

Navigating turbulent waters: associative clientelism and the rise and decline of Riffian elites in Morocco

Ángela Suárez-Collado

To cite this article: Ángela Suárez-Collado (20 Nov 2023): Navigating turbulent waters: associative clientelism and the rise and decline of Riffian elites in Morocco, Territory, Politics, Governance, DOI: [10.1080/21622671.2023.2272672](https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2023.2272672)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2023.2272672>



Published online: 20 Nov 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Navigating turbulent waters: associative clientelism and the rise and decline of Riffian elites in Morocco

Ángela Suárez-Collado 

ABSTRACT

This article examines the pathways followed by peripheral elites to gain access to the Moroccan state apparatus and play a broker role between the centre and the periphery in Morocco. It focusses on Riffian elites and how their profile has changed since independence according to the different social pacts and dynamics of inclusion promoted by the Moroccan regime. The study pays special attention to analysing the landscape of the new elites that emerged during the reign of Mohammed VI through what has been termed associative clientelism, the limits of this new model of inclusion and the decline of these elites.

KEYWORDS

Periphery; centre–periphery relations; elites; Morocco; Rif; civil society; associative clientelism

HISTORY Received 12 January 2023; in revised form 12 October 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

The Rif¹ has historically been portrayed as a region in tension with the central authority and a main focal point of rebellion and contestation. Its resistance to colonial rule during the Spanish protectorate² and the establishment of the Republic of the Rif (1921–27), led by Abdelkrim al-Khattabi, helped to strengthen this image, which has been perpetuated throughout the postcolonial history of Morocco (Madariaga, 2010). The region has been the source of many episodes of contention (1958–9, 1984, 1987) since Morocco gained its independence in 1956, the result of the combination of enduring national economic, political and cultural asymmetries and state repression of the territory. This has reinforced regional disaffection with the centre of power and different regionalist tendencies in Riffian activism over the decades. However, the Rif became a priority area targeted by the regime after King Mohammed VI assumed the throne. Consequently, some local activists were included within Moroccan circles of power, in particular certain state institutions and the Parliament, through the Authenticity and Modernity Party (Parti Authenticité et Modernité – PAM), set up at the initiative of Fouad Ali El Himma, the king's closest friend.

From the very beginning of its constitution, the PAM was a dominant party in the Rif, mainly in the Al Hoceima province, where most of the new Riffian elites come from, and its control over the region went almost unchallenged until a peripheral revolt occurred in October 2016. Unlike much of the Arab world, it was not the 2011 Arab Spring that called into question the new distribution of power in the region, but the tragic death of a fishmonger after the police seized his merchandise, which resulted in a popular uprising, the so-called HIRAK movement.

CONTACT Ángela Suárez-Collado  ascollado@usal.es

Area of Political Science and Public Administration, Department of Public Law, University of Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain

Over the course of the protest, the population accused the Riffian elites of being the sole beneficiaries of the monarchy's rapprochement to the region. The elites, however, were unable to act as mediators between the Moroccan regime and the demonstrators during the period of unrest. The reasons for this failure were related to the very nature of the Hirak protest movement, composed of and led by young people with no significant previous experience in activism and connections with the associations and organisations of civil society led by the new Riffian elites. Thus, the lack of bonds between protestors and them contributed to a progressive disappearance of the peripheral elites within the state apparatus and the regional political sphere.

This article focuses on centre–periphery relations in Morocco using the case study of Riffian elites during the reign of King Mohammed VI and the pathways and constraints affecting the access of peripheral elites to the state apparatus and their ability to play a broker role. The two main research questions are: How can peripheral elites have a presence in the central state apparatus? And: Are peripheral elites able to impact and influence both the centre and the periphery? Against this backdrop, the article examines the means used by the peripheral elites to gain access to central political institutions, the power resources they have needed to do so, their spheres of influence and their brokerage capacity. To that end, the study draws on longitudinal in-depth research in the Rif region, which includes three different close-proximity fieldwork periods (April 2007–May 2011, October 2016 and September 2019), ethnographic observations, in-situ observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, life story compilations, the reconstruction of the memories of militants and a discourse analysis of debates, newspapers and documentation produced by different socio-political actors. As an outsider in Morocco, conducting this longitudinal research allowed me to face some of the challenges inherent in outsider research, such as difficulties in establishing trust and relationships with the local community, understanding the nuances of cultural practices, and navigating potential cultural and language barriers, to ensure that the research process and findings are contextually grounded. The interviews were conducted in the local Amazigh language, as well as in French, Spanish and English. Two-thirds of the interviews were conducted in French or Spanish and very subsidiarily in English. Both activists, authorities and politicians in the Rif are familiar with French, as it is widely used in international cooperation, the media and even the administration, and Spanish, because of the historical bond. Standard Arabic is not used in oral communication in the Rif, as a large part of the population does not speak it, and although Darija is understood well, Riffian is the prevailing language of communication among locals. For the interviews in Riffian language, an interpreter was used. The choice of one language or the other depended on the language skills of each interviewee and the option that facilitated greater fluency in communication between the two parties.

The article is divided into four sections. The first presents the research framework by discussing the evolving nature of the periphery and the terms of its distance from the centre of formal power, putting it in dialogue with the dynamics of centre–periphery relations and Morocco's strategies of inclusion and exclusion in the political sphere. The second section contains an overview of the regional elites who dominated the periphery between independence and Mohammed VI's accession to the throne. The third section examines the changes introduced in the periphery during Mohammed VI's regime and the means, resources and spheres of influence of the 'new' Riffian elites, who have been part of the Moroccan power circles for the last two decades. Finally, the last section reflects on the role of peripheral elites in Morocco in the present reign, analysing their role as brokers and their capacity to influence the centre and the periphery. The research presented in this article expands and updates two previous articles, the first of which analysed the Rif as periphery during the Arab Spring (Suárez-Collado, 2015) and the second, the modus operandi of dependency networks in the region before the emergence of the popular *Hirak* protest movement in 2016 (Suárez-Collado, 2018). It adds more recent research and systematises and classifies the Riffian elites from independence to the present, paying particular

attention to the impact of the *Hirak* on the configuration of elites and local politics in recent years.

2. CENTRE–PERIPHERY RELATIONS AND THE INCLUSION OF NEW POLITICAL ELITES IN MOROCCO

The periphery, as suggested by Stepputat (2013, p. 25), can be seen as the space where ‘the presence of the state is limited, highly contested, or intertwined with forms of power and governance that are at odds with the Weberian ideals of state and bureaucracy’. It is characterised not only by its distance from the centre of formal power, which can be reflected in geographic, economic, ethnic or political terms and also by its changeability and heterogeneity. Thus, centre–periphery relations develop around the tension that emanates from the centre’s attempts to gain control over the periphery through the processes of state- and nation-building, and the resistance of the periphery against this expansionism (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Within this context, Rokkan and Urwin (1983) argue that political dynamics in peripheries are the result of the interplay between economic factors, territorial factors and identity that contribute to the formation of political cleavages. They affirm that these cleavages are not static but evolve over time, often in response to changing economic conditions, territorial boundaries and identity politics, often giving rise to complex political outcomes, including regional autonomy movements and nationalist sentiments.

These dynamics constitute a centrepiece to explain the shifts in the nature of centre–periphery relations in the Rif, as well as the composition of its local elites throughout Morocco’s postcolonial history. During this period, centre–periphery relations have evolved, giving rise to different ‘stages of escalation of peripheral aims’ (Rokkan & Urwin, 1983), which have progressed from integrating petitions in the early years after independence to making cultural claims in the 1970s and, finally, making broad demands for political autonomy after Mohammed VI ascended to the throne in 1999. However, while Rokkan and Urwin (1983) consider regional elites, peripheral political parties, and local institutions to be key peripheral actors in shaping the political dynamics of peripheries, they neglect the role that grassroots movements and social activism can play within peripheral regions and in the definition of centre–periphery relations, as in the case of the Rif. This article seeks to address this lacuna by analysing how activists can turn themselves into brokers between the centre and the periphery. In the case of Morocco, this has been possible thanks to the different socio-political pacts formulated by the Moroccan monarchy since independence.

