

The Limits of Rational Choice in the Sociology of Social Movements: The 20 February Movement and the Rif Movement in Morocco⁽¹⁾

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This study critically assesses rational choice theory in the sociology of social movements using Moroccan protest movements as a case study. It also shows how social movement studies evolved from social psychology to rational choice theory, which supposes that individuals decide whether to participate in any social movement by calculating costs and benefits. By studying the movements of unemployed graduates in Morocco, the paper demonstrates that, despite the theory's ability to interpret some aspects of social movements, it falls short when it comes to explaining symbolically motivated movements. These movements stress self-assertion and immaterial values such as freedom and dignity, as in the case of the 20 February and the Rif movements. As an alternative this study proposes to extend the boundaries of this theory to include the cognitive field through the application of axiological rationality instead of rational choice theory.

Social Movements

Rational Choice Theory

Moroccan Protest Movements

20 February Movement

Rif Movement

This study considers the role of rational choice theory in explaining certain phenomena within the sociology of social movements. It attempts to interrogate the theory and the extent to which it is valuable or limited as a way of looking at collective action. It asks several questions: Is there a rationality to social movements? To what extent does the logic of collective action differ from the logic of individual action? And does an individual choose to be involved in collective action because of the benefits or because of values?

The study attempts to answer these questions through a field study of the protest movement in Morocco. By closely inspecting this movement we will be able to examine the theory's explanatory value and consider its limitations as a tool for studying social movements

in all their rich diversity. We will then conclude by reflecting on the prospects for an alternative rationality.

This work forms part of the debate on research methodology in social and human sciences in the Arab world. Sociology of social movements serves as the academic field within which the interpretative value and limitations of rational choice theory will be discussed. Its originality lies in its topic and methodology, which differ from the issues previously addressed in empirical studies in Morocco:⁽³⁾ the logic of collective action is studied within social movements that have contributed, or contribute to, the formation of a free-standing Moroccan protest space.

Social research as a search for knowledge is the ultimate goal of the sociologist, who seeks not only to collect useful and correct information but also to

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3 Among others: Assia Benadada & Latifa El Bouhsini (dir.), "Le Mouvement des droits humains des femmes au Maroc: Approche historique et archivistique," Étude réalisée par Le Centre d'histoire du temps présent, Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines-Rabat/ Université Mohammed V de Rabat, 2014; Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi & Mohamed Jeggillaly, "La Dynamique protestataire du Mouvement du 20 février à Casablanca," *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 62, no. 5 (2012); Jacopo Granci, "Le Mouvement amazigh au Maroc: De la Revendication culturelle et linguistique à la Revendication sociale et politique," Thèse en science politique, Montpellier 1, 2012; Badimon Montserrat Emperador, "Les mobilisations des diplômés chômeurs au Maroc: Usages et avatars d'une protestation pragmatique," Thèse de doctorat en Science politique, Aix-Marseille 3, 2011; Tehri Lehtinen, "Nation à la Marge de l'État, la Construction identitaire du Mouvement Culturel Amazigh dans l'Espace national marocain et au-delà des frontières étatiques," Thèse de doctorat d'État en anthropologie sociale et ethnologie, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 2003.

educate society as to the status and credibility of certain ‘sources’ of knowledge.⁽⁴⁾ While the research question concerns the explanatory value of the theory of rational choice and its limitations as regards the sociology of social movements, this question was chosen within the context of a theoretical problematic assuming that there are close connections between

all the social movements, constitutive of a protest space seeking to achieve a relative independence *vis-à-vis* two competing spaces: the political space and union activity. The study’s importance thus lies in its examination of the validity of certain theoretical frameworks through the study of a sample of social movements in Moroccan society.

Rational Choice Theory

Since the sociology of social movements is a subfield of sociology, the term ‘methodology’ as used in this science is generally taken to mean techniques of observation or data collection and analysis. However, this definition remains very limited because methodology – as well as referring to descriptive techniques – also comprises the principles that guide scientists in their quest to establish new theories or begin to analyze and criticize existing theories. There is no doubt that knowledge of this methodology requires in-depth study of the most important theories in sociology, theories that cast light on previously unrecognized basic social phenomena.

Broadly speaking a distinction is made between “methodological holism” and “methodological individualism”. If methodological holism considers social phenomena to be whole entities studied in order to highlight causal relationships between them, then methodological individualism is an illustrative approach that allows us to grasp social phenomena by tracing them back to the individual actions that make them up. It is worth noting that the foundations of both approaches were established at the end of the nineteenth century: methodological holism emerged in France with Emile Durkheim, while methodological individualism was pioneered by two German sociologists, Max Weber and Georg Simmel (1858-1918).⁽⁵⁾ Methodological individualism is considered

one of the most important forms of rational choice theory, which provides a general conception of social sciences based on three axioms that we will expand on later: individualism, understanding and rationality.⁽⁶⁾

In addition to this rational model, sociology provides other models for understanding and interpreting social action, one or more of which any researcher can adopt according to the available data. The importance of these models lies in their ability to impart subjective meanings to facts assembled via research tools that are either quantitative (questionnaires and statistics), or qualitative (observations and interviews). Perhaps the most prominent of such models are Ted Gurr’s concept of relative deprivation,⁽⁷⁾ Jeremy Bentham’s principle of utility,⁽⁸⁾ and the model of congruence between actions and social norms dubbed “Habitus” by Pierre Bourdieu.⁽⁹⁾ This is in addition to Weber’s “ideal models” of action and the model of behaviors imposed on the subject to reduce dissonance in crisis situations, or what Durkheim calls “anomie”. On the whole, these models derive their strength from attributing subjectively likely and widely accepted meanings to facts. Should these models collide with enigmatic facts, the unknown is ascribed to the known.⁽¹⁰⁾

The present study is concerned only with the theory of rational choice. Perhaps the easiest way to explain this theory’s distinctive characteristics is to focus on its attempt to build models of individual action,

4 Sotirios Sarantakos, *Social Research*, (London: Macmillan, 1998).

5 Raymond Boudon & Renaud Fillieule, *Les Méthodes en sociologie*, Collection Que sais-je? (Paris: PUF, 1969), p. 4.

6 Raymond Boudon, “Théorie du choix rationnel ou individualisme méthodologique?” *Sociologie et sociétés*, vol. 34, no. 1 (2002), p. 9.

7 Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

8 *The Principle of Utility* by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) is based on the principle that individuals perceive their interests only from the perspective of the relationship of pleasure to pain. Every action has positive and negative consequences, causing individuals to perform the actions that bring them the most happiness.

9 Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) defines Habitus as “the product of the work of inculcation and appropriation necessary in order for those products of collective history, the objective structures (e.g., of language, economy, etc) to succeed in reproducing themselves more or less completely, in the form of durable dispositions” Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d’une théorie de la Pratique: Précédé de “Trois études d’ethnologie kabyle”* (Paris: Librairie Droz, 1972), p. 225.

10 François Dubet, “Frustration relative et individualisation des inégalités,” *Revue de l’OFCE*, no. 150 (Février 2017), p. 1.

where an individual acts rationally in a particular situation.⁽¹¹⁾ According to this perspective, one can say that an individual behaves rationally when his choice of action is based on information related to his situation (What does he want? What are the possibilities and the alternatives available? How does he arrange priorities?) and on the action's potential benefit, although the question of how much knowledge is required to make a rational choice remains controversial in this theory. It is worth noting that intent is the basis for interpretation in the theory of rational choice; that is, the justifications for action lie in the individual's desires and beliefs. The strongest form of this interpretation claims that those desires and beliefs are reasons for the action.⁽¹²⁾ This axiom leads to an important observation: the theory of rational choice is based on a set of axioms that form an axiomatic pattern.

