



## Past and present: memory as "present of the past". The case of the Rif Hirak

Pasado y presente: la memoria como "presente del pasado". El caso del Hirak del Rif

Passé et présent: la mémoire comme "présent du passé". Le cas du Hirak du Rif

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### Abstract

Starting from the orality and experience of the Hirak actors, we conducted a series of semi-structured interviews and field observation, as well as the analysis of the web content of the Hirak actors, to express the relationship to the protest memory of the Rif. This memory does not present a logical sequence of events, but rather operates as



a rhetorical approach to the past where the real and the imaginary move as elements that constantly shapes the "market of memory". As such, this paper seeks to capture the movements of inversion from a heroic Rif to a victimized Rif, and vice versa. We will show how the Hirak serves to renew memory, and how actors renew their action by making memory dynamic.

**Key words:** Rif, Hirak, memories, mobilization, prison, Morocco.

## Résumé

Partant de l'oralité et de l'expérience des acteurs du Hirak, nous avons mené une série d'entretiens semi-directifs et de l'observation du terrain, ainsi que l'analyse du contenu de web des acteurs du Hirak, afin de nuancer le rapport à la mémoire contestataire du Rif. Cette mémoire qui ne présente pas une suite logique des événements, mais fonctionne comme une approche rhétorique avec le passé où le réel et l'imaginaire cheminent comme des éléments qui ne cessent de façonner le « marché de la mémoire ». De ce fait, cet article cherche à saisir les mouvements d'inversion d'un Rif héro vers un Rif victime, et vice-versa. Nous allons montrer comment le Hirak sert à renouveler la mémoire, et comment les acteurs innove dans leur action en rendant la mémoire dynamique.

**Mots clé :** Rif, Hirak, mémoires, mobilisation, prison, Maroc

## Resumen

A partir de la oralidad y la experiencia de los actores del Hirak, realizamos una serie de entrevistas semidirigidas y observación sobre el terreno, así como análisis de contenido web de los actores del Hirak, con el fin de matizar la relación con la memoria de protesta del Rif. Esta memoria no presenta una secuencia lógica de acontecimientos, sino que funciona como una aproximación retórica al pasado, donde lo real y lo imaginario se mueven como elementos que conforman constantemente el "mercado de la memoria". Como tal, este artículo trata de captar los movimientos de inversión de un Rif heroico a un Rif victimizado, y viceversa. Mostraremos cómo el Hirak sirve para renovar la memoria, y cómo los actores innovan en su acción dinamizando la memoria.

**Palabras clave:** Rif, Hirak, memorias, movilización, prisión, Marruecos.

## Introduction

Since 2011, Morocco has experienced a significant social mobilization, which was part of the Arab Spring where the north of Morocco was very active, particularly Tangier, Tetouan and Al-Hoceima. Nevertheless, the most important mobilization is that of the

Hirak of the Rif between 2016 and 2017. Even though the Hirak took the form of the February 20 movement as a protest, it differed from the latter in its organization and in the homogeneity of its leaderships (Mouna, 2018); it also has its own identity. Several authors have addressed the question of collective action in the Moroccan context, particularly in the context of shantytowns; such actions have been led either by political parties or by leaders (Arrif, 1991; Zaki, 20015). In this sense, shantytowns appear as resistance actors of marginalized social groups claiming their rights in post-2011 Morocco (El Kahlaoui, 2018). These contestations are a way to multiply social expectations, and collective claims (Rachik, 2018). These post-Arab Spring forms are expressions of a mutation of the voice of the street (Bennani-Chraïbi, 2019).

The Hirak, however, opened a new perspective to analyze the social issue in Morocco, the term *hirak*, from the Arabic root *harraka* which means to move, became the term used to qualify the protest movements in the Maghreb. The Hirak triggered a great wave of solidarity in the Maghreb (Suárez, 2017), it has itself become a space-time-memory. We build on the concept of the margin to rethink the social order, and the relationship to power, not as subversion but as a model of invention and resistance (Mouna, 2018). It is about the margin as a space in between, both as an empirical and theoretical framework. The margin is both a space of life and actors who, through their practices, confuse dominant norms, and challenge the coherences of structures of domination. Thus, the spaces of the margin are places of resistance against social, political and religious normativity; the margin is, in this sense, another form of understanding society, a form of otherness in the plural sense of the term (Mouna, 2018), it is taken here as "an operative notion" (Cattedra et al., 2020: 19). This margin has a double dimension: on the one hand, it is rooted in everyday practices (De Mas, 1978) and, on the other hand, it offers us the means to observe the multiple processes of change it provokes. In his analysis of the Italian Risorgimento (Ciavolella, 2015), as a historical process, Antonio Gramsci gives us an analytical perspective in the political margin/state relationship for the contemporary period. Thus, the state is an open field with variable geometry, it is a space of the junction between institutions and social life (Ciavolella, 2015), it is not coextensive with society, and it is in this context that the social mobilization of the Rif was forged. The Hirak does not operate on the margins of the state, but within it, which calls into question the official rhetoric that has tried to disqualify the movement by calling it separatist.