These kinds of pacts have served as a tool in the hands of the governing institution of the Makhzen³ to promote different alliances at the various times when its legitimacy has been contested. The Makhzen has aimed to preserve the crown’s hegemonic position within the political system through stimulating and promoting changes from within and including certain segments of society, demands and political groups over others (Parejo & Feliu, 2009). Incorporation into the institutional sphere through these pacts has produced an important transformation in the Moroccan opposition structure, insofar as inclusion in the system automatically moderates the discourse and the acceptance of the limits of dissidence established by the regime (Szmolka, 2010). Accordingly, the main reason for these political pacts and dynamics of inclusion has been to limit questioning of the established order and consolidate the monarchy as the main actor, with the political parties as supporters of the status quo (Ottaway & Hamzawy, 2009). However, at the same time, they have also led to a parallel modification of the cost of participation and the structure of political opportunity, opening up the public space to the social and political forces that decide to take part in the process (Parejo, 2004). Thus, despite the limits of Moroccan politics, participation in the electoral processes has constituted a mechanism for

accessing co-optation circles and institutional representation structures, and for exerting influence over day-to-day governance decisions (Tozy, 2010).

These pacts and patterns of inclusion used by the Makhzen have affected the configurations of not only the politically relevant elites⁴ in Morocco since independence, but also the composition of Riffian elites, whose degrees of influence as brokers between the periphery and the centre have differed according to the centre–periphery relations in each given context. Moreover, the Riffian elites since independence have been characterised by having different power resources, which have shifted over time, pursuant to the needs of the centre and the dominant pacts of inclusion defined at each time. Thus, the basis of power of the Riffian elites has shifted from tribal solidarity to wealth and connections with local activism, as discussed in the following two sections.

3. RIFFIAN ELITES AFTER INDEPENDENCE: FROM TRADITIONAL NOTABLES TO 'NEW TRADESMEN'

Centre–periphery relations in the aftermath of independence were characterised by strong confrontations between both poles, especially in Berber rural areas, such as the Rif, where tribal leaders felt they were losing authority to the Arab urban elites, who dominated the party in government, the Istiqlal Party (Parti de l'Istiqlal – PI). The rejection of the centre's claim of legitimacy and control over local power in the peripheries manifested itself in the form of different uprisings, including in the Rif. In this case, other causes were also behind the periphery's disaffection and reflected its geographic, economic, ethnic and political distance from the centre: the collapse of the regional economy; a slow integration with the southern zone; relative neglect by the state during the early years of independence; the underdevelopment of the region in terms of education, infrastructure and employment; and the assignment of official positions to people from outside the region, most of them French-speaking Istiqlal supporters from the southern areas (Ashford, 1961; Hart, 1976).

The Riffian revolt, the most violent of the uprisings that occurred during that period, was marked by intense confrontations and a repression that resulted in 8000 deaths (Ybarra, 1997). Moreover, Prince Hassan, who had led the Royal Army Forces operation, was personally involved (Hart, 2000). The result was the imposition of central Moroccan state institutions and control throughout the region, military governance of the Al Hoceima province for three and a half years (Seedon, 1981) and mutual distrust between the monarchy and the Riffian population. This was a proto-regionalist experience in which the periphery's demands focused on the region's integration into the new state structure and the recognition of its particular features, contained in an 18-point programme submitted by local notables to King Mohammed V at the end of 1958 (Hart, 1999). The programme reflected the dissatisfaction with the prevailing political party, the lack of Riffians in government jobs and the general underdevelopment of the region, but these claims were only partially considered by the central power (Hart, 2000).

Nevertheless, participation in the 1958 revolt came to be one of the most defining attributes of belonging to the local elite during the following decade, in addition to traditional knowledge and tribal affiliation (Leveau, 1976), two features valued by the Palace in the first social pact it promoted after independence. At that time, local elites in rural areas became the main support for the monarchy, which leant on them to counterbalance the power of the Istiqlal Party and the urban bourgeoisie (whose modernising projects were seen as a sellout by rural notables) (Leveau, 1976). The role of these local notables as a political buttress was fostered by the control and electoral manipulation exercised by the Makhzen, beginning with the first parliamentary elections and throughout the following decades (Hammoudi, 1997; Leveau, 1976).

In the case of the Rif, local elites at that time easily dominated the regional institutional political sphere, participating both as independent candidates and as part of the pro-regime parties.

They benefitted not only from the persistence of strong tribal cohesion and the importance of local networks but also from the limits of electoral constituencies – consistent with tribal borders – and the single-winner plurality voting system in place (Leveau, 1976). This meant that the sphere of influence of the peripheral elites who emerged after independence was mainly limited to territories that adhered to a particular tribal identity and/or solidarity. Abdelaziz Ouzzani provides a clear example of this type of Riffian elite. Because of his social anchorage, he was elected for several parliamentary terms to represent the province of Al Hoceima. He had been born in 1927 into the Ait Yetteft tribe and, like 42.4% of the deputies in the first Parliament after independence, he was involved in the agricultural sector. He was also the sheikh of the Ouazzania Zaouia spiritual gathering place⁵ in Ait Yetteft, and therefore considered a rich man at the time. Under the Spanish protectorate, he had been appointed as a member of the caliph's council in 1948 and later qaid of the tribe of Ait Yetteft in 1951. After independence, he spent ten months in prison due to problems with the authorities related to his refusal to join the Istiqlal Party (Leveau, 1976, p. 110). Ouzzani took refuge in Spain after the revolts of 1958 and returned to the Rif in 1960, where he was particularly influential in the Ait Yetteft, Ait Boufrah, Ait Gemil, Mestassa and Bucoya tribes, as well as some factions of Ait Youssef Ou Ali. He ran in various elections, depending on the electoral districts at any given time. His first participation in an electoral process was in 1963 under the umbrella of the Democratic Front for the Defense of Constitutional Institutions (Le Front pour la Défense des Institutions Constitutionnelles – FDIC), founded by Ahmed Reda Guerida, an adviser and person of trust of King Hassan II. After this party was disbanded, he joined the ranks of the National Rally of Independents (RNI), continuing to represent the group as a member of Parliament until the mid-term of the 2002–2007 parliamentary period.

Despite this continuity and the support of the peripheral elites in consolidating the throne after independence, they did not achieve any real degree of influence at the national level, and their brokerage capacity was restricted to their constituencies of influence. The relationship between the monarchy and the Rif during Hassan II's reign was primarily characterised by publicly demonstrated royal disdain and economic and political neglect of the region (Moreno, 1998). This became evident when the so-called 1984 bread revolt spread to the Rif, where very specific local claims were added to the general protest against the suspension of commodity subsidies and the increase in school fees. In this regard, protestors in the Nador province took to the streets to denounce the impact of international migration and smuggling on the region's economic and social spheres and the state's peripheralisation policy towards the northern part of the country (Suárez-Collado, 2023). The disaffection with the centre was also seen in different regionalist and anti-Moroccan regime proclamations – 'Down with Hassan II!, Long live Abdelkrim!', 'Long live Abdelkrim! Long live the Republic!', 'Too many prisons and palaces', 'To go to war, you remember us, whereas for living, you ignore us'⁶ (Clément, 1987, p. 138) – and the state's inability to end the riots through traditional channels, like the intermediation of local notables (Clément, 1987, p. 138).