In this regard, Raymond Boudon believes that the first axiom of this pattern is the axiom of individualism, which holds that every social phenomenon is the product of individual behavior, actions, decisions, attitudes and beliefs. The second is the axiom of understanding that assumes that an individual's actions and beliefs are all understandable, at least in principle. As for the third axiom, it is that of rationality which, although it does not deny the existence of irrational causes, holds that the individual actions and beliefs that social sciences must be aware of are essentially the product of rational justifications that may be somewhat perceptible to the individual. The fourth axiom – teleology or instrumentalism – assumes that the justifications that the individual takes into account in his actions and beliefs relate to their consequences. The fifth is the axiom of egocentrism, stating that an individual cares exclusively or as a priority about the consequences of actions and beliefs associated with his personal interests. The sixth axiom is cost-benefit analysis, which assumes that any action involves a cost and a profit, and therefore individuals always choose the actions that achieve the greatest possible benefit.⁽¹³⁾

Marxist sociology adds a seventh axiom: that individuals value their actions, attitudes, and beliefs based on their consequences on their personal interests, which are essentially linked to their class interests. Some sociologists draw inspiration from Nietzsche and add the axiom that a social actor is subject to the “will to power”. Although the restrictive Marxist or Nietzschean axioms of the theory of rational choice do not constitute a general framework, the sociology inspired by them has produced some analyses that are sometimes very useful.⁽¹⁴⁾

If the theoretical structure defined by the two axioms of individualism and understanding is appropriate to interpretive sociology in the Weberian sense, then the axiomatic pattern, reduced to the axiom of individuality, brings us to methodological individualism as a basic method in social sciences as well as methodological holism. It is noteworthy that Boudon gives special importance to the pattern consisting of the axioms of individualism, understanding and rationality, as he considers it a general rational model driving most effective sociological theories.⁽¹⁵⁾

This study is based at least in part on rational choice theory because of its ostensible interpretive value *vis-à-vis* the emergence and development of certain types of social movements; as we will demonstrate later, work premised on rational choice theory in this field is considered one of the most prominent manifestations of its success. This decision is also justified by the increased attention that social movements have been receiving since 2011 in the context of the first wave of Arab revolutions – not only in the Arab world, but also internationally, given the pioneering role it played in leading all of the uprisings and revolutions of Arab peoples.

11 Ian Craib, *Modern Social Theory: From Parsons to Habermas* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992).

12 Ibid.

13 Raymond Boudon, *Raison, bonnes raisons* (Paris: PUF, 2003), pp. 19-21.

14 Ibid., p.24.

15 Ibid., p.25.

The Value of Rational Choice Theory for the Sociology of Social Movements

Rational choice theory is particularly attractive as a theoretical basis, as is correctly highlighted by James Coleman because it visualizes the action in such a way that any additional question becomes unproductive. “Rational action” means an action driven by cost-benefit analysis: whenever a person is interpreted as having undertaken a particular action instead of another because it seemed to them to further their objectives more, the account is complete.⁽¹⁶⁾

In order to measure the extent to which the rational choice theory contributes to the development of social sciences, it suffices to mention the works of Coleman,⁽¹⁷⁾ Anthony Oberschall,⁽¹⁸⁾ Russell Hardin⁽¹⁹⁾ and Timur Kuran.⁽²⁰⁾ Thanks to this theory, these scholars have succeeded in explaining some challenging phenomena in the sociology of social movements, criminality, public opinion or the state. No solid university education in any of the major fields of sociology can ignore the methodological contributions made by rational choice theory.⁽²¹⁾ But to what extent is an act of collective protest a rational act?

To answer this question and explain the position enjoyed by rational choice theory in the sociology of social movements, we need to provide a brief overview of the methodological development of this branch of sociology. The earliest approaches to collective action, which emerged in the late 19th century, viewed it as a crowd movement to be studied from the perspective of social psychology:

“The most striking peculiarity presented by a psychological crowd is the following: Whoever be the individuals that compose it, however like or unlike be their mode of life, their occupations, their character, or their intelligence, the fact

that they have been transformed into a crowd puts them in possession of a sort of collective mind which makes them feel, think, and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think, and act were he in a state of isolation. There are certain ideas and feelings which do not come into being, or do not transform themselves into acts except in the case of individuals forming a crowd.”⁽²²⁾

“We see, then, that the disappearance of the conscious personality, the predominance of the unconscious personality, the turning by means of suggestion and contagion of feelings and ideas in an identical direction, the tendency to immediately transform the suggested ideas into acts; these, we see, are the principal characteristics of the individual forming part of a crowd. He is no longer himself, but has become an automaton who has ceased to be guided by his will.”⁽²³⁾

However, the Chicago school would gradually leave behind this inherited view of crowd psychology. In the interwar period, Robert E. Park (1864-1944) and Herbert Blumer (1900-1987) integrated crowd study into the study of collective behavior, which became one of sociology’s established subjects.⁽²⁴⁾ Protests were no longer moments of social pathology but rather had a special rationality. The principle of crowd behavior based on the logic of contagion was also replaced by the principle of individuals heading towards common goals. The Chicago school’s advocates and their students adopted a methodology based on the individual as a social actor, because

16 Boudon, “Théorie du choix rationnel”, p. 11.

17 James Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge/London/Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990).

18 Anthony Oberschall, *Social Conflict and Social Movements* (USA: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

19 Russel Hardin, *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

20 Timur Kuran, *Private Truths, Public Lies. The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification* (Cambridge/ London/ Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995).

21 Boudon, “Théorie du choix rationnel”, p. 15.

22 Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A study of the popular mind*, 2nd ed (Dunwoody, Georgia: Norman S. Berg.), p. 5.

23 Ibid., p. 12.

24 Erik Neveu, *Sociologie des mouvements sociaux*, 5th ed. (Paris: La Découverte, 2011), p. 39.

collective accounts of a given behavior can only be understood from the perspective of the agent.

Other studies in the 1960s ushered in a new era in the analysis of the distinctive collective behavior of social movements. Some scholars tackled the problem of interpreting revolutions or rebellions by focusing on the concept of “relative deprivation”, as in James A. Davis’ theories of revolution.⁽²⁵⁾ Davis attempted to account for revolutions by a sudden divergence between people’s expectations (motivated by economic progress) and satisfaction of those expectations due to changing economic circumstances (such as slowing or declining economic growth) or political circumstances (such as fierce repression)⁽²⁶⁾. Ted Gurr likewise argues that it is relative deprivation resulting from the difference between actors’ aspirations and their reality that leads to the emergence of social movements. But this does not mean that there is a mechanical relationship between deprivation and protest, as it is known that any social movement requires the production of a discourse and the determination of responsibility, in addition to working to spread meaning throughout lived social relations.⁽²⁷⁾

There is a great distance separating relative deprivation, as a difference between aspirations and resources, from collective action. Therefore, in order to understand and explain collective action resulting from deprivation, it is assumed that the theory of relative deprivation is supported by other additional explanations and theories.⁽²⁸⁾ In this respect, Mancur Olson⁽²⁹⁾ has provided us with theories that have actively contributed to the transfer of networks of analysis from social psychology – a field developed by Neil Smelser and Ted Gurr – to a theoretical field inspired by economics. Herein lies the bottom line that constitutes the theoretical framework within which the study will examine the value of rational

choice theory to the sociology of social movements and their limitations.

Olson believes that before deciding whether to participate in any social movement, individuals consider the cost-benefit principle. His analysis is based on the following paradox: From a common-sense perspective, it is assumed that the more a particular movement targets the interests of a group of individuals, the more intuitive collective action is. But Olson objects that a group that possesses these characteristics may never take action. Therefore, it would be a mistake to consider any latent group as an entity with a unified will: the analysis must also take into account the logic of individual strategies.

