through a historical turning point and that success was imminent; the triumphs that helped to stoke the fires of participation; the measures implemented to maintain the coalition and mask particular identities and ideologies.

As for the coalition’s gradual disintegration, it occurred both visibly and imperceptibly, in relation to both intentional and non-intentional interactions. The first defections were those of by actors well positioned enough on the institutionalized political scene to hope to influence its reconfiguration and benefit from the reforms put in motion. At the same time, infiltration and growing suspicion regarding the ‘Makhzen within’ blurred the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’, thus halting the process of polarization. More significantly, acts of repression, the struggle waged against both the internal and external Makhzen and the attempts to compensate for defections encouraged, at the heart of the reconfigured coalition, the hegemony of those endowed with the greatest militant capital, to the detriment of those individuals hoping to conduct politics otherwise. The last straw came in the form of the second large swath of defections, marked by the departure of the Islamist organization, hitherto considered the most powerful within the protest space. In a demoralizing atmosphere, the following perceptions arose: many felt that they had ‘lost the battle’ amid a deterrent regional climate; history appeared to slow down; the feeling of being an ‘us’ unified against adversity began to fade; the belief that the fruits of participation were reaped only by a

certain contingent of the coalition and not the whole. Each time that new defections robbed the M20 of segments which had helped to 'moderate' or 'maintain' the coalition, the process of radicalization was magnified within a group increasingly composed of individuals who saw no alternative to occupying the streets. In the case observed, the 'structural uncertainty' inherent to situations of political fluidity was rapidly offset by self-limitation, both with regard to the authorities as well as the protest movement, dominated by 'organized' actors, wary of disturbances and excesses and proud of their ability to control the streets and aware of the strategic scope of each of their actions. The process of radicalization was consequently more fostered by the movement getting weaker than by its strength, or by the overwhelming of its pioneers by unpredictable followers.

During February 2012, hotbeds of protest and dissent began to develop outside of the M20, taking different forms: an increase in sectorial demonstrations, the wide-spread adoption of the slogan 'Get Out!'; outbursts of violence which demonstrated just how precarious of an option self-limitation was; the 'quiet encroachment of the ordinary'⁶⁹ marked by the conquest of urban spaces by street vendors and the increasing number of lodgings built with no attention paid to city regulations. At the very moment when the M20's organization began to falter, its main pillars realized that they had opened a Pandora's box. One man in charge of the security forces confessed to us⁷⁰ that 'nothing will ever be the same again, citizens no longer have the same relationship with the authorities'.⁷¹

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⁶⁹ Asef Bayat, *Street Politics. Poor People Movements in Iran*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

⁷⁰ Interview, February 2012.

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