Various mediation attempts failed over the course of the uprising, highlighting the deficits in the regime's power structure at the local level. In other words, regional political elites were dependent on national ones and had limited legitimacy among the population, which restricted their ability to negotiate and dissuade the mobilised sectors. One of the most important consequences of this confrontation between the periphery and the centre was the increased distance between the region and the monarch, who expressly addressed the Rif to warn its inhabitants, to whom he referred as *awbach* ('savages', 'despicable people'), saying 'you have known me as a prince Hassan, better not to know me as Hassan II' (Nahhass & Bendella, 2021), referring to his participation in the 1958 repression. As a result, there were no Riffians in the Moroccan government until the mid-1990s, and the region remained economically neglected by the state for decades (Moreno, 1998).

That economic disregard was characterised by a *laissez-faire* state policy that left the region outside the formal economic circuits, making emigration, smuggling and the cultivation and trading of *kif* (hashish) its main sources of wealth (Planet, 1998). This environment favoured the emergence of a different type of local notable, who profited from the new socio-political pact promoted by the Palace from the late 1970s to the 1990s. During this period, the country was experiencing a severe economic and political crisis that directly affected the legitimacy of the monarch. These circumstances drove the Palace to reconfigure its alliances, supporting the inclusion of new social classes into the circles of power. Thus, technocrats, liberal professionals, businessmen, and tradesmen began to occupy more seats in Parliament. As part of the last category, major smugglers and drug barons emerged as a new local notable group in the Rif, thanks to the importance that both activities had for the regional economy. First, smuggling was an important source to compensate for the weakness or absence of official exchanges between the Spanish-Moroccan and Moroccan-Algerian borders, providing a means of subsistence for small-scale smugglers, an important source of wealth for large and organised networks of smugglers, and a new way of life for the population in North Morocco (Troin, 2002). While the existence of these activities between the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and the Rif region has at times been understood as the cause of development problems in the region, it was also seen as a force for social integration and economic stabilisation (Planet, 1998).

Second, the cultivation of *kif*, which initially developed in the commune of Ketama, experienced spectacular growth from the 1970s onwards, both in the extension of the crop and in the number of families dedicated to this activity. Indeed, it represented the only source of income for around 200,000 households in the late 1990s (Troin, 2002). During this period, the regime used its permissive attitude towards these illicit activities to exert control and consolidate the king as the main actor within the political system. This strategy allowed him, according to Waterbury (1976, p. 432), to become the chief planner, distributor and regulator who made the elites accept the rules and outcomes established by the Palace, and to mitigate class and social cleavages through the construction of vertically-integrated clienteles.

Within this frame, Rifian drug barons and smugglers did not advocate 'revolutionary' ideas; quite the contrary, their positions tended to align with the conservative parties, which had been part of the majority in Parliament since the 1970s and favoured the policy of tolerance that helped them amass their power and fortunes (Moreno, 1998). In this context, their main objective, second to gaining access to institutions, was the acquisition of parliamentary immunity, meaning that they generally upheld the Makhzen's formal rule in the Rif, with only a few of them actively participating in regional or national political life (Suárez-Collado, 2018). Thus, their means to gain access to central political institutions was their membership in loyalist parties, and their power and legitimacy resources relied on their social assistance, which generated networks of dependency that were used during election periods. These activities included covering the healthcare needs of their neighbours, paying the wedding costs of the poorest, buying lambs for the feast of Aid al-Kebir, building mosques, leading football teams and helping unemployed people (Moreno, 1998).

Beginning in the late 1990s, the forms of notability gradually began to change, with more importance being placed on other factors such as professional resources, both in material and symbolic terms (Zaki, 2009). This trend intensified with the accession of Mohammed VI to the throne and crystallised more clearly in the 2007 parliamentary elections and the 2009 municipal elections. In both processes, a change in the tactics and roles of the traditional actors – the political parties – could already be observed, along with the emergence of new actors, in particular civic associations. As they were simultaneously linked to the social and political fields, they were able to acquire increasing prominence in the public sphere (Parejo & Veguilla, 2008). These transformations helped move peripheral elites from an outermost to a central-peripheral position in the Moroccan power structure, as discussed in the following section.

4. THE EMERGENCE OF NEW ELITES IN THE RIF AND ASSOCIATIVE CLIENTELISM AFTER 1999

Mohammed VI's accession to the throne led to a new social pact that sought to respond to some of the pressing problems identified by the monarchy: the discrediting of politics in the eyes of the population; the failure of the left after its time in power; the advance of Islamists and the Makhzen's inability to deal with the Salafist challenge; and the resistance of the networks of notables, who were suspicious of the reformist discourse that the Palace tried to promote (Tozy, 2010). To face these challenges and preserve and enhance the king's monopoly within the economic and political system, different strategies were adopted, including the technocratisation of politics, the marginalisation of the government and Parliament as policymakers, and the co-opting of groups in civil society through governmental and semi-governmental institutions (Hibou, 2011). These circumstances also favoured the emergence of new centre–periphery relations between the Rif and the central power that manifested themselves in three different dynamics: the implementation of diverse development plans; the monarch's symbolic personal relationship with the Rif, as exemplified by his frequent trips to the region; and the co-optation of new local elites in certain sectors who had been strongly politicised and repressed during Hassan II's reign and were active actors in the local civil society.

Since the end of the 1990s, associations gained a central position within national politics as an alternative means of political participation, different from the traditional forms of representation – for instance, political parties and unions – that were considered ultraconservative, conformist and easily co-opted (Cavatorta & Durac, 2010). However, this new form of politics was not exempt from falling into the state's patronage system. Thus, from the mid-2000s onwards, members of associations and civil society began to contemplate the possibility of turning their activist capital into a political resource in order to gain an advantage from their own militant experience (Emperador, 2011), which was increasingly valued by politicians during the election campaigns (Berriane, 2009). The daily contact with the population, their social and technical expertise, and the extensive network that some associations had at their disposal made their support or collaboration with political parties invaluable. This, then, gave rise to a phenomenon that can be termed 'associative clientelism', which is based on the capacity of these associations to access funds, their knowledge and their mobilisation networks (Bennani-Chraïbi, 2004; Berriane, 2009).

Within this context, at the Riffian local level, associations became important channels for conveying the population's grievances to the authorities and obtaining social and economic support in response to their demands. Moreover, they acted as a locus for constructing competent pressure groups, allowing their members to connect and establish formal relationships with the primary elite circles to advance their claims. These dynamics have produced a dual-patronage system that constitutes a novel mechanism for redistributing diverse services, in which Riffian elites offer associations and activist leaders the opportunity to promote their demands at the national level or even to develop a political career at the local level, while associations and activists put their mobilisation networks at the service of these elites (Suárez-Collado, 2018). In parallel, associations provide diverse resources to the local population, such as funds or political support in favour of their demands, receiving promises of solidarity and loyalty in return (Suárez-Collado, 2018). In short, Riffian elites became brokers between the regional and national levels, while local associations acted as brokers between these elites and the Riffian population.

The transformation of Riffian activists into co-optable elites gave rise to the emergence of a new type of elite in the region (see Table 1). This process of inclusion was tied to a very specific context in which various transformation processes converged. First, as noted above, the new king's accession to the throne and his symbolic approach to the Rif inspired some local actors

Table 1. Types of Riffian elites in contemporary Morocco.