The Rif, as a territory of the margin, brings out two relations of force, and through a game of constant confrontations, these two relations of force "find each other, in such a manner to form a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the shifts, the contradictions that isolate them from each other; the strategies finally in which they take effect, and whose general design or institutional crystallization take shape in state apparatuses, in the formulation of the law, in social hegemonies" (Foucault, 2018: 122). As a result, the Hirak is a collective action of a population living in a stigmatized space, a population that tries, not to separate, but to integrate with its own particularism in the national context. The feeling of injustice (Daston, 1995: 2014) becomes mobilizing and actors share a network of values linked to their territory. They organize themselves to take

charge of the forms of indignation against the exclusion and marginality from which they feel they suffer.

Along these lines, socio-economic claims are intertwined with memory, and actors select positive features of this memory that mark the Rif's resistance, both, to central power and to colonialism (Wyrzten, 2015; Zomeño, 2002). The Rif is, according to this memory, a victim of colonial but also national repression exercised by the Makhzen<sup>1</sup>, a term given a generic meaning here to speak of power in its authoritarian sense (Aziza, 2019). This ambivalence that characterizes the relationship to memory is not specific to the Rif, it is just more observable in the Rif context than in other regions. This is an observation that we were able to make during our comparative study of post-Arab Spring Amazigh movements between the Rif and the Middle Atlas. Thus, while Rif activists spoke of Rif particularism, Atlas activists considered that Rifans have retained a strong relationship with their past transmitted from one generation to another, which presents their specificity (Benlarbi et al, 2018). This specificity does not only reflect a look at oneself, but also, the look of others on the Rif and the Rifains. Whether it is a real or imaginary specificity, it is today a repertoire of collective action that is formed in an expression of struggle, as is the case with the use of Graffiti studied by Belarbi (2019) during the Hirak of the Rif. In this regional context, memory is a rhetorical expression that accompanies protest.

Based on the orality and experience of the Hirak actors, we conducted a series of semi-structured interviews and field observation, as well as a web content analysis of the actors, especially the speech of Zafzafi, but also the images of police intervention against the people of Hirak. While some of them had a role in the Hirak activity through mobilization work on social networks or in the field. Others, notably two of them, consider themselves victims, and that they had no connection with the Hirak. The common point between these young people is the situation of singlehood and unemployment. While some former prisoners agreed to meet us in public spaces without problems, others, still suffering from the after-effects of prison, preferred to meet us in places away from people's unwanted eyes. Thus, we encountered two types of difficulties in this field; one related to the nature of our questions which plunged our interlocutors into violent memories where they were subjected to both physical and moral violence, and secondly, the concern to protect ourselves and our interlocutors. Regarding the observation, it was conducted between 2016 and 2017, in the middle of the Hirak; during this period, we were also able to conduct a series of meetings with the actors of the movement.

The starting point of our analysis was not to see memory as a logical sequence of events, but as a kind of rhetorical approach to the past, where the real and the imaginary move as elements that constantly shape the "market of memory" (Mohand-Amer, 2020). We use the term market to show how private, collective or institutional, formal or informal actors find their account in this market to build their memory; or each actor makes the selection line for a memory that suits them. Thus, between

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<sup>1</sup> The term Makhzen refers to the ruling elite in Morocco that used to center around the king or sultan. The Makhzen consists of the monarchical institution, notables, landowners, tribal chiefs and sheikhs, senior military personnel, security directors and chiefs, and other members of the executive institution.

individual, family, local, collective or official memory, the actors show imagination to reinvent a "dualist" imaginary in which the Rif is both victim and hero. It is a hero to defend the collective honor, and a victim of its own heroism. This is not an oppositional duality, but rather a functional duality that keeps reversing itself in the actors' discourse. As such, this article seeks to capture these movements of inversion from a heroic Rif to a victimized Rif, and vice versa. This inversion occurs in the current context with the repression of activists. This does not mean that the Rif is locked in the past, on the contrary, we will also show how the Hirak serves to renew the memory, that of the new actors of the present. The repertoire of action of this fact is very diverse and intensified (Essahel, 2015). This angle of approach aims to show how actors innovate in their action by making memory dynamic.

Unlike a Weberian political approach that perceives politics as emerging from the center, this work attempts to show that the territories of the margin are spaces where political stakes that cross the whole of society are disputed; and in moments of tension and confrontation, it is the margin that becomes the center, and the center that becomes the margin, because the margin has the capacity to question, from a daily practice, the political memory of the country and its relationship to its past and present, and the whole is played out in an inversion of power.