If we believe that the larger a mobilization, the more cost-effective it is, we cannot account for the ‘free rider’ scenario, which involves a more cost-effective strategy: abstention. Consider the case of a non-striking worker who nonetheless benefits from an increase in wages thanks to a strike – without incurring any costs such as deductions from wages or dismissal from work. If we pursue this logic to its end point, any mobilization becomes impossible; the rationality of individuals who refuse to act will inevitably lead to inaction.

However, experience confirms the possibility of collective action. This prompted Olson to enrich his model with the concept of selective incentives. Selective incentives may be positive, such as granting services and privileges to members of the organization involved in the action, or negative in the form of coercion, as in the closed shop system.⁽³⁰⁾ To what extent can the Olson model, which is inspired by the theory of rational choice, form the basis for an explanation of social movements in Morocco?

For nearly two decades, Morocco has witnessed an upsurge in protests, with about 52 taking place in 2012.⁽³¹⁾ At the same time, the position of political parties and unions has declined: the percentage of

25 Didier Le Saout, « Les Théories des mouvements sociaux. Structures, actions et organisations: Les Analyses de la Protestation en perspective, » *Insaniyat*, No. 8 (1999), pp. 145-163.

26 James A. Davies, “Toward A Theory of Revolution,” *American Sociological Review*, vol. 27 (1962), pp. 5-19.

27 Neveu, p. 41.

28 François Dubet, “Frustration relative et individualisation des inégalités”, *Revue de l’OFCE*, no. 150 (2017), p. 6.

29 Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (UAS: Harvard University Press, 1965).

30 Used historically in unions in Britain and the United States of America, this system allows employers to hire union members only.

31 Ministry of Interior Statistics as reported by Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane on November 30, 2012, before the House of Representatives. See: Hassan al-Ashraf, “Binkirān: ‘al-‘Āmm Zayn’ fī Majāl al-Ḥurriyyāt wa-Ḥuqūq al-Insān”, *Hespress*, 30/11/2012 (accessed on 28/11/2017 at: <https://bit.ly/2TQfU0z>)

young people who are members of a political party does not exceed 1%, while only 4% participate in party or union meetings.⁽³²⁾ This is in addition to the low turnout in legislative elections: 51% in 2002, 37% in 2007, 45.5% in 2011, and 42.29% in 2016.⁽³³⁾

Based on this data, between 20 February 2011 and 19 February 2012 I conducted fieldwork on the 20 February Movement in Rabat via direct observation, participant observation, and semi-directed interviews. The resulting study concluded that social movements do not exist in isolation from one another nor do they hesitate to demonstrate their relative independence *vis-à-vis* political parties and unions. Since the study revolves around the type of relations that exist between social movements and institutional politics, I opted to approach the issue within a theoretical framework assuming that there are close connections between all the social movements constitutive of the protest space, which seeks to achieve relative independence *vis-à-vis* two competing fields: the political field and union activity.

Prior to the first wave of Arab revolutions Arab social scientists showed little interest in the sociology of social movements. But within the Francophone academic community specializing in countries south of the Mediterranean, a work by Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi & Olivier Fillieule⁽³⁴⁾ (a seminal work in this regard) laid the groundwork for the use of the concept of “social movements” to study the countries of this region. This same work criticizes the ontological differences that the political opportunity structures model claims exist between democratic and non-democratic states. This model suggests four types of political patterns versus four types of conflict. If strong democracies are favorable to social movements, this is not the case with the other three patterns that experience secret opposition and short-

term confrontations, which are quickly suppressed as is the case in strong non-democratic regimes including Morocco⁽³⁵⁾; civil wars in weak non-democratic regimes; or military coups and sectarian conflicts in weak democracies.⁽³⁶⁾

This American paradigm, which has often dominated the literature of sociology of social movements, has come under criticism for its mechanical and static association between the development of social movements and the openness of the structure that allows or forecloses political opportunities.⁽³⁷⁾ This criticism is supported by the presence of some examples of non-fossilized authoritarian regimes in the southern Mediterranean, which even adapt to events and protests. The Moroccan regime, for example, has allowed for the emergence of protest movements since the beginning of the 1990s. Authoritarian Tunisia was also the scene of major protests in the Gafsa mining basin.⁽³⁸⁾

These critiques have shown the limitations of the political opportunity structures model. It is no longer credible to claim that social movements are unique to democratic regimes and that secret opposition with short-term confrontations remains the fate of authoritarian regimes. This study thus builds on a theory first sketched out by Lilian Mathieu in 2007 in his study of collective protest action in France. Defining the central concept in its approach, Mathieu says that “[t]he space of social movements is a field of practice and meaning, relatively independent within the social world, within which protest movements unite with certain ties.”⁽³⁹⁾

Until recently, political struggles in Morocco – as well as, since independence was gained in 1956, social movements – were typically led by national movement parties⁽⁴⁰⁾ and their associated unions.⁽⁴¹⁾ During this stage of conflict with the regime it was

32 High Commission for Planning, *Enquête Nationale sur les Jeunes* (Kingdom of Morocco: 2012), p. 69.

33 Results of legislative elections, Morocco, Ministry of Interior (accessed on 02/12/2019 at : <https://bit.ly/2RG5AtV>)

34 Bennani-Chraïbi Mounia & Fillieule Olivier (dir.), *Résistance et protestations dans les Sociétés musulmanes* (Paris: Presses de Sciences-Po, 2003).

35 Charles Tilly & Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed (New York: OUP, 2015), p. 57.

36 Ibid., p. 105

37 Lilian Mathieu, *L'Espace des mouvements sociaux* (Paris: Edition du Croquant, 2012), p. 114.

38 For a six-month period in 2008 the Gafsa region in Tunisia's southwest witnessed a strong protest movement because of the declining role of the Gafsa Phosphate Company in reviving the region's economy.

39 Lilian Mathieu, “L'Espace des mouvements sociaux,” *Politix*, vol. 1, no. 77 (2007), p. 133.

40 These include the Independence Party, the National Union of Popular Forces, the Socialist Union of Popular Forces, and the Party of Progress and Socialism.

41 The Moroccan Workers' Union, the General Union of Moroccan Workers, and the Democratic Confederation of Labor.

thus impossible to talk about an independent protest space, since any social or political mobilization came either directly or indirectly from these entities. The first attempts to create an independent space of this kind came only with the establishment of the National Association for Unemployed Graduates in Morocco in 1991 and the subsequent explosion of unemployed graduate movements.⁽⁴²⁾

To a great extent, these movements provide a miniature laboratory to examine the conceptual and methodological tools of rational choice theory in its Olsonian form. Study of these movements affirms the importance of the cost-benefit axiom as one of the fundamental principles of methodological individualism based on instrumental rationality. In addition, the effectiveness of the 'closed shop' technique to block the 'free rider' scenario was verified, as this contributed to successful social mobilization of the unemployed thanks to the mandatory involvement and participation of every member desiring a state job.⁽⁴³⁾ Operating according to this principle continued to be fruitful throughout the period in which access to public jobs was directly guaranteed. Moreover, Olson's paradox was confirmed when the 'selective incentives' ceased because direct employment was cancelled under a Prime Ministerial edict in 2012, leading to a loss of momentum in these movements.