Type of elite	Means to access	Power resources	Sphere of influence	Brokerage capacity
Traditional	Loyalist parties	Participation in the 1958 revolt Traditional knowledge Tribal affiliation and networks	Tribal areas	Mediation based on tribal identity and/or solidarity
New tradesmen	Loyalist parties	Economic resources	Local people in need Local population benefiting from hashish and smuggling	Mediation based on networks of dependency
Former activists	Loyalist parties Parastate institutions Civil society	Networks in the activist field	Local activists National politics	Mediation based on a dual-patronage system

Source: Author.

to act as a bridge between the region and the central power (Suárez-Collado, 2015). The second was related to the dynamism of human rights associations at the national level after the creation of a Truth Commission to shed light on human rights violations during the so-called Years of Lead.⁷ This process prompted Riffian activists to become more deeply and actively involved in the cause, with the aim of proposing a specific path of reconciliation between the Rif and the central power (Suárez-Collado, 2013). Thirdly, the Moroccan left reunified under the umbrella of the Unified Socialist Left (Gauche Socialiste Unifiée – GSU) in the early 2000s. In this regard, the local Riffian political sphere and, in particular, some of the new elites played an active part in this experience, allowing them to gain a presence within the opposition and political processes at the centre (Suárez-Collado, 2013). Fourth, an earthquake in the Al Hoceima province on 24 February 2004 had an impact in the regional political and social spheres. The management of the humanitarian crisis and the subsequent reconstruction process gave rise to an upsurge in the number of associations and the consolidation of some local actors as interlocutors of the central power in the region (Suárez-Collado, 2008). The difficulties in distributing aid and the population's discontent helped some local elites modify the vision of what their role could be in future relations between the Rif and the central power (Suárez-Collado, 2013).

Of the actors involved in these processes, the most representative has been Ilyas El Omari, the leader of a new generation of local elites, who shared a militant past related to 1980s student activism and suffered under the regime's repression. Around El Omari other figures also emerged, including Hakim Benchamach, Abdessalam Bouteyeb, Aziz Benazzouz and Mohamed Boudra. All of these individuals had extensive experience in the associative field and had been part of organisations with links to the country's left, mainly the Unified Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste Unifié – PSU, at that time the GSU) and the Party of Progress and Socialism (Parti du Progrès et du Socialisme – PPS), before they joined the PAM upon its creation. The new party gave them access to the institutions in the centre, where they used their activist experience to develop a dual-patronage system in two different settings: the periphery and the centre. To do so, they created a

variety of associations and platforms of associations (see Table 2), in order to position themselves in the region's political and associative sphere in four fundamental areas (which they also tried to extend to Rabat). These areas encompassed some of the most delicate and pressure-filled issues in centre–periphery relations, where most associations were created between the early 2000s and 2011, and over which the Makhzen exerted the most control:⁸ memory and reconciliation; autonomy; Berber activism and regional development. To lead these different arenas, the Riffian elites created and/or inserted themselves into associations, platforms, committees, networks, political parties and advocacy centres. These represented sociologically different types of units in terms of how individuals bind together, align their interests and collaborate to achieve common goals or influence the channels they have at their disposal, reflecting the very nature of the dual-patronage system, of being present in the areas of greatest interest for centre–periphery relations in their very diverse forms.

The first area of activism was connected to memory and reconciliation in the Rif, which had been a priority target since the beginning of Mohammed VI's reign. This interest was perceived as providing an opportunity to act as a broker between the region and the central power. To this end, one of the platforms launched was the Association for the Defense of Victims of Toxic Gas in the Rif, created by El Omari in Al Hoceima in July 1999 to open an investigation into whether there was a correlation between the high number of cancer cases in the region and the use of toxic gases by Spain during the Rif war. The idea was to explore new domains of militancy, such as the common memory between Spain and Morocco, in which Riffian social and political actors could play a distinct and special role in comparison with other Moroccan actors. The creation of this association aroused interest in that debate and encouraged joint actions on the subject with militants from other fields, such as Berber activism, trade unions and development associations, as well as the creation of new platforms, such as the Research Group on Chemical Warfare in the Rif and the Mohamed Abdelkrim al-Khattabi Research Group.

The initial interest in the region's historical memory intensified after the state established an arbitration board (1999) and the Instance for Equity and Reconciliation (IER) (2004) to investigate the enforced disappearances and human rights violations during the Years of Lead. Both

Table 2. Brokerage strategy of the Riffian elites.

Brokerage field	Demands	Rif	Rabat
Memory and reconciliation	The Rif declaration (2005)	Association for the defence of victims of toxic gas in the Rif	The Moroccan centre for common memory and the future
Autonomy	Territorial delimitation	Rif declaration committee	Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM)
	Powers and autonomy	Pro-autonomy platforms	
Berber	Cultural and political identity	Local Berber associations	Tamaynut association
	Autonomy		Para-governmental institutions (Haca, Ircam)
Development	Total development plans	Bades and Al-Amal networks	Rif association for solidarity and development (arid)
	Illicit economic activities		

Source: Author.

initiatives encouraged Riffian civil society to coordinate and find a common position between local political forces and activists. One of the platforms that emerged within the frame of the national reconciliation process was the Rif Declaration Committee (2003), a multi-platform created to discuss how Riffians could address the region's economic and social problems and claim its historical rights against the state. Within the central core of the committee, which conducted the meetings and debates, were Abdesalam Bouteyeb, Hakim Benchamach and Mohamed Boudra, as well as Ilyas El Omari. El Omari focused on controlling the organisation and chaired the negotiations around the Declaration's text and the Committee's composition.⁹

The final version of the Declaration (2005) focused on demanding an apology from the state for its repressive practices against the Riffian population during 1958–59, the events of 1984 and the 1987 revolts in addition to economic reparation for the victims. It also insisted on the respect and recognition of the political, social and cultural rights of the region and an end to the deliberate marginalisation of the Rif with the implementation of a total development plan.¹⁰ These demands were not only circulated at the regional level; the new elites also tried to influence the position of other activists at the national level. In this regard, both El Omari and Benazzouz pushed the Unified Socialist Left to support the Rif's claims in order to reinforce them within the national opposition structure.¹¹

As Rif-state relations were, indeed, a sensitive point within the national reconciliation process, leading the regional reconciliation project became a promising way to control and achieve some status in the regional political realm and to play a mediating role in centre-periphery relations. To that end, these new elites not only became directly involved in the Rif Declaration Committee, but helped create the Instance for Equity and Reconciliation,¹² participating in public hearings.¹³ The national reconciliation process, then, allowed them to position themselves, especially El Omari, within the Makhzen's sphere of interest, as they could provide their social and knowledge resources for its new rapprochement strategy towards the Rif (Suárez-Collado, 2018).

The second area of brokerage for these new elites was autonomist and regionalist activism. The debate generated by the Rif Declaration Committee paved the way for the creation of new platforms, such as the Movement for the Autonomy of the Rif (Mouvement pour l'Autonomie du Rif – MAR), created in 2008, and the Northern Forum for Human Rights (FDHNM), set up in 2010. These new organisations focused on the construction and dissemination of Riffian regionalist and autonomist discourses, which particularly resonated among the younger sectors, mainly those who were already part of Berber activism (Suárez-Collado, 2010). Although there was no common articulated discourse or a common territorial demarcation proposal, these platforms and activists demanded, in a broad sense, the official recognition of Riffian cultural, linguistic, and economic particularities, the right to form a regional party to exert political pressure on the central power, respect for regional rights and interests and the constitution of an autonomous region.¹⁴ Although the new Riffian elites did not control these platforms, they did individually or collectively support their meetings and participated in them.¹⁵

The third area of associative brokering for the new Riffian elites was Berber activism, focused on the defence of the political, economic and cultural rights of the Berber population in Morocco. In the case of the Rif, this activism has been one of most powerful social forces in the region over the last 20 years, to the point of the Berber question emerging as a central element in Riffian politics, both from the top down and from the bottom up. From the top, authorities and institutions incorporated it into their political actions and local governance, sometimes out of conviction and other times as a means of obtaining political benefits and support from sympathisers. From the bottom, civil society in the region accepted it as part of the ideology, because it was at times seen as a representative element of regional action and at times as a means of legitimising mediation and negotiation with local authorities and peers. Thus, the Berber question has constituted an element used by socio-political actors in the Rif to implement their own strategies of

contestation, co-optation and accommodation in the regional political and social spheres (Suárez-Collado, 2013). The relationship between the new Riffian elites and Berber activism at the local level was linked to the strengthening of this activism in the region during the 1990s. Consequently, its demands were assumed and incorporated into the other fields of memory and reconciliation, as well as regionalist activism. Moreover, joint actions were regularly organised between the new elite's platforms and local Berber associations.

