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Morocco

Marrakesh: contributing to a political dynamic against imperialist institutions

- IV Online magazine - 2023 - IV586 - November 2023 -

Publication date: Tuesday 7 November 2023

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On 8 September 2023, a magnitude 7 earthquake struck the areas around Marrakech and neighbouring towns, the most violent in Morocco for over a century. A mobilization against the World Bank/IMF summit in Marrakesh a month later was planned. This was an opportunity to meet our comrades from Al Mounadil-a and discuss the situation in the country in this context.

Can you describe the situation in Morocco after the earthquake, what were its effects, how the authorities reacted?

The violence of the natural disaster had both class and spatial dimensions, exacerbated by decades of neoliberal policies in Morocco. The violence of the earthquake affected the poor populations of the villages, who saw their homes completely destroyed. Already fragile communications were cut. The Marrakech-Safi region, hit by the earthquake, is one of the poorest regions in the country, according to official data.

The earthquake evoked other natural disasters, such as the 2014 floods in southern Morocco (Guelmim) and the Lâarach fires in the north in 2022. Populations remained isolated in the face of the horror of these natural disasters.

In all cases, the state only intervenes when it is too late. For the Moroccan state, it is above all a question of minimizing the scale of the disaster in order to reduce its impact. Which helps maintain its image while preparing to repress any social anger and any fight against the results of its policies which aggravate natural disasters. Its reaction to the earthquake in the Haouz region was also marked by the context of preparation for the annual meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which took place in Marrakech from October 9 to 15, 2023.

The state mobilized its repressive apparatus (army, police and gendarmerie) to support the popular solidarity caravans launched spontaneously to help the victims of the earthquake. As for social services (medical staff, ambulances, etc.), they were very timid and reflected the extent of the deterioration of the public health sector since its opening to the private sector, reminiscent of what happened during the pandemic of Covid-19 in 2020.

Concerning foreign aid, the state treated it in a logic of political calculation, refusing to receive aid coming from France and Algeria, due to political differences between the regimes of the two countries and Morocco.

Similar to its response to the effects of the Covid pandemic, the state created the Special Earthquake Impact Management Fund, with the aim of concentrating fundraising. It has already implemented the recommendations of the World Bank in the field of combating natural disasters, by creating in 2018 the Fund to Combat the Effects of Natural Disasters, the management of which was delegated to insurance companies, while the Solidarity Fund against Catastrophic Events was allocated to the poorest.

The earthquake of September 8, 2023 once again revealed the great fragility of effective means of intervention against natural disasters as well as prevention infrastructures. In the logic of liberal policies, priority is given to road infrastructure in regions where national and foreign private capital is invested, particularly in coastal cities like Tangier, Casablanca and Agadir. The rural world remains marginalized.

How is the social movement trying to intervene in this situation?

It is very difficult to talk about a real social movement in our country. The ecological crisis and the resulting natural disasters are absent from the agendas of the movements of struggle in Morocco, in particular their organized sector, the trade unions.

As during the Covid-19 pandemic, the trade-union movement mobilized behind the state under the slogan of national consensus, by refraining from criticizing state policies which exacerbate the effects of natural disasters. The major trade-union centres mobilized to participate in solidarity convoys – on the sidelines of popular solidarity convoys – and to help collect in-kind contributions (food, tents, blankets, etc.). But without any political intervention that would call into question the liberal development model which makes poor populations the main victims of the violence of natural disasters.

Furthermore, popular solidarity convoys began spontaneously, notably in the Rif region (northern Morocco), which itself experienced a violent earthquake in 2004, treated by the state with criminal negligence, which triggered a wave of anger and large demonstrations. Convoys then began to arrive from all regions of the country, demonstrating a lack of confidence in the effective intervention of the state to help victims of the earthquake.

This wave of popular solidarity quickly weakened, due to the lack of an organizational structure which could centralize it and give it a broader horizon than that of simple solidarity. The state has been able to contain it within its official channel through the Earthquake Impact Management Fund. Despotism is always afraid of any popular gesture coming from below, initially tolerated as long as the state can replace it and justify its neoliberal agenda (article 40 of the Constitution of the Kingdom), but it must not exceed its limits to become a space for political debate, asking questions and proposing alternatives.