The year 2011 offered unemployed graduates an opportunity for direct employment in public service. This can be attributed to the protest dynamic created by the 20 February Movement. The government sought to break the links between this Movement and the movements of the unemployed, granting all 4,304 unemployed graduates then registered in government

lists government jobs. But once the process started it became clear that many of these graduates did not benefit. This led them to organize into new groups that were involved in escalating protests, perhaps the most important of which was the occupation of the headquarters of the Independence Party in Rabat. The IP's Secretary-General was then Prime Minister in the pre-Arab Spring government.⁽⁴⁴⁾

But this moment ushered in a phase of decline for these movements, beginning from 2012. To make up for their weak capacity for mobilization resulting from the absence of "selective incentives", various unemployed graduates' organizations were forced to resort to some forms of solidarity⁽⁴⁵⁾ or alliance⁽⁴⁶⁾ that were previously lacking due to the race for job opportunities that were available locally or nationally. As a last resort, these movements escalated their forms of protest⁽⁴⁷⁾ despite their very high cost.⁽⁴⁸⁾

The second case that demonstrates the effectiveness of Olson's rational model is the trainee teachers' movement whose demands comprised the employment of all teachers and the non-reduction of scholarships. In this case it should be noted that the 'free rider' option was not made infeasible by a 'closed shop' system⁽⁴⁹⁾ but because the movement was made up of small groups (about 250 trainees in each regional center), subject to interpersonal-interactive arrangements. It is understood that in this type of groups the feeling of being able to influence decision-making is stronger and more likely to lead to mobilization. Moreover, social and moral pressures are more present and real because the relationships between its members are based on proximity, reciprocity and familiarity. The presence of 'selective incentives' (guaranteed work and increased scholarships) on the one hand, and

42 Badimone Montserrat Emperador, "Les Mobilisations des diplômés chômeurs au Maroc usages et avatars d'une protestation pragmatique," Thèse de doctorat en Science politique, à Aix-Marseille 3, École Doctorale Sciences Juridiques et Politiques (Aix-en-Provence), 2011, p. 8.

43 Organizing committees established lists with member names to monitor the attendance and participation of each member in the various forms of protest orchestrated by their movements. Therefore, only committed and regular members benefited from state employment. See: Author's field notes, 2010-2015.

44 It is worth mentioning that the occupation, which lasted between 13 and 20 July 2011, almost turned into bloody confrontations between the unemployed officials protesting in the Independence Party's headquarters and the party's supporters who were about to storm the place to free it from its occupiers. Thanks to the initiative of higher authorities in the state to negotiate, a more ghastly outcome was avoided. Author's field notes, 2010-2015.

45 Such as the organization of a unified national march in Rabat on 6 October 2013. Ibid.

46 Such as the establishment of the National Union for Unemployed Officials on 25 February 2015. Ibid.

47 In particular, blocking traffic or the tramway in the center of Rabat, or rail tracks. This is in addition to occupying the headquarters of some ministries, public administrations, or party headquarters. Ibid.

48 The most prominent example of this is the death of an unemployed graduate. Author's field notes, 2010-2015; in addition, the Rabat Appeals Court remanded nine activists in custody on 4 April 2014 on charges of sabotaging public property, assaulting private security personnel, and blocking rail tracks, see: "Tājil Muḥākamat al-Mu'aṭṭilīn at-Tis'a ilā 15 Shutambir", *Al-Yawm* 24, 01/09/2014 (accessed on 02/12/2019 at: <https://bit.ly/2r47cTm>)

49 It was not possible to implement a 'closed shop' policy in this movement because the government, if it met the demands, would not exempt anyone.

the near impossibility of being a ‘free rider’⁽⁵⁰⁾ on the other, allowed the trainee teachers’ movement to last for about six months and continue to pressure the government until the two parties signed a memorandum of agreement.⁽⁵¹⁾

In short, it can be said that the study of these two social movements have demonstrated the explanatory power

of Olson’s rational model. But this does not mean that we can stop asking other questions. To what extent can this rational perspective be generalized to other social movements, especially those that have profoundly affected the current Moroccan protest space, such as the 20 February Movement and the Rif Movement?

The Limitations of Rational Choice Theory: On the Sociology of the 20 February Movement and the Rif Movement

Olson's theory has largely succeeded in explaining the emergence of social movements based on economic interests, such as the integration of unemployed graduates into public service or ensuring that training is associated with employment in the case of trainee teachers. However, this theory does not apply to social movements built on intangible values such as freedom, dignity, social justice, solidarity and coexistence. Hence, Olson's conception of the ‘collective action paradox’ remains somewhat simplistic, material, objective and instrumental, despite serving as the starting point for the concept of ‘selective incentives’ and the additional finessing of ‘symbolic incentives’.⁽⁵²⁾ These are incentives of a moral and psychological nature, such as the joy of struggle, the satisfaction that results from defending certain ideas, a sense of the ability to act, self-assertion and self-value. To demonstrate the importance of this intangible type of incentive, two cases of social movements in Morocco will be analyzed. They provide evidence of the limitations of the Olsonian model of instrumental rationality, paving the way for alternative interpretations based on ‘symbolic incentives’ or belong to ‘axiological rationality’. The issue is linked to the 20 February Movement and the Rif Movement.

Regardless of the criticism of Olson’s model, this model poses a positive challenge to sociological analysis by stating that collective action is not an intuitive matter. This observation seems to have

led a generation of researchers to try to take up the challenge by seeking to explain the conditions for the development of social movements. However, this due mention of Olson's work does not prevent from asking for more scrutiny of the ‘rationality’ that he places at the heart of behavior and about the conditions of its existence. Nor does it prevent us from asking about the limits of the application of this model.⁽⁵³⁾ By doing so we will arrive at some of the most important criticisms directed at rational choice theory in the social sciences generally, and in particular in the sociology of social movements.

The most important of these criticisms can be formulated as negative questions: Does the way that readiness as regards economic calculation is internalized not differ by social circles and times? Does the possibility of dealing with problems according to a rational perspective not differ from one individual to another and from one action to another according to the individual himself? Is it not possible to avoid conflating the theoretical models of interpretation that the researcher prepares to explain the objective regularities of the various patterns of behavior with the self-sustaining motivations of social actors during collective action? Finally, is it not possible to think of an activist as someone with social content rather than a calculator?

The internalization of readiness as regards cost-benefit calculations does indeed vary across social settings and times. Moreover, the possibility of dealing with

50 There were rare cases of trained teachers who did not participate in the movement’s protests. See: Trainee teachers in Morocco Facebook page: <https://bit.ly/2pyqrmn>

51 On 16 April 2016, a memorandum of agreement was signed suspending implementation of the decree separating employment from training and providing for the employment of all trainees after (formal) competitive exams were held at the end of December 2016.

52 Daniel Gaxie, “Rétributions du militantisme et paradoxes de l’Action collective,” *Swiss Political Science Review*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2005), p. 160.

53 Neveu, p. 48.

problems from a rational perspective is not the same from one individual to another, nor from one act to another according to the individual himself. Therefore, confusion between theoretical models to explain the various patterns of behavior and self-sustaining motivations by social actors during collective action should be avoided. Finally, it is indeed permissible to think of an activist as someone with social and cultural qualifications that go beyond all utilitarian instrumentality.

Although the theory of rational choice, especially in its instrumental rational model with Olson, provides important methodological possibilities for understanding and explaining many aspects of the phenomena associated with some social movements, it remains unable to explain other issues in the same field. For this reason, this study uses an alternative theoretical framework that accommodates the theory of rational choice and goes beyond it at the same time. This is Mathieu's 'social movement space' theory.

The 20 February Movement seems to be the most prominent attempt by the protest space in Morocco to gain its independence. Contrary to Olson's conceptualization of collective protest action, this movement did not have material demands specific to a single social group. It is thus difficult to study using instrumentalist rational choice theory. Examination of the movement's demands shows that it is of a general political, legal, and social nature that does not belong to one group or another, but rather is of concern to most segments of society, as is the case with most social movements that emerged during the first wave of Arab uprisings and revolutions. The demands of the 20 February Movement are normally summarized as freedom, dignity and social justice.