The final sphere of influence of the new Riffian elites was the field of local development, an area they pursued in the aftermath of the 2004 Al Hoceima earthquake, which left 628 people dead, 926 injured, and 15,000 homeless. The management of the humanitarian crisis was slow and extremely complicated, generating deep tensions among the local population. This situation led local associations and platforms to take control of the aid distribution and coordination, as well as the subsequent reconstruction process. The primary new Riffian elites were actively engaged in this process, from Mohamed Boudra, mayor of the city of Al Hoceima at the time, to Aziz Benazzouz, founding member of the BADES Association for the Social and Economic Animation of Al Hoceima and head of the association's management of the housing reconstruction plan. His work focused on assisting the *douar* (village) committee in organising the tasks, debates and reconstruction work among the affected people,¹⁶ which put him into close contact with the local population. Likewise, Hakim Benchammach, Abdessalam Bouteyeb and Ilyas El Omari, as part of the BADES association – later the Amal Network for Emergency and Sustainable Development, the umbrella organisation for all the associations after reconstruction began – played a central role during the humanitarian crisis.

Especially significant was the role of El Omari, who, while Mohammed VI and his senior advisor Fouad Ali El Himma settled in a tent in the devastated city, took charge of every aspect of the crisis, from rescue operations to re-housing families.¹⁷ This involvement put him at the forefront of crisis management, and his ability to act as a 'fireman' (as one witness described him) in such a tense situation¹⁸ gave him clout and power in the administration, to the point that the Palace realised how useful he could be as a strongman in the Rif.¹⁹ From that time forth, he established himself as the principal interlocutor with the central government and some in the press began to report that, thanks to the royal *carte blanche*, the power conferred on El Omari and his comrades had become immense, directly derived from El Omari's close relationship with El Himma.²⁰

4.1. The new elites at the centre

Parallel to this progressive empowerment, the Riffian elites deployed another strategy at the centre, which consisted of extending peripheral demands there, capitalising on the resources they had, and fostering their presence in central institutions and spheres of power. The activist careers of certain individuals show how the new peripheral elites were able to insert themselves into the centre's structures. One such case is Ilyas El Omari, who used a network he created during his years underground when he was part of the Marxist left. After he settled in Rabat in the late 1980s, he started to act as a bridge between activists from different social movements. He became involved in Berber activism in the country's capital through the Tamaynut association, based in Rabat, where he met Hassan Aourid, a former schoolmate of King Mohammed VI, who would become his advocate in the Makhzen's circles. In Rabat, he also joined the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH), where he tried, along with other members of Tamaynut, to introduce the demands of the Berber movement by winning the support of comrades who he had known during his clandestine period.²¹

This was one of his first experiences with mediation, for which he used both his knowledge of militancy and his network; later it would help him establish his role as a broker. His new connections in Rabat and his increasing presence in the social and political spheres helped him begin to insert himself into institutions at the centre after Mohammed VI came to the throne.

For instance, he was appointed member of the Royal Institute of Amazigh (Berber) Culture (IRCAM) in 2001 and the High Authority of Audiovisual Communication (HACA) in 2003.

The Riffian origin of these elites was also marked by the new platforms they launched in Rabat, such as the Rif Association for Solidarity and Development (ARID), created some months after the 2004 earthquake. This group was founded to raise awareness about the region's economic potential through sectoral studies, conferences, and participation in creating favourable conditions for the revitalisation of the region's economic, social and cultural infrastructure. At the same time, this kind of platform served the political objectives of the elites, primarily their consolidation as brokering elites from the Rif, as reflected in the following observation by an association activist:

Ilyas thought that the national context had changed and that other instruments could be used to make politics. His intention was to form an association that would bring together all the economic and intellectual elites outside the region. He wanted to form an association with which he could negotiate and have an influence on the development of the region, but also on its politics.²²

ARID, then, was the first attempt to constitute a Riffian lobby at the core of the state. Another platform was the Moroccan Centre for Common Memory and the Future (CMCA), created in 2008 and headed by Abdessalam Bouteyeb, to establish a dialogue between the Spanish and Moroccan civil society and to examine Spanish-Moroccan relations. Its foundation, which was promoted by the Al-Amal Network, was based on the belief that civil society has powerful capacities for awareness, negotiation, and lobbying that can serve as tools to allow stakeholders to position themselves within the spaces of influence supported by the Moroccan political system.²³ Furthermore, the group believed that the memory of Spanish-Moroccan relations could be used to take advantage of these capacities.²⁴

The consolidation of the new Riffian elites in the centre paralleled the strengthening of El Omari's relationship with Fouad Ali El Himma, which reached its peak with the creation of the Movement of All Democrats, the embryo of what would become the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM), founded in 2008. That party, promoted by El Himma, incorporated an important number of Riffian politicians and activists with militant careers similar to that of El Omari. These included some of the figures discussed above; Hakim Benchamach, Aziz Benazouz and Mohamed Boudra were all part of the first Political Bureau.²⁵

The aim of the new party, characterised by its liberal and anti-Islamist positions, was to gain power in the 2012 elections, and it obtained excellent results in the 2009 municipal elections. In Al Hoceima, for instance, the party won more than twice the number of votes as the second most voted party. The strong Riffian presence deep inside the organisation was viewed with suspicion by its other members and as a sign of domination by the Rif population, who did not hesitate to send requests or complaints to El Omari so that he could address them directly.²⁶

Thus, by the end of the 2000s, the new Riffian elites were present both at the centre and the periphery, at the institutional and non-institutional level, and they acted simultaneously as a transmission belt for the less challenging petitions of the periphery, and a containment barrier for the more challenging demands in the Rif. However, the beginning of the next decade called into question not only the centre-periphery relations, but also the role of Riffian elites as brokers.

5. THE PERIPHERY IN CONTENTION: THE DECLINE OF THE NEW RIFFIAN ELITES AFTER 2011

The so-called Arab Spring had a special impact in the Rif, as it was the territory where the most violent events occurred on the first day of the mobilisations and where the protests lasted the longest. The clashes of 20 February 2011 in Al Hoceima left several buildings burned down

(including institutional buildings, the headquarters of the PI and PAM parties, two bank offices, and one hotel), 38 people arrested and five people, whose scorched bodies were found in one of the burned banks, dead.²⁷ Different members of the population interpreted the riots in Al Hoceima in a variety of ways. On the one hand, some sectors viewed the events as a reaction to the control that the new Riffian elites had over the Rif. Even at the national level, in Rabat, the name and photo of Ilyas El Omari appeared on protest banners. He was seen as one of the de facto forces in the shadows who, because of his proximity to power, enjoyed an informal authority and was allowed to exert political pressure and influence in certain areas of the system. On the other hand, the intention of the local political enemies of the PAM government to destabilise it in the region was discerned in some of the actions, as noted by one Berber activist:

The king has always been here since 1999 and has had great success. Without the Riffian political lobby, the reconciliation with the Palace would not have taken place. There are people who are related to the incidents who want to put an end to the reconciliation between the Rif and the Royal Palace [...]. It was a really organised affair [...]. What is left (after 20 February) is the Justice and Development Party and Istiqlal, which are the lobby of Fes and Rabat. What is needed are parties representing the Berbers, and the regions, to be able to create a Riffian lobby.²⁸

The situation in the wake of the 2011–2012 protests in the Rif progressively polarised the population and called the brokering capacity of the new Riffian elites into question. Even so, and although the PAM was unable to defeat the moderate Islamist PJD party in the November 2011 general election, the new elites were still able to maintain spaces of influence, both at the periphery and the centre. The 2011 constitutional referendum was used to reinforce the image of the PAM as responsible for development in the Rif. With the slogan ‘Yes to the constitution of a new project, Yes to the continuation of the Rif development process’, the party sought to exalt its role as an intermediary between the central power and the region, attributing the development of the previous few years in the Rif to the closeness between the regional elites and the country’s decision-making circles and blaming the enemy forces in the region for the social tensions at that time.²⁹

Within this frame, the new Riffian elites still had a presence in certain activist spheres. For example, they were at the MAR meeting, organised after the 2011 protest. El Omari was also behind the organisation of the North African Peoples’ Union (UNAP), which united different autonomist Berber organisations in response to the heavy presence of Berber activists in the protests.³⁰ The 2011 uprisings had demonstrated the deep-rootedness of Berber activism in North Africa and its potential to impact the changes initiated in the Arab Spring countries, while the demand for autonomy became more powerful in the uncertain situation. Consequently, the creation and control of associations sympathetic to these causes interested the Moroccan state.