This article examines the procedures and logics by which memory processes are thought of as part of a network. It is based on semi-directive interviews with six former prisoners, aged between 25 and 38. The interviews were conducted using an interview guide based on the following axes: the relationship to the memory of the Rif, the experience of the Hirak, the moment of arrest, the violence suffered, and finally the relationship to memory. These interviews were conducted in places far from view. Some of these detainees are engaged in a process of strengthening the memory of the Rif, testifying for them is a historical and political commitment for their region, they participated in the creation of a museum of local memory, for them, the testimony appears as a matter of public interest (Chua et al., 2021). These testimonies, while speaking of a personal experience, are inscribed in a collective register, and the testifiers take on the task in the process of not leaving room for the forgetting of memory (Jelin, 2017). As a result, the injustice is denounced by the person who suffered it directly, but also by the group, and the ties of proximity with the victim's function as a legitimizer of collective memory. Herein lies one of the great challenges of memory for Jelin, who has worked on the case of Latin America, as memory tends to become familiar and extend participation to the whole society as a stakeholder in a process (Jelin, 2017). Jelin gives importance to the question of the temporality of memory, and how the memories of the past become the object of social and political struggles that take place today. The violence of the state appears as a legacy that gives the group a common reference, so public policy attempts to put in place an official memorial political process that focuses more on national reconciliation than on clarification and temporarily. The actors on their part resist by producing more memorial variants. The state attempted to create a jurisdictional transition through the Equity and Reconciliation Authority in 2004. This official memorial policy places more emphasis on a reconciliation without transition (Laouina, 2016), as the state in

embarking on this reconciliation endeavor has attempted to construct an "institutionalized oblivion" (van Diest, 2018), however, the local population attempts to construct a continuity between the past and the present by taking temporality into account. This memory is in an ambivalent pattern marked both by the past and by the desire to renew this memory with a new one. The discourse on the dissidence and marginality of the Rif, is not only the property of the central power, it is also the product of entrepreneurs of local memories that have actively participated in this process (Mouna, 2018; Nahhass, 2019). Thus, this work addresses how memory in the Rif in its temporality is expressed and structures group behaviors.

## Margin and power

Any culture, by definition, constructs a narcissistic relationship with itself (Clastres, 2010), but what attracts our attention in the case of the Rif, are the claims that mark out history as a reference. But the present remains the channel for the refusal of young people mobilized against *hogra*/humiliation. The Hirak has put in relation the link between the outside and the inside, on the question of the margin of the social world.

The daily practices of groups and individuals are part of a vast and complex repertoire. The actors invest their knowledge of the terrain to energize the relationship to memory and give it new life. Nietzsche, as Deleuze reminds us, reproaches knowledge as an abstract element for imposing itself and taking power over life (Deleuze, 2003). However, knowledge cannot be a judge of life, since it is life that gives birth to this knowledge from the diverse and varied practices of the actors who are the source of our knowledge of everyday life. Nietzsche's idea reminds us that the Hirak discussed in this study represent life, that of the actors, that of the relationship of the actors to their territory and what they consider to be their identity, and finally that of a physical space characterized by its heterogeneity. Hassan tells us in this sense:

"The Hirak became part of the political memory of the Rif, it showed the relationship that exists between the Rif and the center. It was an opportunity to rebuild trust between the two parties and achieve a true conciliation with the region, its children and its local history. But unfortunately, the hope has been damaged once again" (Former Hirak prisoner, July 2021).

Whether for Hassan or the other detainees with whom we had the opportunity to speak, the Hirak was an opportunity to re-establish trust, to stir up the boundaries and limits that define the actors' room for maneuver. The Hirak as a form of collective action is a staging of social life, a dramatization of the issues that cross society. It speaks to us of a situation, of a life, of the forms of injustice that are experienced in daily life, but also those related to history. From the accounts of their arrests and their judgments, we question how these actors approach their belonging to the Rif but also how they have experienced violence. Recall that the main wave of arrests took place in

May 2017, with hundreds of detainees and the imprisonment of the movement's main leaders.

The actors draw their sense of commitment from a common place, from an emotional repertoire, from a collective memory that refers to the past. This reference to the past does not have the function of contemplating historical moments; on the contrary, they invest the past as a source of reference that feeds their collective action, on the one hand, but also gives meaning to the feeling of belonging, on the other. The collective repertoire (Tilly, 1984) means that actors select elements of memory that they consider positive in order to give meaning to their action, while the past offers political opportunities for action (MacAdam, Paulsen, 1993). In other words, actors highlight the political context as a catalyst or repressor of mobilizations, and where the multiforms of past violence towards the Rif, are mobilized to give meaning to the action of protest (Rhani, 2020).