We recall that the 'Olson paradox' states that small groups are more likely to rally than larger groups thanks to the mobilization potential of 'selective incentives' and thanks to the active role of the 'closed shop' technique in blocking the efforts of 'free riders'. We can say that the 20 February Movement managed to overcome the 'Olson paradox', mobilizing diverse

social groups in about a hundred cities throughout 2011.⁽⁵⁴⁾

It is here that the movement, after its orientation towards social change, acquires its collective dimension as well as its conflictual dimension. It is worth noting that this definition of the movement differs greatly from the one that reduces it to "organization, an active mobilizing force, and claims of social significance".⁽⁵⁵⁾ The collective dimension of the 20 February Movement is demonstrated by the fact that protesters – despite their political and ideological differences – agreed on a range of political and legal demands. As for the conflictual dimension, it indicates the positioning of the 20 February Movement and the state on either side of the oscillating balance of power and meaning. The movement's third dimension is evident in its attitude towards social change, due to the dissatisfaction of activists and participants in the movement with corruption and tyranny, and their endeavor to change this reality through demands for democracy and social justice.⁽⁵⁶⁾

However, the mobilization launched by the 20 February Movement was purely political from the very beginning and has remained so. It has failed to absorb existing hotspots of social movement in the country.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Therefore, the 20 February Movement falls to some extent within the category of "new" social movements as per Alain Touraine's definition. This categorization is justified by its demands that are related to intangible universal values such as freedom, dignity and social justice, which are based on the identity of its activists and participants who belong mostly to an educated middle class, and from its horizontal structure. It differs from labor movements in that it mobilizes its members around intangible issues such as identity, environment, peace, and human rights. Movements of this kind are based on three principles, the first of which is the principle of identity, which means that the group must have an easily recognizable and significant identity with respect to the cause it defends. The second principle is the principle of conflict, according to which the

54 Author's field notes, 2011.

55 For a further expansion of the comparison, see: Abd al-Rahman Rachik, "Ḥarakat 20 Fibrāyir: Tatwīj li'l-Iḥtijājāt fi'l-Maghrib", in: *20 Fibrāyir wa-Māālāt at-Taḥawwul ad-Dimuqrāṭiyy fi'l-Maghrib*, Democratic Transition Series (Doha / Beirut: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2018), p. 145.

56 This definition of social movement is taken from Lilian Mathieu, *L'Espace des mouvements sociaux*, (Paris: Edition du Croquant, 2012), p. 12.

57 Mohamed El-Sassi, "an-Niẓām as-Siyāsiyy al-Maghribiyy Ghudāt Ḥirāk 2011: al-Istiqrār al-Hashsh Badīlan min ad-Dimuqrāṭiyy," in: *20 Fibrāyir wa-Māālāt at-Taḥawwul ad-Dimuqrāṭiyy*, p. 74.

studied movement should determine who are its opponents. The third principle is the new social movement's defense of its demands in the name of inalienable universal values, such as freedom, human rights, and environmental protection, among others.⁽⁵⁸⁾

It seems clear, then, that the rational choice theory in its instrumentalist Olsonian model suffers from a methodological and epistemological myopia *vis-à-vis* this type of social phenomenon, in which the protest collective action is subject to a logic differing from instrumental rationality based on the cost-benefit axiom. How can the specificity of this different logic be determined? One of the activists of the 20 February Movement in Casablanca said: "I completed my studies in journalism and philosophy before the Arab Spring began, but then I postponed my master's degree and all job offers, canceling everything for the sake of what I believed in. I could have become a journalist at one of the newspapers or radio stations that offered me a job and my grades in philosophy would have allowed me to become a high school teacher, enabling me to complete my studies. I could have done my master's degree then my PhD either domestically or abroad with the help of relatives."⁽⁵⁹⁾

If we read this testimony from the viewpoint of the rational choice theory in its instrumental model, we notice that the cost of the chosen action exceeds its benefits. Indeed, the activist canceled all job and graduate studies opportunities for the values he believes in, such as freedom, dignity and social justice. The activist adds, "I stopped everything and participated in the joy demonstrations in 2011. I joined the media committee after friends told me there was a shortage of members in the largest city in Morocco, then I left for the slogans committee after some friends told me they needed members. I was like a maniac, sparing no effort, sometimes attending two marches in two distant cities followed by a night meeting. I threw myself into everything that motivated and reassured the people. I did not believe that 'the fighter is the last one to be beaten or killed'."⁽⁶⁰⁾

This activist sacrificed all opportunities for work or graduate studies in order to participate in what he called 'demonstrations of joy' during the uprisings of 2011. This is in addition to his involvement in various activities of the 20 February Movement where he spared no effort, and his belief that a fighter should always be at the forefront and ready to make sacrifices, as attested to by his committed dedication.

This conclusion is reinforced by another testimony given by one of the activists of the 20 February Movement in the city of Rabat in an interview conducted by the researcher in 2011. "I participated in most of the protests organized by the 20 February Movement Coordination Committee in Rabat. Although I was beaten and insulted countless times by the security forces in the street, this never discouraged me from continuing the struggle for the values of freedom, dignity, and social justice that I believe in. What's worse, I was threatened with expulsion from the school where I was studying."⁽⁶¹⁾

Undoubtedly, such an unwavering struggle reminds us of John McCarthy and Mayer Zald's concept of the 'disinterested militant', a novel conceptualization of incentives that goes beyond the 'selective incentives' concept in Olson's instrumental model. This is what Gaxie calls 'symbolic incentives', as noted above, which are of a moral and psychological nature: the joy of struggle, the satisfaction arising from the defense of certain ideas, a sense of the ability to act, in addition to self-assertion and appraisal.

If analysis of the 20 February Movement strongly refutes the instrumentalism of the Olson model, study of the Rif Movement shows that this movement likewise defies the conceptual toolkit of Olson's instrumental rationality. This movement does not have specific class-related demands but rather rights, social and economic demands that concern the entire population in the Rif. If we recall the 'Olson paradox', smaller groups are better prepared for mobilization than larger groups thanks to the potential of 'selective incentives' and the effectiveness of the 'closed shop' technique to prevent the 'free rider' attempts. The Rif

58 Alain Touraine, *La Voix et le Regard* (Paris: Les Éditions du Seuil, 1978), p. 112.

59 "Ḥamza Maḥfūz Yaktub: Ba'da Sanawāt Arba' min Las'at ar-Rabī'!", *Huna Sawtak*, 30/12/2014 (accessed on 17/12/2017 at: <https://bit.ly/2M11vox>)

60 Ibid.

61 Interview with M. A., activist, who preferred to stay anonymous, Rabat, 10 July 2011.

Movement can be said to have beaten this paradox, mobilizing diverse social groups in the Rif – especially in the city of Al Hoceima – for almost a year.⁽⁶²⁾

Although the Rif⁽⁶³⁾ suffers less from disparities⁽⁶⁴⁾ than other Moroccan regions, its inhabitants have been constant rebels ever since independence despite major changes to the politics of the country. In fact, social scientists are faced with this paradox: Why are the people of this region almost uniquely rebellious? Or rather, why do the residents of the rest of the marginalized regions in Morocco not protest, or protest only rarely?

This study shows that the Rif Movement has a collective and conflictual dimension as well as a third dimension associated with the orientation towards social change. This movement manages to combine several factors that no other post-independence social movement has succeeded in bringing together. From its very first moments a field leadership emerged from its core,⁽⁶⁵⁾ with unrivalled independence *vis-à-vis* both the political and trade union fields.⁽⁶⁶⁾

It is understood that the direct cause of the emergence of the Rif Movement was the gruesome accident that took the life of fishmonger Mouhcine Fikri, 30, in Al Hoceima on the evening of 28 October 2016.⁽⁶⁷⁾ This tragedy sparked popular anger and launched waves

of protest that continued for nearly a year. As soon as the news spread among the residents, especially the younger generation, they began an open sit-in in front of the local Security Zone Headquarters.⁽⁶⁸⁾ To end their sit-in, the protesters requested that the governor of Al Hoceima and the public prosecutor meet with them. The two officials complied, arriving at the sit-in at 3 a.m. on October 29, 2016.⁽⁶⁹⁾ After a discussion with the protesters, the two officials committed to conducting an impartial investigation into Mouhcine Fikri's death. The protest was concluded with the formation of a civilian committee entrusted with following up on the case and holding all those responsible for the tragic accident accountable.