The new Riffian elites tried to counteract the criticism by trying to find new ways to continue to maintain influence in both the periphery and the political sphere of the centre. To do so, they used the CMCA and ARID platforms to organise both national and regional meetings and events concerning the most pressing activist trends in the Rif, such as the Rif history and past, transitional justice, Berber culture and identity and economic development in the region.³¹ Moreover, Riffian elites were able to approve some key dossiers for regional activism sectors in Parliament. One important action forced the government to reform the territorial demarcation of north Morocco to incorporate the Al Hoceima province into the Tangier-Tetouan region, instituting the ‘Greater Rif’ territory.³² In the centre, the new Riffian elites consolidated themselves in the PAM party, maintaining their position in the central institutions. El Omari was appointed secretary-general of the party in 2016 and president of the *Akber Sâa* media conglomerate, which included a daily newspaper, a weekly publication, three monthly journals and an electronic

website.³³ Benchamach has served as president of the National Council of the PAM since February 2012, and president of the Chamber of Councillors since 2015. Aziz Benazzouz was nominated to head the group in charge of the party's structure in 2014 and made chairman of the PAM parliamentary group in 2016. Finally, Mohammed Boudra became president of the World Association of Sub-Regional Governments of the UCLG and the Association of Local Authorities of Morocco in 2012. The elections held between 2011 and 2016 allowed the PAM to consolidate its influence in the Rif. In 2015, El Omari was elected president of the Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima region, and the party won more than half of all the votes cast in the Al Hoceima province in the parliamentary elections held in October 2016.

However, this victory did not allow the new elites to overcome the October 2016 crisis involving the gruesome death of a fishmonger after the police requisitioned his merchandise. His death resulted in a wave of unrest against arbitrary abuse by the authorities, inequality, corruption and the state's governability deficit in the province. The protest went on for eight months, and its evolution was greatly influenced by political blockage that delayed the constitution of the new government by six months. Moreover, the lack of a clear interlocutor among the central authorities and the Makhzen's passivity in deactivating the mobilisations strengthened the protest. In this context, the Riffian elites were not able to act as brokers in the conflict, and their incapacity marked the beginning of their decline. The reasons for this failure were related to the nature of the protest movement itself, which comprised and was led by young people with no significant previous experience with activism or connections with associations and civil society organisations. This lack of any real links between the protestors and the Riffian elites led to a contraction of the state's patronage system in the region and the elites progressively disappeared from the party and the political arena. El Omari resigned as secretary-general of the PAM in August 2017 and was replaced in May 2018 by Benchamach, who was in turn replaced by Abdelatif Ouahbi just one year later. At the regional level, this lack of power was also reflected in a loss of electoral support, to the point that the party received only 13.68% of the votes in the province of Al Hoceima in the last parliamentary elections in 2021. As a result, Benchamach also lost his position as president of the House of Councillors. Divided³⁴ and deprived of their previous political leverage in the party and the region, the other members of the erstwhile new elite gradually faded away from the political scene and moved on to other professions.³⁵

Today, the approach of the centre to the Rif has shifted from a strategy of co-opting activists to one of surveillance and the repression of activism. The *Hirak* movement was undermined by more than 400 arrests in 2017. However, although its leaders were sentenced to up to 20 years in prison, they continue to enjoy great popularity and influence in the region.³⁶

6. CONCLUSION

The emergence of the new Riffian elites after Mohammed VI came to the throne occasioned an important change among the peripheral elites in Morocco. The transformation entailed the introduction of a social pact that opened the political sphere up to new social actors, with hitherto untapped sources of power connected to their activist experience. Associative clientelism became a successful tool to position the peripheral elites at the centre by bringing their dense network of face-to-face relationships, local knowledge and resources for on-the-ground mobilisation in key areas of activism in the Rif to the service of reconfiguring centre-periphery relations. Consequently, the new Riffian elites were able to play a central role within state institutions and have some degree of policy influence in favour of peripheral demands. However, their forceful presence at the centre generated distrust on both sides. On the one hand, their consciousness of ethnic specificity was viewed with suspicion both within the national party and the population in the centre. On the other hand, their close ties with the centre of power were seen by part of the Rif population as instruments for their own benefit, rather than that of the region.

This case study of Riffian elites has shown the uneasy balance for peripheral elites who try to maintain a state-oriented and periphery-oriented profile that will allow them to act as brokers and central power figures at the same time. Furthermore, as their sphere of influence widened with the new social pact, the bonds and brokerage capacity of the new elites proved to be more volatile and less firm than those of the previous elites, which were based on tribal identity and solidarity or dependency networks (insofar as these elites were elected for longer periods of time). As centre–periphery relations are subject to periods of expansion and contraction, according to the Palace’s requirements, the peripheral elites in Morocco must constantly renegotiate the basis of their clientelistic relationships and the resources they can offer the regime. This does not necessarily mean the disappearance of the phenomenon of associative clientelism, insofar as activists and members of civil society continue to participate in local politics and electoral processes, but rather the evidence that the use of this patronage system needs to be readjusted in order to be effective, following not only the needs of the pacts and dynamics of inclusion defined by the centre, but also the elements that allow the strengthening of the bonds between local elites and populations. Moreover, co-optation strategies among civil society continue to be common practice in Morocco and other authoritarian contexts where the inclusion of civil society members in institutions serves as both internal and external legitimisation mechanisms. Therefore, keeping an eye on the changing dynamics of associative clientelism in centre–periphery contexts can help to understand how peripheries are embedded in a dynamic structure in which power struggles are shaped by specific historical, symbolic-discursive, institutional and socioeconomic contexts, which modify the periphery’s opportunity structure and consequently its patterns of interaction and resilience against the centre.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the memory of my beloved father, who knew my research in-depth and closely, supporting me and giving me strength all along the journey. You will always be my guardian.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ETHICS STATEMENT

The interviews contained in this article have the consent of the participants for publication. This consent was expressed orally by the interviewees and recorded on the interview recording. The excerpts contained in this article do not permit identification of the interviewees. However, the published version of the article will be provided to the interviewees for their reading.

NOTES

1. The Arabic term Rif, which has two different meanings in Arabic – ‘cultivable land’ and ‘seacoast’ – refers to a territory located in north Morocco that has always been difficult to delimit. The problems with defining the Rif and the Riffians have always been a result of the criteria employed (Hart, 2000), so that while in physical geographic terms the Rif is identified with the entire mountain chain that extends from Tangier to Ceuta in the west and to Melilla in the east, linguistic and cultural criteria place it between the town of Targuist and the Moulouya River (Hart, 2000). This territorial space corresponds to the current provinces of Nador, Driouch and Al Hoceima, which also incorporates the confederation of the Sanhaja as-Srair tribes, also Berber speakers, located between Targuist and Ketama. This article uses the linguistic and cultural criteria when referring to the Rif.