Hirak leader Nasser Zefzafi referred to "the death as a 'crime' and inscribed it in the broader history of violations that have continued to rock the region in the distant past and the near present" (Rhani al, 2022: 2). What makes the issue of mobilization much more attractive in the case of our field is not the degree of violence and repression practiced by the state, but rather the impact of this violence on the collective imagination and the reinforcement of this sense of marginality among the population. The government has relied on violence to maintain order, but this violence has only fed the emotional framework and the popular unanimity that finds the state's practices illegitimate. Thus, violence is thwarted by the actors through an art of inversion of the relations of domination, by referring to "a social historicity in which the systems of representation or the processes of fabrication appear not only as normative frameworks but as tools manipulated by users" (de Certeau, 1990: 39-40), with the aim of legitimizing their protest practice.

## The birth of a new historical opportunity

The protest movement was born following the death of the fishmonger Mohcine Fikri on October 28, 2016, crushed by a dumpster. The movement that started in Al Hoceima to fight against *hogra* (humiliation or contempt) and to demand dignity was quickly associated with figures who would become emblematic of the Hirak. On the evening of Fikri's tragic death, the first hard core of the Hirak mobilized. In this agitated context, a Rifian activist appears, it is Zafzafi, a young man of 39 years, that we see in one of the videos<sup>2</sup>, present the day of Fikri's death. With no previous political affiliation, he is not well known on the local scene as an activist, he mobilizes the history of the family: his father is a former activist of the USFP (National Union of Popular Forces/Left Party), his maternal grandfather was Minister of the Interior in the government of Mohamed Ben Abdelkrim Khattabi, while his uncle was one of the members of the revolt of 1958-59.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZyAeVJAayA> [accessed: 8 May 2023].

During his speech, the day before Fikri's death, he reacted against the *hogra* of the Makhzen. This *hogra* which does not date from today according to him, it is embedded in the history of the Rif since the first war (1921-26), then the revolt of 1958-59, through the events of 1984, then the mobilization of 2011 after the death of five people burned in a bank. It is around this figure that the identity of some HIRAK actors will be created. Regardless of whether they adhere emotionally or actively to the HIRAK, the activists are arrested and questioned further about their relationship and links with Zafzafi.

The claims are social: hospital, university, infrastructure, approximation of the administration ... etc., but the strength of the mobilization lies in the tribal solidarity, and the presence of support groups in all tribes of the Rif. One of these claims' dates back to the dahir of militarization in 1958. Zafzafi focuses on the dahir of *askara*/militarization because, according to him, the Rif people no longer want the Rif to be governed by this dahir, " the Ministry of the Interior wants to draw the Rif into a bloodbath...the Ministry of the Interior treats us as separatists..."<sup>3</sup>. The political history of the Rif is perpetuated through these claims. The collective consciousness linked to the Rif is mobilized, the leaders of the HIRAK go around the neighborhoods and tribes asking the population to take an oath on the Koran not to betray the Rif. Mohamed Ben Abdelkrim Khattabi had proceeded to the same movement of sacralization of the alliance with the tribes that constituted the confederation of the Rif tribes against the Spanish colonization.

It is in this sense that expressions such as *abna' al-Rif*/the children of the Rif, for example, are mobilized to broaden the form of belonging to the Rif that covers not only those in Morocco, but also those in the diaspora. The latter are also mobilized, and the history of the Rif is reinvested to show how much this region, this space is condemned by the central power, which pushed many Rifians to travel from other cities in Morocco to demonstrate in Al Hoceima.

The new leader has reached the rank of leader by supremacy over the others; he has accomplished an initiatory itinerary to reach this power. He attacked the Makhzen, he claimed his Amazigh identity, without isolating the Rif from the rest of Morocco. He was able, in fact, to inaugurate the way of the challenge against the central power and to show thereafter that the Rif region remains exceptional in its forms of resistance to this power. He is in line with the characters who made the history of the Rif in the 20th century. But this path would not have been possible without the State, which has bet on time to stop the movement.

The movement has had its own means of communication on social networks (Temsaman live, HIRAK tv...), and forms of solidarity have continued to emerge in the northern cities' day after day, but also in the rest of the country. However, the most effective strategy of the state is essentially the isolation of Nador, so that the protest does not spread to this city, and that the scenario of 1984 does not happen again. Old border with the enclave of Melilla, Nador is a city of transit for drug trafficking, smuggling of all kinds, in addition to a significant presence of sub-Saharan migrants,

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZfTEdZx1cw> [accessed: 8 may 2023].



but also a good network of Wahabi Salafism; it is a city where religious fundamentalism and trafficking of all kinds are daily. The stakes are high, and the irruption of Nador in the Hirak can turn the game around. In the midst of the Hirak, the state is launching social projects in Nador to isolate Al Hoceima from its environment (the project of big Nador, the acceleration of the project of Marchika...). Among the state's strategies is the promise to recruit a hundred or so young people from the Rif into the Tangier free trade zone, a means of emptying the city and its supportive tribes, notably Beni Yataf, Beni Hdifa, Beni Waryaghal, Beni Ghmil, etc., of its activists, while at the same time accusing Hirak militants of separatism.