Across the country most Moroccans were shocked by mobile video footage showing the victim being crushed to death, transmitted via social networks. A general feeling of *ḥagra*⁽⁷⁰⁾ prevailed, especially after another video showing the man's corpse stuck in the bin lorry's rubbish compactor was disseminated. Consequently, there were several calls for protest via the Internet, followed by waves of protest in many Moroccan cities.

As the current study notes, these events are interconnected methodologically. However, there is no automatic connection between the crushing accident and the outbreak of the Rif Movement.

62 From the rise of the movement on October 28, 2016 to the first anniversary of Mohsen Fekry's death on 28 October 2017.

63 The Rif is full of natural resources and enormous potential, which have not been harnessed to achieve balanced development and improve the population's living conditions. The region has been negatively affected by decades of marginalization, isolation and exclusion. See, for example: Omar Iharchane, "Ḥirāk ar-Rif: as-Siyāq wa't-Tafā'ul wa'l-Khaṣā'is," *Siyasat Arabiyya*, Issue 31 (March 2018), p. 68.

64 The highest poverty rate is found in the Drāa-Tafilelet region (14.6 percent), followed by Béni Mellal-Khénifra (9.1 percent). However, the poverty rate does not exceed 2.6 percent in the region of Tanger-Tetouan-Al Hoceima, to which the Rif belongs. See: Kingdom of Morocco, High Commission for Planning, *an-Natā'ij ar-Rāsiyya li-Kharīṭat al-Fuqr Muta'addid al-Ab'ād li-Sanat 2014: al-Mashhad at-Turābiyy wa'd-Dīnāmiyya* (accessed on 02/12/2019 at <https://bit.ly/381uj1F>).

65 Headed by Nasser Zefzafi (born 1978 in Al Hoceima, northern Morocco), who had participated in previous protests in the Al Hoceima region, especially as part of the 20 February Movement during the Arab Spring. Although he was recognized locally as a political activist on social media platforms, he only became famous with the Rif Movement. See, for example: "Ḥiwār: az-Zafzāfi Yaḳūl Kull Shay' 'an Ḥayātihi wa-'an Ilyās wa-Limādhā Yastafid bi'l-Ḥirāk wa-Limādhā Ḥaharā Rifqat al-Ḥurrās", *alaual.com*, 20/5/2017 (accessed on 02/12/2019 at: <https://bit.ly/338gJ9B>).

Although sentenced to twenty years imprisonment, he was shortlisted for the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought organized by the European Parliament, after receiving 40 nominations from European parliamentarians. See: "az-Zafzāfi Ḍimn al-Qā'ima an-Nihā'iyya li'l-Murashshahīn li-Jāizat Sakhārūf li-Ḥurriyat al-Fikr", *lakome2.com*, 9/10/2018 (accessed on 10/10/2018 at: <https://bit.ly/2BQUfy4>).

66 The movement's leaders and activists became especially sensitive towards the majority of the party and trade union organizations, which they considered mere 'political fronts' (*dakākin siyāsiyya*). See, for example: "Ḥiwār: az-Zafzāfi Yaḳūl".

67 This young man was crushed to death in a bin lorry while protesting the confiscation and destruction of his swordfish by the police.

68 In this regard, Nasser Zefzafi's mother recounts, "At around 7 pm on October 28, Nasser was sitting at home. I poured him a cup of tea and before he started sipping it, I told him, 'I heard that someone has been crushed in a garbage truck, is it true? So he put his cup down and went out ...' See: "bi'ṣ-Ṣuwar: az-Zafzāfi Kamā Lam Ta'rifūhu min Qabl", *Aṣwāt Maghāribiyya*, 26/07/2017 (accessed on 20/02/2018 at: <http://urlz.fr/5Lam>).

69 A video shows the two officials assuring the protesters that an impartial investigation would be launched into the incident. Responding to the officials, one of the interlocutors – who would later be known as Nasser Zefzafi, the leader of the movement – demanded adequate guarantees that there would be a transparent investigation. YouTube, 08/01/2017 (accessed on 28/11/2017 at: <https://bit.ly/2qVWe2m>).

70 In Morocco, *ḥagra* connotes contempt, trampled dignity, arrogance, and violated rights.

We must mention here that although Morocco has experienced similar events in recent years, they only led to weak protests, limited in time and place,⁽⁷¹⁾ as the reality is far more complex than to be reduced to such simplistic explanations. The tragic crushing was the straw that broke the camel's back, unleashing years of accumulated social discontent. This requires deeper study of how the Rif Movement erupted in the context of the interaction between the protest space and the field of institutional policy.

This tragic accident can be said to have strongly embodied a set of interrelated factors that formed to a large extent the foundation for explaining how this social movement originated and developed. These objective factors concern social structures and interact with other subjective factors concerning the actions of individuals or groups. Perhaps the most important of these factors is the exacerbation of youth unemployment and the spread of the scourge of corruption, which alongside the sense of *ḥāgra* explains many aspects of what happened in the Rif.

The interaction of sociocultural,⁽⁷²⁾ economic⁽⁷³⁾ and political⁽⁷⁴⁾ factors has undoubtedly created fertile ground for discontent. If we add the weight of history to these factors we get a clearer idea of the painful recollections associated in the rural collective memory with historical tensions with the central authority. After Morocco's independence in 1956, the people of the Rif revolted in the 1957-1959 period, rebelling against marginalization and neglect.⁽⁷⁵⁾ According to American anthropologist David Montgomery Hart, the Rif uprising is attributable to dissatisfaction with

the independence period: the people of the region have been disappointed by both political parties and the Moroccan government in which they did not even obtain a regional governor position. In addition, their region's underdevelopment, compared to others, deepened their sense of *hogra*. However, instead of responding to these demands⁽⁷⁶⁾, the Moroccan regime bloodily suppressed the movement, dispatching ground and air military forces led then Crown Prince Moulay Hassan (later Hassan II) and General Mohamed Oufkir (1920-1972).

The Rif, in addition to other Moroccan regions, witnessed further uprisings: on 19 January 1984 protest movements erupted in several cities, especially Al Hoceima, Nador, Ksar El Kebir and Marrakech.⁽⁷⁷⁾ Five years after coming to power, Mohamed VI established an Equity and Reconciliation Commission to put to rest serious human rights violations in the Rif and other regions.⁽⁷⁸⁾ However, with the outbreak of the first wave of Arab revolutions in 2011, Morocco, including the Rif, would see new waves of protest under the banner of the 20 February Movement.

There is no doubt that the interaction of these historical, sociocultural, economic and political factors contributed greatly to the formation of a protest space encompassing a group of networks revived whenever the opportunity arises – as happened in the case of Mouhcine Fikri's tragic death. Among the most prominent such networks are the National Association for Unemployed Graduates in Morocco, the local coordination committee of the 20 February Movement, in addition to some leftist and Islamist

71 Including, in particular, self-immolation as protest, 'Bouazizi style'. 29 cases of self-immolation were registered in Morocco between 2011 and 2016, see: "Les immolations par le feu au Maroc en chiffres," 16/5/2016 (accessed on 17/12/2017 at <http://urlz.fr/5Laz>).