2. The Spanish protectorate in Morocco began in 1912 with the Treaty of Fes, which granted Spain control over specific territories: the Rif in the north and Tarfaya and Saguia el-Hamra in the south.
3. The Makhzen has been described by Cavatorta and Durac (2010, p. 57) as an 'informal governing alliance between the monarch, his advisers, selected businessmen, high-ranking bureaucrats and tribal chiefs operating as the unelected and unaccountable decision-makers in the country beyond the control of the elected government.'
4. Werenfels (2007) defines the 'politically relevant elite' as all those individual and collective actors with direct or indirect influence on strategic decisions of national significance. Werenfels focuses on influence rather than on formal position and/or function to present a dynamic picture of the elites, and highlights the inclusion of structural constraints on elites, considering that the level of influence of politically relevant individuals and collectives is subject to changing domestic and international political, social and economic conditions.
5. Zaouia is a term used in Islamic culture to refer to a religious or spiritual gathering place for Sufi Muslims. Often, a Zaouia is headed by a revered Sufi master or spiritual leader, known as a Sheikh or Murshid, who guides and mentors the disciples on their spiritual journey.
6. Author's translation from the French.
7. The term 'Years of Lead' (in Arabic *zaman al-rasas* or *al-sanawat al-sawda*) refers to the state repression of all types of opposition to the political regime, from Moroccan independence to the end of Hassan II's reign (1956–99).
8. Fieldwork observation in the provinces of Nador and Al Hoceima between 2007 and 2011.
9. Interview with a member of the leftist party, Annahj Addimocrati, Al Hoceima, April 2011.
10. See 'Rif Declaration', Al Hoceima, 30 January 2005, and 'Quand le Rif veut panser ses plaies', *Libération*, 29 January 2006.
11. Interview with a member of the leftist party, Annahj Addimocrati, Al Hoceima, April 2011.
12. The media reported on El Omari's presence at a home meeting hosted by Driss Benzekri (a former political prisoner), held a few months after the enthronement of Mohammed VI. These two were joined by a small group of people including members of the leading party in the governing coalition, the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), and Fouad Ali El Himma, a friend and advisor to Mohammed VI, at the time Secretary of State for the Interior. At the meeting, discussions were held about the creation of the Instance for Equity and Reconciliation (IER), of which Benzekri would later become president. See 'Ilyas El Omari: grandeur et décadence dans l'ombre de Mohammed VI', *Middle East Eye*, 17 January 2020. Access: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/actualites/ilyas-el-omari-grandeur-et-decadence-dans-lombre-de-mohammed-vi>
13. Both Hakim Benchamach and Abdesalam Bouteyeb testified about the repression suffered at the hands of the regime during the public hearings organised by the IER in Al Hoceima. Both were arrested for their participation in the 1984 revolts while they were students at the University of Oujda and remained jailed in the Oujda civil prison for two and three years, respectively.
14. See 'Communiqué pour une large autonomie dans le Rif', *Mouvement for the Autonomy of the Rif*, February 2008; مشروع أطروحة فكرية لـ "حركة سياسية ريفية", *Committee for the Movement for the Autonomy of the Rif*, 10 May 2009; Amsterdam Declaration, *Declaración de Amsterdam*, the Northern Forum for Human Rights, 12 February 2011.
15. Information about these meetings can be found at *اللياس العماري يهدد بالحكم الذاتي للريف للعودة إلى دائرة القرار بالبلاد Arrifinu*, 24 May 2011: <http://www.arrifinu.net/?p=46008> [Accessed: 26 May 2011]. فاعلون سياسيون وجمعويون يناقشون بالناظور التغيير الدستوري والسياسي ومستقبل الريف والريف *Nadorcity*, 11 June 2011: <http://www.nadorcity.com/8801.html> [Accessed: 11 June 2011]
16. Interview with BADES association member, April 2007.
17. See 'Ilyas El Omari: grandeur et décadence dans l'ombre de Mohammed VI', *Middle East Eye*, 17 January 2020. Access: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/actualites/ilyas-el-omari-grandeur-et-decadence-dans-lombre-de-mohammed-vi>
18. Interview with human rights activist, Al Hoceima, April 2011.
19. See 'Portrait-Enquête: Le mystérieux Ilyas El Omari', 25 January 2016. Access: https://telquel.ma/2016/01/25/portrait-enquete-mysterieux-iliass-el-omari_1479378

20. See 'Maroc : Ilyas El Omari, fait au Rif, défait par le Rif', Middle East Eye, 9 August 2017. Access: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/reportages/maroc-ilyas-el-omari-fait-au-rif-defait-par-le-rif>
21. Interview with a Rifian political elite, Rabat, December 2009.
22. Interview with a local development association activist, Al Hoceima, April 2011. Author's translation from the French.
23. See 'Rapport de synthèse des journées d'étude "La mémoire commune: démocratie, Droites de l'Homme et perspectives"', Amal Network for Emergency and Sustainable Development, Al Hoceima, 2007.
24. Ibid.
25. See <https://pam.ma/fr/>
26. See 'Portrait-Enquête: Le mystérieux Ilyas El Omari', 25 January 2016. Access: https://telquel.ma/2016/01/25/portrait-enquete-mysterieux-iliass-el-omari_1479378
27. See 'Se abre una investigación sobre las muertes de Alhucemas', AlhucemasPress, 23 February 2011. Access: http://www.alhucemaspress.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1819:se-abre-una-investigacion-sobre-las-muertes-de-alhucemas&catid=36:noticias-del-rif&Itemid=126
28. Interview with a Berber activist, Al Hoceima, April 2011. Author's translation from the French.
29. See 'الأصالة و المعاصرة في ندوة بالحسيمة حول الدستور : لنقف جميعا ضد من يريد تمير الريف و نخرط في تنمية المنطقة' Rifnow, 28 September 2011. Access: http://www.rifnow.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3275%3A2011-06-24-18-45-15&catid=39%3A2009-04-12-16-06-34&Itemid=87
30. See 'أمازيغية : بلاغ اتحاد شعوب شمال إفريقيا' communiqué UNAP Tange', Riftoday, 28 July 2011. Access: <http://www.riftoday.com/modules/news/article.php?storyid=1389>
31. See 'Al-Hoceima fait le plein. Méga-rush pour voir Khaled, guest star du festival méditerranéen. Plus de 150.000 spectateurs pour la soirée d'ouverture,' *L'Economiste*, 22 August 2013; 'Célébration de l'année amazighe 2964: Une expression forte de la diversité marocaine,' *Devanture*, 30 December 2013; 'Journée d'études sur le développement au Rif le 26 mai à Nador,' *MAP*, 9 May 2012.
32. The idea of a 'Greater Rif' included all Northern Morocco, from Tangier to Nador. However, the demarcation was recently redrawn to incorporate Al Hoceima into the Tangier-Tetouan region.
See 'Maroc : Le PAM obtient gain de cause, Al Hoceima fait partie de la région Tanger-Tétouan', Yabiladi, 6 February 2015. Access: <https://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/33224/maroc-obtient-gain-cause-hoceima.html>
33. See 'Ilyas El Omari: grandeur et décadence dans l'ombre de Mohammed VI', Middle East Eye, 17 January 2020. Access: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/actualites/ilyas-el-omari-grandeur-et-decadence-dans-lombre-de-mohammed-vi>
34. See 'PAM: Le tracteur paralysé par la guerre des chefs', Labass, 30 June 2019. Access: <https://labass.net/30429-pam-le-tracteur-paralyse-par-la-guerre-des-chefs.html>
35. For example, El Omari currently manages the companies, businesses and wealth that he accumulated through the relationships forged during his years of political leadership. See 'Maroc : le retour « surprise » d'Ilyas El Omari', Jeune Afrique, 4 May 2021. Access: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1162110/politique/maroc-le-retour-surprise-dilyas-el-omari/>
36. Fieldwork observation in Al Hoceima province in 2019 and online communication with local activist between 2019 and 2023.