For activists, the Makhzen has already repressed the Rif, and the Rifians have been humiliated enough. When appointing the government in April 2017, the king appointed Abdelouafi Laftit, a statesman from the Rif, as Minister of the Interior, as well as appointing a new governor of Al Hoceima from the Rif Mohamed Yaakoubi, an attempt to manage the protest internally. But the Hirak has found other ways to build its legitimacy and its own memory. In this dynamic of protest that is not only built on the figure of Zafzafi, the Hirak has given birth to other figures who will become comrades in the struggle of Zafzafi, and many of them will end up either in the prison of Oukacha in Casablanca or in Al Hoceima. The identity of the actors took shape with the muscular arrests of the forces of law and order, who arrived most often before dawn, in civilian clothes, in groups of about twenty people according to our interlocutors. These arrests are sometimes filmed by relatives or neighbors. These images and videos serve to produce a counter-narrative to the stories that present the movement as violent. A narrative, as Dupret (2011) points out, is a "nested" structure through many stages; it is intended to produce a story that presents a surface immediately accessible to any competent reader/viewer. These images and videos of the arrests feed, in addition to the prisoners' narratives as we will show, the market of memory.

It is the 53 detainees of Hirak transferred to the criminal court of Casablanca that made the headlines. On June 26, 2018 the judgment is given, more than 200 years in prison distributed by the court after 8 months of trial and 85 hearings, among the figures of Hirak judged we find Nacer Zafzafi, Nabil Ahamjik, Ouassim Boustati and Samir Ighid who were given 20 years in prison, three other prisoners 15 years, 10 years for 6 others, 9 were judged 5 years, the rest of the sentences that varied between 1 to 3 years. They are all prosecuted under Article 201 of the Penal Code: undermining state security.

### **Towards the reinvention of a new political identity**

The Hirak went through three important phases: the protest phase, the arrest phase and the trial phase. If the first phase gave birth to a generalized mobilization, the second and third phases created figures and symbols of the injustice done to the Rif.

But it is around the arrest and trial that the identity of political actors of Hirak is forged, or each actor of Hirak is perceived as a political prisoner project:

"During the Hirak, every activist was projected to be arrested, I was just waiting my turn. The arrest began on August 25, 2017, when the moqadam came to my house to inform me that I must go to the gendarmerie in Imzouren. I went, once I had presented them my card, they arrested me, and they handcuffed me. That was the beginning of my arrest, they put me in the interrogation room without me knowing the reason for my arrest. Among the questions asked was the link I had with Nabil Ahamjik and Nacer Zafzafi, but also the date of my last meeting with the latter. Once before the King's prosecutor, I learned that the trial established by the judicial police had nothing to do with the questions asked and I was finally able to hear the strange accusations contained in this report that I was forced to sign without reading. From the accusations based on my Facebook posts, I was pursued by accusations such as: incitement against the integrity of the State and incitement to commit a crime and a misdemeanor. After defending my innocence in the presence of lawyers, the prosecutor informed me that I was going to be pursued in freedom, my family was happy. But soon after, things changed because I was informed that I was going to be followed under arrest. I think the order came from somewhere else. I was arrested and judged because I was defending a social cause" (Former Hirak detainee, August 2021).

The path taken by the activists to become leaders or spokespersons for social grievance has changed direction, as it is towards the center, just as their arrest and trial come from afar as they claim. The street has produced its own activists, and the memory of collective action does not function solely from a sense and coherence of actions, but from the stories of arrest that accompanied the Hirak. The repressive and violent image of the Makhzen takes on its full brilliance in the actors' discourse. For them, the Makhzen has relied on its authoritarian past to carry out repression. Has the Makhzen forgotten that rules are characterized by uncertainty and reversibility, not "only because the actual rules differ from the explicit or official rules. But because they can be deformed, corrected according to the case, and adapted to new situations. And above all because they are directly subject to pressure, counter-pressure and negotiation" (Reynaud, 2004: 13). It seems that our interlocutors are unanimous when it comes to describing their arrests.

"As for the experience of the arrest, it was bitter and dark in the true sense of the word, since the beginning of our "kidnapping" on June 6, 2017 without notice, warning or summons, and without respecting the most basic standards of respect for the detainee or human rights. Regarding the circumstances of my arrest, I was with friends at their home, we were sleeping, when suddenly, around 5:30 am, a group of people in civilian clothes stormed the residence. The arrest was accompanied by insults, such as (bastards, oulad Sbeniol/sons of Spaniards...), and also characterized by the use of physical violence. It was not expected that the arrest (kidnapping) was done in this Hollywood way (about 30 people), as if we were war criminals who committed capital crimes,