72 As the mother tongue of the Rif, the Amazigh language still suffers from significant marginalization in education, administration and information, despite its position being enshrined in the constitution in 2011. The Rif's population thus feel linguistically and culturally marginalized, reinforcing their sense of exclusion. This identity factor plays an active role in the Rif people's pride in their historical glories, which they use in the face of present-day problems.

73 In the absence of strong economic structures in the Rif, smuggling represents an income-generating activity for many families. This is in addition to mountain and marine tourism and the hard currency that the Rif community in Europe brings. It is also no secret that the Rif, especially the town of Ketama, is known for cultivating and trading cannabis and smuggling it into Europe.

74 Most observers believe that the government generally controls the inputs and outputs of the political field. According to the Justice and Development Party's statements on the Rif crisis, this control is evident in the intervention of state agencies to preserve the hegemony of the Authenticity and Modernity Party, which is close to the highest authorities in the country.

75 Hsain Ilahiane, *Historical Dictionary of the Berbers (Imazighen)* (USA: Scarecrow Press, 2006), p. 107.

76 In his aforementioned book, David Hart states that the movement's goals include the evacuation of foreign forces from Morocco, the formation of a broad-based national government, and the establishment of a democratic system that pursues the people's aspirations in the fields of economy, politics, and education.

77 The protests emerged among students, before encompassing other social groups as well. The uprising was subjected to severe bloody violence and large-scale arrests, see in this context: Shakib El-Khayari, "Intifādat Yanāyir 1984 bi'n-Nāzūr... al-Asbāb wa'n-Natā'ij", *al-Hiwār al-Mutamaddin* No. 1301, 29/08/2005 (accessed on 10/12/2017 at <https://bit.ly/2pk5pss>)

78 A national commission created by the King in 2004 to manage the transitional justice process in Morocco and to uncover the truth about serious human rights violations in the 1956-1999 period.

currents and other human rights and trade union organizations. Moreover, this protest space represents a fertile ground for every emerging social movement.

One of the by-products of the Rif Movement was a dramatic upheaval within both the protest space and the political field – an upheaval the likes of which Morocco had not seen since the 2011 uprisings. As far as the protest space was concerned neither the quick measures taken by the King nor the Prime Minister's own initiatives succeeded in calming the situation. And the regional authorities were likewise unable to stop the protest and prevent it from spreading to other regions.⁽⁷⁹⁾

In the political field the state's responses can be divided into two categories: hasty measures and medium-term measures. Both the King and the government took rapid steps intended to absorb the anger of the Rif population and urban popular opinion.⁽⁸⁰⁾ But the government's management of the situation was marked by confusion and inefficiency, which contributed to the movement's perseverance and helped it spread to most regions of the country; none of the methods it adopted produced a solution. The mismanagement is obvious to anyone familiar with the movement's chronology: measures ranged from promising an impartial investigation into Mouhcine Fikri's death to using excessive and disproportionate force and accusing movement leaders of separatism and receiving foreign funding. These accusations were then withdrawn and ministerial delegations were sent to the region to follow the progress of the programmed development projects.⁽⁸¹⁾

In the medium term, according to movement activists, accountability in the "impartial investigation" encompassed only a few sacrificial lambs and did not

extend to senior officials. Although initially authorities had taken a flexible approach to the protests – hoping that they would peter out naturally with time – their persistence led to a change in direction. After they accused leaders and activists of being 'separatists' and 'receiving money from abroad', the movement's leaders quickly launched a rebuttal campaign on social networks, which led to the withdrawal of the accusations and recognition of the legitimacy of the movement's demands. Activists nonetheless insisted on going ahead with a scheduled demonstration.⁽⁸²⁾ Under royal instructions, a ministerial delegation visited Al Hoceima to hold meetings with locally elected officials and civil society representatives, albeit in the absence of the movement's leaders.⁽⁸³⁾

The final straw in the mismanagement of the crisis was the state's use of religion to attack the movement's legitimacy. A Friday sermon accusing activists of fomenting 'strife' (*fitna*) provoked worshippers led by Nasser Zefzafi to boycott the preacher on the grounds that religion was being used for political ends. This incident provoked one of the most dangerous *volte-faces* that the movement would experience. The authorities launched a massive campaign to hunt down, detain and prosecute leaders and activists, levelling very serious charges against them. They also banned any form of protest.⁽⁸⁴⁾

Despite ongoing arrests and harsh sentencing, protests in the Rif did not stop – in fact, they spread further in most parts of the country. When time and the arrest of the its leadership and many of its activists failed to break the movement, the security forces lost patience and accelerated their crackdown. The cost of the struggle was thus very high for the movement's

79 Peaceful demonstrations were organized in thirty cities, the most important of which were Tangier, Casablanca, Rabat, Marrakech, and Nador. See: "Ghaḍab wa-Muzāharāt bi'l-Maghrib Ba'd Mawt Bā'i Samak Tihnan", *Al Jazeera.net*, 31/10/2016 (accessed on 02/12/2019 at: <https://bit.ly/324APjX>)

80 Immediately after the tragic accident, the King quickly dispatched the Minister of the Interior to the city of Al Hoceima to offer condolences to Fikri's family. He also gave instructions "to conduct a thorough and in-depth investigation and to follow up on all those found responsible in this incident". PM Abdelilah Benkirane, meanwhile, called on his Justice and Development Party not to respond to any call to protest. See: *ibid.*

81 Mohamed Naimi, "Hirāk ar-Rif: Ba'd 'Unf as-Sulṭa al-Mufriṭ, Lā Makhraj min al-Azma ilā bi'l-Hiwār", www.lakome2.com, 02/07/2017 (accessed on 03/07/2017 at: <https://bit.ly/2C1b1L5>)

82 This massive demonstration was held in Al Hoceima on May 18, 2017 to denounce accusations of treason and to cling to the movement's economic and social demands. See: "al-Ḥusayma Tusayyir Masīra Ḍakhma Rāfiḍa li't-Takhwīn wa-Mutashabbitha bi'l-Maṭālib", www.aljamaa.net, 18/05/2017 (accessed on 02/12/2019 at: <https://bit.ly/2JDooFg>)

83 Author's field notes: *Krōnōlōjiyā Hirāk ar-Rif*, 2016-2017.

84 *Ibid.*

leaders and activists.⁽⁸⁵⁾ At the same time, political answers were provided, especially by the King in his capacity as head of state.⁽⁸⁶⁾ This is an important methodological point through which the extent of the controversial interaction taking place between the protest space and the field of institutional policy is evident, contrary to the theory of ‘the structure of political opportunities’.

Once again, when faced by this type of social movement – in which collective action is subject to an entirely un-utilitarian logic unconcerned

with the axiom of cost-benefit analysis – Olson’s instrumental rationality shows its methodological and epistemological deficiencies. Nonetheless, despite the criticism directed at it, the theory retains a double advantage. On the one hand, it has reconsidered the alleged causal relationship between discontent and collective action. On the other, it has cast light on an important dimension of the process of mobilization: the cost and diverse risks facing those protesting, which often prevent those who otherwise might be assumed to protest from acting.⁽⁸⁷⁾

Towards an Alternative Rationality in the Explanation of Social Movements

Based on our conclusions here – and in order to understand and explain collective action from an open and flexible rational perspective – rational choice theory requires some adjustment. We might call the result of this adjustment ‘bounded rationality’ theory or ‘good reason’ theory. This can only be achieved by supporting it with other explanations like those offered by resource mobilization theory, which highlights the role of societal linkages, action organizers and networks. Also noteworthy is Charles Tilly’s work, which has helped explain the role of political contexts, institutional patterns, and ideological presentations in constituting collective action. In general, sociologists and historians have highlighted the role of political cultures and

perceptions of social justice in the formation and development of protest action, away from the solid nucleus of relative deprivation.⁽⁸⁸⁾

With the advent of resource mobilization theory in the 1970s in the United States, the seminal contributions of Tony Oberschall (1973), William Gamson (1975), Charles Tilly (1976), John McCarthy and Mayer Zald (1977) cast new light on old questions and considerations. This theory breaks epistemologically with a theoretical perspective hypnotized crowds and violent mobilization. It also breaks with Olson’s instrumental perspective, which is interested exclusively in social movements with direct material concerns. Resource mobilization theory can thus

85 About 500 detainees, the youngest of whom was not yet 14, according to the movement’s activists’ Self-Defense Committee, in addition to the death of activist Imad Atabi, who was wounded in the head during a security intervention to disperse the Al Hoceima march on July 20, 2017. See: “500 Mu‘taqal fi’l-Maghrib ‘alā Khalfiyat Hirāk ar-Rif fi Aqall min Sana”, www.alyaoum24.com, 10/10/2017 (accessed on 02/12/2019 at: <https://bit.ly/2N72sob>).