ORCID

Ángela Suárez-Collado  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2288-8867>

REFERENCES

Ashford, D. E. (1961). *Political change in Morocco*. Princeton University Press.

- Bennani-Chraïbi, M. (2004). Représenter et Mobiliser dans l'Élection Législative au Maroc. In M. Bennani-Chraïbi, M. Catusse, & J. C. Santucci (Eds.), *Scènes et Coulisses de l'Élection au Maroc: Les législatives 2002* (pp. 15–53). Karthala-IREMAM.
- Berriane, Y. (2009). Intermédiations Stratégiques: L'Engagement de Militantes Associatives Locales dans la Champagne pour les Législatives Marocaines de 2007. In L. Zaki (Ed.), *Terrains de Campagne au Maroc: Les Élections Législatives de 2007* (pp. 161–191). IRMC-Kathala.
- Cavortorta, F., & Durac, V. (2010). *Civil society and democratization in the Arab world: The dynamics of activism*. Routledge.
- Clément, J. F. (1987). Stratégies répressives et techniques du maintien de l'ordre: les révoltes urbaines de janvier 1984 au Maroc. *Mouvements sociaux*, 5, 3–46.
- Emperador, M. (2011). Unemployed Moroccan university graduates and strategies for “apolitical” mobilization. In J. B. y. F. Vairel (Ed.), *Social movements, mobilization and contestation in the Middle East and North Africa* (pp. 217–235). Stanford University Press.
- Hammoudi, A. (1997). *Master and disciple, the cultural foundations of Moroccan authoritarianism in comparative perspectives*. University of Chicago Press.
- Hart, D. M. (1976). *The Aith Waryaghar of the Moroccan Rif: An Ethnography and History*. University of Arizona Press.
- Hart, D. M. (1999). Rural and tribal uprisings in post-colonial Morocco 1957–60: An overview and a reappraisal. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 4(2), 84–102. doi:10.1080/13629389908718363
- Hart, D. M. (2000). *Tribe and society in rural Morocco*. Frank Cass.
- Hibou, B. (2011). Le Mouvement du 20 Février: Le Makhzen et l'Antipolitique. L'Impense des Reformes au Maroc, CERI, Available at: http://www.ceri-sciencespo.com/archive/2011/mai/dossier/art_bh2.pdf, accessed July 18, 2012.
- Leveau, R. (1976). *Le Fellah Marocain Défenseur du Trone*. Presses de la Fondation Nationales des Sciences Politiques.
- Lipset, S., & Rokkan, S. (1967). *Party systems and voter alignments: Cross-national perspectives*. The Free Press.
- Madariaga, R. (2010). El Rif y el poder central: Una perspectiva histórica. *Revista De Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos*. (9). doi:10.15366/reim2010.9.002
- Moreno, P. (1998). *Consecuencias socioeconómicas del cultivo del cannabis sativa para el Rif* [Doctoral dissertation]. Universidad de Valencia. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/tesis?codigo=163661>
- Nahhass, B., & Bendella, A. (2021). Le Rif: les méandres d'une réconciliation. The community reparation programs and the reconciliation process in the Rif. *L'Année du Maghreb*, 26, 141–156. <https://journals.openedition.org/anneemaghreb/10170#quotation>.
- Ottaway, M., & Hamzawy, A. (2009). *Getting to pluralism. Political actors in the Arab world*. Carnegie Endowment.
- Parejo, M. A. (2004). Principio y fin de siglo en clave política: alternancia, sucesión e islamismo político en marrocos. In C. P. Beltrán (Ed.), *El mundo árabe e islámico ante los retos del futuro* (pp. 99–122). Universidad de Granada.
- Parejo, M. A., & Feliu, L. (2009). Marruecos: la Reinención de un Sistema Autoritario. In F. Izquierdo (Ed.), *Poder y Regímenes en el Mundo Árabe Contemporáneo* (pp. 105–143). Fundación CIDOB. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/ejemplar/211895>
- Parejo, M. A., & Veguilla, V. (2008). Elecciones y cambio político. Análisis diacrónico de los procesos electorales en Marruecos. *Awraq*, 25, 11–40. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/ejemplar/211895>.
- Planet, A. (1998). *Melilla y Ceuta: Espacios-Frontera Hispano-Marroquíes*. Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia.
- Rokkan, S., & Urwin, D. W. (1983). *Economy. Territory. Identity: Politics of West European peripheries*. Sage.
- Seedon, D. (1981). *Moroccan peasants: A century of change in the eastern Rif 1870–1970*. Dowson.
- Stepputat, F. (2013). Contemporary governscapes: Sovereign practice and hybrid orders beyond the center. In M. Bouziane, C. Harders, & A. Hoffmann (Eds.), *Local politics and contemporary transformations in the Arab world: Governance beyond the center* (pp. 25–42). Palgrave.

- Suárez-Collado, A. (2008). *El Terremoto que cambió en destino de Albuemas: de la crisis humanitaria al desenclave y el desarrollo del Rif* [Diploma de Estudios Avanzados]. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. <http://sites.google.com/sites/teimproject/tesinas-dea>.
- Suárez-Collado, A. (2010). La sociedad Civil Frente al Proceso de Regionalización: El Caso del Rif. *Revista de Estudios de Internacionales Mediterráneos*, 9, 142–151. <https://repositorio.uam.es/handle/10486/670256>.
- Suárez-Collado, A. (2013). *El Movimiento Amazigh en el Rif: Identidad, Cultura y Política en las Provincias de Nador y Albuemas* [Doctoral dissertation]. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/autor?codigo=2611243#Tesis>.
- Suárez-Collado, A. (2015). Territorial stress in Morocco: From democratic to autonomist demands in popular protests in the Rif. *Mediterranean Politics*, 20(2), 217–234. doi:10.1080/13629395.2015.1033908
- Suárez-Collado, A. (2018). Center-Periphery relations and the Re-configuration of state's patronage networks in the Rif. In L. R. de Elvira, C. Schwarz, & I. Weipert-Fenner (Eds.), *Clientelism and patronage in the Middle East and North Africa networks of dependency* (pp. 193–217). Routledge.
- Suárez-Collado, A. (2023). The 1984 uprising in Nador: More than just a bread revolt. *Revista de Estudios de Internacionales Mediterráneos*, 34(34), 78–95. doi:10.15366/reim2023.34.003
- Szmolka, I. (2010). Party system fragmentation in Morocco. *Journal of North African Studies*, 15(1), 13–37. doi:10.1080/13629380902727569
- Tozy, M. (2010). Les élections législatives au Maroc: processus de libéralisation et/ou dynamique de redéploiement autoritaire? In M. Tozy (dir.), *Election au Maroc entre partis et notables (2007–2009)* (pp. 47–67). Najah Al Jadida.
- Troin, J.-F. (2002). *Maroc: régions, pays, territoires*. Maisonneuve et Larose.
- Waterbury, J. (1976). *Le Commandeur des Croyants. La monarchie marocaine et son élite*. PUF.
- Werenfels, I. (2007). *Managing instability in Algeria: Elites and political change since 1995*. Routledge.
- Ybarra, C. (1997). La Rebelión del Rif (1958–1959). *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, 1(10), 333–347.
- Zaki, L. (2009). Un Notable en Campagne: Les Ressorts Locaux de la Réélection d'un Parlementaire Sortant'. In L. Zaki (Ed.), *Terrains de Campagne au Maroc: Les Élections Législatives de 2007* (pp. 45–73). IRMC-Kathala.