although we were just activists in the Hirak that has clear and just economic and social demands. After our arrest on June 6, 2017, they transferred us to the police station in Al Hoceima where we suffered further physical and psychological torture (beatings, insults and abuse), then they put us in a police car and drove us to Casablanca but without us knowing the destination. And there the investigation process began. -Were you expecting a heavy arrest? - The idea of the arrest, frankly yes, but I did not expect it to be in this inhumane way, even if it was an idea, because I knew that a group of friends and activists had been arrested for nothing, just because they were protesting and demanding change, freedom, dignity and social justice. Therefore, the probability of my arrest was 50% yes and 50% no. Any individual risked being arrested even if they were not actually participating in the movement. The conditions of the detention as well as the conditions of the investigation were tragic since the beginning of my arrest. During the interrogation I wanted to remain silent, but they refused. I also asked for a lawyer, but to no avail because I was no longer entitled to one. They asked me for my Facebook password by using force and with many threats. In this interrogation, they asked me many questions about the movement and my relationship with Nasser Zefzafi" (Former Hirak prisoner, August 2021).

The stories around the arrests of the Hirak point to the use of physical and immoral force by the state. The insults against the Rif and the Rifians became an argument for the Hirak actors to show that the Makhzen should never be trusted. The hirakists wanted to play within the system, but also with the system, and the movement proceeded at times to reverse the accusations. For example, at the end of March 2017, the authorities announced that a police barracks had been burned by demonstrators. Zafzafi, in reaction to what happened, calls for the opening of an investigation and the trial of those responsible, he puts the state in front of its accusations, the case is hushed up and no investigation would be opened at this time. The State accuses the demonstrators of being violent, which can eventually justify its violence. The state allows itself to make the Rif, during the period of the Hirak, a buffer zone, a space of exception, in other words, a space of full power, a "return to a pleromatic original state, where the distinction between various powers (legislative, executive, etc.) has not yet occurred" (Agamben, 2003: 16). It is a state of exception that empties the Rif of law, analogous to the idea of a state of nature where only violence against people and property is able to control mobilization. The actors of the Hirak are therefore suspended, without any rights, in other words, with a partial or total suspension of rights. And the exception in this sense makes it possible to centralize attention and become the guarantor of the community's continuity (Agamben, 2003). Facing the judges, the prisoners of the Hirak are accused of treason and plotting against the sovereignty of the state, asking for the tearing of the Moroccan nationality, breaking the *bay'a*/allegiance with the sovereign, while keeping the Rif identity. Thus, the Rif was qualified as a space of *siba* in the sense of anomie or disorder, in other words a territory of dissent, where the power used violence to integrate it into the order. As a result, the central power has been ruthless in this area, believing that the only way to ensure its continuity was through violence. In addition, the population of the Rif

entered into a public mourning, that of seeing the actors of the Hirak brought back far from their home (Casablanca) to be judged.

"The day of my arrest, I was in the area of Atrokot (village grouping belonging to the Driouch region), about 4 km from the town of Imzourne. At half past five in the morning, through the window, the police stormed the house in a violent and barbaric manner. - What did you feel when you saw this large number of public forces besieging the house? - It was a feeling of fear, because as soon as I looked out of the window, I started to hear various insulting expressions and that violated human dignity, like (son of a bitch...), and they were hitting the house with sticks and iron, they thought I was going to try to escape... After attacking the house in such a violent way, the first person to arrest me entered the house through the window and not through the door. We were all arrested because we were four activists in that house, and we were transferred to Oukacha prison in Casablanca. The method of arrest is characterized by barbarism and the use of extreme violence in an inhumane and illegal way. The law has nothing to do with the reality and the method of our arrest. They never told us who they were, they didn't tell us about our rights... Only, we were arrested by force, with violence, kicks and insults inside the police car in a hysterical way, and we were treated like terrorists who had already been convicted several times. Immediately after our arrest, we were first taken to the police station in Al Hoceima, and about three hours later, they transferred us to the headquarters of the National Brigade of Judicial Police in Casablanca in the police car. Throughout the trip, which lasted about thirteen hours in the police car, we were handcuffed with our hands behind our backs in the middle of the month of Ramadan. We begged them to just loosen the handcuffs so that we could breathe and rest a little, but they prevented us and tortured us psychologically and physically. I still have pain in my hands and back. Immediately after we arrived at the National Brigade headquarters, we were interrogated without giving us time to rest" (Former Hirak prisoner, August 2021).

This systemic violence used during the arrest, which was usually carried out at home and at dawn, had the function of creating a feeling of terror among the population, as expressed by some interlocutors. The number of police present and mobilized to arrest a single person or even two people is on average more than twenty. More than a simple arrest, it is a question here of the use of the socio-historical imagination of the force of order. This imaginary consists in seeing in the Rif and the Rifains a population hostile to the power, as it was expressed by a police officer with whom we had an exchange, and who operated in the Hirak of the Rif and Jrada in Eastern Morocco. For him, the Hirak of Jrada is legitimate, he even showed some solidarity with the movement, so Jrada is described as a poor region inhabited by simple and unpretentious people. The Rif and the Rifians on the other hand are perceived as difficult and hostile. It only manifests the official socio-historical and political imagination that sees this region as a place of communitarianism and anti-national sentiment. The Rifians use various discourses to talk about their stigmatization by the authorities, but also about their victorious local history against the Spanish occupation.