On June 26, 2018, the First Instance Criminal Chamber of the Appeals Court in Casablanca sentenced 46 Rif movement leaders and activists to a total of 300 years imprisonment, with sentences ranging from one year to 20 years. The movement’s leader Nasser Zefzafi and three other leaders were convicted to twenty years in prison. See: “‘Ājil... Aḥkām Šādima fi Ḥaqq Qā‘id ‘Hirāk ar-Rif’ Nāšir az-Zafzāfi wa-Rifāqihī”, <http://chamaly.ma>, 26/6/2018 (accessed on 12/12/2019 at: <https://bit.ly/338dZt4>).

86 The King’s first response was to chair a Cabinet meeting on 25 June 2017 dedicated to the discussion of several topics, most notably the Rif protests. The crisis in all of its complexity was reduced to technical and administrative issues pertaining to the failure to implement the ‘Al Hoceima, Beacon of the Mediterranean’ program. The King expressed to the government “his dissatisfaction, exasperation, and concern” regarding the failure to implement the projects included in this development program within the specified deadlines. He also expressed his anger at a number of ministers. See: The Kingdom of Morocco, “Jalālat al-Malik Yatarā‘ as bi’ d-Dār al-Baydā’ Majlis al-Malikiyya”, <http://www.maroc.ma/>, 25/06/2017 (accessed on 02/12/2019 at: <https://bit.ly/34ol3lv>). In his coronation day speech on 29 July 2017, he criticized the poor outcome of human development and the mismanagement of the public sector, in addition to pointing out the weaknesses in most parties. See: The Kingdom of Morocco, “Naṣṣ al-Khiṭāb as-Sāmī alladhī Wajjahahu Jalālat al-Malik bi-Munāṣabat Ḥulūl adh-Dhikrā 18 li-Tarabbu‘ Jalālatihī ‘alā ‘Arsh Aslāfihi al-Mun‘amin”, <http://www.maroc.ma/> (accessed on 2/12/2019 at <https://bit.ly/2NvTff0>).

The King’s third response was much more dramatic: on 24 October 2017 he dismissed four ministers. See: “Malik al-Maghrib Yuqil Arba‘at Wuzarā’ li-Tāakhkhar Mashārit al-Ḥusayma”, <https://www.aljazeera.net>, 24/10/2017 (accessed on 02/12/2019 at: <https://bit.ly/2PDDFtz>).

87 Michel Dobry, “Les Causalités de l’Improbable et du probable: Notes à propos des manifestations de 1989 en Europe centrale et orientale”, *Cultures & Conflits*, no. 17 (Spring 1995) (accessed on 13/02/2018 at: <https://bit.ly/2NuneNc>).

88 Dubet, p.6.

account for all types of movements – including those with explicit ideological and political aspects like the 20 February Movement. Its most important contribution was to reformulate the fundamental question to analysis of social movements: no longer “Why do certain groups mobilize, as in the model of collective behavior?”, but rather “How is mobilization launched and how does it develop?”, then “How does it succeed or fail?”⁽⁸⁹⁾

In addition, by classifying types of support, it provides an unprecedented answer to the ‘Olson paradox’ referred to above. It introduces the concept of ‘adherents’, meaning people who support the goals of the movement as distinct from ‘constituents’ (active members) who give the movement their time, money, and all forms of material support. Moreover, we can place the ‘active members’ in two categories: one for ‘potential beneficiaries’ who can gain some personal benefit from the movement's success; and another for ‘ascetic militants’ who support the movement without making any significant material profit. These ‘ascetic militants’ pumping their energies or money into a cause offers an unrivalled empirical solution to the

Olson paradox: these external resources reduce the cost of collective action for potential beneficiaries and increase the cost-effectiveness of participation.⁽⁹⁰⁾ This paper’s analysis of the 20 February Movement and the Rif Movement in Morocco confirms this. In both cases, the study showed that we are faced with a special type of ‘ascetic militants’ who make enormous sacrifices for a cause without any benefit in return.

This leads us, briefly, to cognitive rationality, which aims to explain the reasons why people adopt ideological or magic beliefs or moral values and which is mainly attributable to the German School of Sociology. By distinguishing between instrumental rationality and axiological rationality Max Weber is able to argue that rationality *per se* should not be conflated with its instrumental form. The concept of axiological rationality may sometimes be somewhat ambiguous, especially for those who cannot conceive of a non-instrumental rationality because they conflate the two. But it becomes much clearer if we see it as an application of cognitive rationality to normative issues.⁽⁹¹⁾

Conclusion

We can conclude that rational choice theory in its instrumentalist iteration does not constitute a general framework capable of explaining most social phenomena. Fieldwork with a group of social movements in Morocco shows that Olson’s instrumental rationality can account for only a few events – those concerning social movements interested exclusively in limited sectional economic interests. Social movements with political or ideological concerns remain impossible for him to understand.

It is well known that economics and the economic model have affected all other social sciences to varying degrees. Within economics, which presents itself as a neoclassical discipline, the only legitimate epistemological underpinnings are microeconomic – that is, everything proceeds from the axiom that

social actors as rational agents care only about their own interests. This axiom, which lies at the heart of methodological individualism and rational choice theory, is also operative in other social science disciplines.

To transcend this narrow economicist viewpoint, the scope of rationality must be expanded to include cognition. This might help us avoid the trap of choosing between an excessively rational economic being and an irrational sociological being presented by deterministic sociology as an automaton driven by social forces. Most actions of interest to sociologists exist in a middle category: neither the actions of a calculating, fully informed economic actor nor the actions of a sociological self driven unwittingly by imperatives far bigger than it.⁽⁹²⁾

89 Olivier Fillieule, “Requiem pour un concept. Vie et mort de la Notion de structure des opportunités politiques,” in: Gilles Dorronsoro (dir.), *La Turquie contestée: Mobilisations sociales et régime sécuritaire* (Paris: Presses du CNRS, 2005), p. 202.

90 Neveu, p. 52.

91 Boudon, *Raison*, p. 51.

92 Boudon & Fillieule, p. 4.

We thus need a greater openness to an axiological rationality taking into account a set of values, or what Raymond Boudon dubs the rationality of ‘good reasons’ (*bonnes raisons*). We desperately need a general sociology based on principles other than the theory of rational choice and the economic model – a general social science that is not utilitarian.⁽⁹³⁾ We must also move beyond the bivalent Aristotelian logic diagram to trivalent dialectical logic. Neither the ‘methodological individualism’ adopted by the theory of rational choice nor ‘methodological holism’ is capable alone of explaining all social phenomena. This is the overall trend in social sciences today, as it seeks to transcend this methodological duality as part of an approach towards integration.

93 Alain Caillé & Stéphane Dufoix, “La Globalisation des sciences sociales,” *Sciences humaines*, vol. 3, no. 290 (2017), p. 14, at: <https://bit.ly/2Y8X488>

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