This back and forth between heroism and victimization structures the power of the actors in search of new memorial issues.

## **When the Riffians dare!**

"Some say that the state has changed its treatment of the region and has achieved reconciliation. But the trial that the Rif has undergone, as well as that of the Hirak detainees, has revealed the falsity of the reconciliation and the failure of the state's management of the crisis and protests. The Makhzen has shown that its relations with the region have not changed since the early years of independence (1959-1958). What happened in '58 and '59 is the same as what is happening now with the Rif movement" (Former Hirak prisoner, August 2021).

The Rif Hirak has put the power in front of a stigmatized community, a population that has opted for a passive resistance "decided in response to trivial and daily situations" (Essahel, 2015: 8). When the power judges the activists, it is actually only participating in the construction of a new memory for a new generation. In this sense the relationship to power cannot be examined only in the "confrontation" relationships between the margin and the center, where the center is perceived by some anthropologists, the case of Jamous (2020) as an example, as the protector of the margins, and the true transmitter of power, removing from the margins any form of power (Mouna, 2017, 2018). These relationships are often seen as asymmetrical relationships; yet, the asymmetries of the social world become all the more describable when observed in moments of tension. The Hirak attempted to reverse power relations, to borrow Abdellah Hammoudi's (1988) parody of sacrifice, when the relationship between victim and sacrificer is reversed. The relationship between the dominated and the dominant does not go in one direction, as roles can change at any time.

The political discourse of the protesters during the Hirak is grafted onto history and memory, but the actors' arguments can be placed on several levels that allow them to judge the state's intervention. The actors have a view of the past, but also of the present and the future, which for them is uncertain. But above all, they base their discourse on their own experiences of the Hirak, they have created their own collective memory that extends into that of history. They have recourse to a bricolage, even a heterogeneous assembly, because this appears to carry power for the defense of the cause. Certainly, the phenomena of the past are important, but the present phenomena have an analytical interest equal to, even superior to, those of the past, when examined "according to the same methodology as those of the present" (Latour, 2006: 181). This is expressed by some actors as follows:

"The Hirak situation of 2016 can be considered an important stage in the modern history of the Rif, to be added to those of 1958-1959-1984-2011, as it

is a continuation of the bloody past of the region. Other movements and protests may appear more powerful and explosive than those before, especially if the state continues with its mentality and approach to repression policy without listening to the voice of the people. The Rif movement revealed the failure of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission, as the series of arbitrary arrests and unfair trials still exist, despite the Commission's recommendations to achieve true reconciliation with the region. What has happened has been repeated in the region over the past few years (detention and torture), perhaps now with more violent and overwhelming force and with more loss of life as well. Thus, the experiment in equity and reconciliation has exposed its failure. How did it fail? Because the state has only made reconciliation with the people and has not made true reconciliation with the region, its history and its symbols. We want a true reconciliation that restores respect for the region, recognizes the people who are part of it, and treats them on an equal footing with the rest of Morocco, provided that its local historical specificity is recognized and that its memory and the people who contributed to the expulsion of the foreign colonizer are respected. The release of political detainees, the abolition of legal proceedings against activists in the diaspora, and the real political treatment of the file of the Hirak of the Rif... These points constitute a starting point and a preliminary step to talk about a true reconciliation with the region" (Former Hirak prisoner, August 2021).

Another activist tells us:

"The Hirak movement became part of the political memory of the region, and revealed the nature of the relationship that exists between the Rif and the center. It was an opportunity to rebuild trust between the two parties and achieve a true reconciliation with the region, its people and its local history, but this hope has again been shattered and the wounds have increased the pain..."

In the discourse of the actors, the past does not take the place of the present, it takes place in the present. Through the use and the way, they refer to this past and reinterpret it and produce its power over the present, the Hirak appears almost as a continuity of history. From the point of view of these actors, the Hirak offered the possibility of giving more space to the issue of social justice in state discourses and practices, but this was not heard. As a result, social justice analysis requires us to be concerned with "the variety of forms of justification that actors deploy in reference to the situation" (Nachi, 2009: 342). Taking charge of justice and injustice allows us to observe the judgment of actors, but also "pragmatic constructions requiring a return of action to the rule" (Nachi, 2009: 407), which has allowed us to observe, in the case of the Rif, the dynamics of the margin through the articulations of actions between past and present, between memory and history.

The actors see the Hirak as a step in a long period of repression, but one that they believe has brought about novelties through its various mechanisms of operation and

discipline. The movement also benefited from a set of errors that occurred during past historical events and was able to overcome them. Thus, for our interlocutors, the prominent figures of the movement of February 20, 2011 were linked to political parties and some civil society movements, while the Hirak tried to overcome these errors and was not led by any party or grouping; this is a fundamental characteristic of the movement for these actors, and which made the Makhzen has not been able to eliminate their movement in its early moments. This flexibility that the movement gave itself explains for the detainees the violence of repression and trial as, for them, it was the Rif that was judged along with its men.

"The trial of the Rif detainees was a political trial of the region as a whole, not of individuals in particular. As long as the Rif has not abandoned its history, its symbols and its heroes, it needs a mass trial. The state sees the Rif as a space that needs collective rehabilitation (as it does with the rehabilitation of individual prisoners), because these individuals according to the state are not part of the national fabric. The Hirak has a group of individuals who were arrested in the Rif movement, and they do not even know the reason for their arrest, they have not committed any crime punishable by law, they were just innocent victims. The state wanted to convey, through the arrest of these individuals, a message: that the protest must be abandoned and the recognition that Morocco is a single country in which there is no place for local historical particularities (inhabited history). This historical particularity of the region, is a matter of concern for the state which tries, as much as possible, to erase it from the collective memory of the region because the Rif region has historical symbols that are both Moroccan symbols, and I mean here, for example: Sharif Muhammad Amziane, Mohamed Ibn Abdel Karim al-Khattabi, the flag of the Republic of the Rif..." (Hirak activist, August 2021).

In the discourse of the actors, the State appears to be trying to practice a collective castration of the memory of the Rif. On the other hand, the Hirak serves as a response, according to our interlocutors, to those who consider that the state has already succeeded in achieving equity and reconciliation with the region. What makes the mutual trust between the two parties absent.

"The Makhzen does not trust the Hirak, and the Hirak does not trust the Makhzen. This is due to the bloody history of the Rif region. The history of the twenties of the last century, for example, is still vivid in the collective memory of the region, and the movement has provided an opportunity to revive this shared historical memory of the region, and social media has played a major role in reviving this collective memory. Live technology, for example, has greatly contributed to the dissemination of events, the announcement of demonstrations, and the definition of historical symbols of the region: Moulay Mohand - Mohamed Ibn Abdel Karim Al-Khattabi - Sharif Mohammed Amziane, Mohamed Salam Amziane..." (Hirak activist).

The movement is certainly characterized by its youth, who found in the Hirak an opportunity to present themselves on the political scene as spokespersons for a marginalized community. But this generation has given birth to itself, with the help of the state, which is contested from this point of view. However, the state exercises "a surveillance that qualifies, classifies and punishes" (Foucault, 1975: 186). In this surveillance, memory becomes a particular dense point of passage for relations between the margin and the center, with the knowledge that whoever offends the center must be punished. The nature of the punishment depends on the degree of the offense, and this sociotechnics of the art of punishment shows that punishment is thus a means of transformation and not of testing as found in Foucault (Foucault, 1975). It is in this sense that the actors speak of the Rif judgment as a space of collective memory and action.

## Conclusion

In this article we have limited ourselves to the place of memory and its reinvention by the actors. The rhetorical functioning of this memory has given rise to a political consciousness for a new generation of young people. In the construction of this memory, the arrest and prison box give shape to a new space of memory. The individual and collective experiences give the narratives of memory a thickness that guarantees their discursive impact on the population. The current memory, that of the youth in this case, supposes an identification on the part of other young people, and it is in this sense that emotion takes place to create a new exploration of the present and the past. The state, for its part, has participated in the construction of an imagined memory of a glorious, rich and fertile Rif, but also a victim, particularly with the arrests and judgments subsequent to the Hirak. The particularism of the region was also the work of the state through its repressive policy and political condemnation of the actors. The state has given soul and form to this particularism. It has placed the local, national and international imaginary about the Rif in a real framework, which has allowed this new generation to reinvent its way of entering the history of the region and to reinforce the particularism, which passes through the experience of arrests and judgments.

It is obvious that the Hirak does not present a continuous chain of events, and the Rif is not a space of static reproduction of its history. Nor is it a space that lends itself to a form of violence and protest that provides a continuity for an "exotic" analysis. We argue that the Rifians and the Rif are anti-segmental, even counter-segmental, because their line of attack is the center; they are anti-segmental in the sense that they have made their power of the margin a force for integration with the center. This is done through their contestations and their refusal to be historically sidelined, and this is probably what some (researchers and policy makers) have failed to grasp, as Anne Wolf does in her article "Morocco's Hirak movement and legacies of contention in the Rif". Instead, she interprets the present in the light of the past, and reduces the Rif to a space of bled Makhzen animated by the spirit of bled siba. Our line of "attack" consists in perceiving the margin as a dynamic that questions the center through



multiple contestations, because it rejects the established borders. It tries to reconstruct its space from the representations of the borders that extend beyond its physical space. The protest in Morocco functions in a dynamic of change but also of continuity, the protest purposes as a socio-political phenomenon that expresses the popular awakening (Elhabib Stati, 2019).

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