What is the overall situation of the regime, what analysis do you make of its course and its relations with imperialism?

The Moroccan regime is a disguised dictatorship, dependent and anchored on a social volcano whose pressure is increasing due to the pursuit of neoliberal policies and repression. It benefits from the unwavering support of its imperialist allies: the European Union, the USA and the reactionary Gulf regimes. It serves the interests of imperialism by incurring debts and so-called free trade agreements and opening the country to multinationals to plunder and exploit cheaper labour.

The Moroccan regime also plays a role in the sub-management of migratory flows from Africa to Europe, as well as in the so-called “fight against terrorism” policy. It is linked to the USA by a strategic military partnership embodied in the defence cooperation roadmap 2020-2030, signed in October 2020, during the visit of the American Secretary of Defence to Morocco, as well as by hosting the “African Lion” exercises, the largest joint military training of AFRICOM forces.

The integration of the regime into the imperialist policy of the region has taken on an additional dimension with the accelerated development of economic, security and military relations with the Zionist state since the latter's recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara.

The monarchy manages and controls the political situation despite the explosive social crisis resulting from the consequences of the free rein given to Capital to over-exploit the working class, impose a very high level of unemployment and precariousness, destroy the modest public services and take advantage of a wave of unprecedentedly high prices. This control results from the weakening of its political opponents, whether it is the historical bourgeois opposition or part of the Islamist movement (these opponents who always intervene to help it overcome moments of social upheaval and political) and its success in defeating popular *hiraks* (protest movements).

The *hiraks* counterbalanced the negative aspects on the labour scene, where bureaucracy played a destructive role, undermining the potential of the workers' struggle and preventing it from uniting with that of its popular counterpart. Now that the *hiraks* have faded, the state of inactivity has become evident and is strongly reflected in the morale of the vanguard of the struggle.

The regime has stepped up repression against freedom of expression by repressing critical journalists and orchestrating massive dissuasion of oppositional voices on social networks, considered the main source of danger after taking control of the political arena, particularly after the impact of the consumer goods boycott campaign in 2018, while continuing harassment against the embryos of workers' organization in the private sector.

The regime benefits from its success in defeating the struggles of youth. The so-called reform of university education and the control of the Ministry of the Interior (undermining the student struggle by stirring up "factional violence") completely destroyed the student organization in its historical form. State management of graduate unemployment and the subjective flaws of the unemployed movement, linked to the overall situation of the radical left, caused this movement and all its components to disappear. Its militant impulse is limited to an occasional awakening which quickly fades.

The state also benefits from the deep integration of trade-union bureaucracies, which was very clearly manifested in the social agreement of April 2022, by which the union leaderships accepted a law de facto prohibiting strikes, a new offensive on pension systems and a revision of the Labour Code, responding to employers' demands for more flexibility.

How does the IMF and World Bank summit fit into this analysis? What were its objectives?

The choice of Morocco to host the annual assemblies of these two institutions, which since their creation in 1944, have only been held once in Africa, in Nairobi in 1973, is a political decision to support the regime and promote its neoliberal "development model".

The World Bank has intervened, since the beginning of the sixties, to support a dependent capitalism established since the colonial era, and to put in place the mechanisms of neo-colonialism through massive debt while strengthening the despotic regime.

For its part, the International Monetary Fund intervened in the early 1980s after the worsening of Morocco's debt crisis and its inability to repay it, and dictated a structural adjustment programme. This liberal programme further increased the debt, opened up the country to capital and goods and permitted the repatriation of profits, particularly with Morocco's accession to the World Trade Organization in the mid-1990s, and the generalization of "free trade".

So, this trio cooperates with the ruling classes to give more opportunities to big foreign and local capital to monopolize the country's wealth and consolidate political despotism. Normalization with Zionism is part of the strategy of imperialism and the regime to accelerate predatory capitalist penetration into the African continent and strengthen the role of Morocco as a gateway to Africa.

The Moroccan regime therefore considers that the success of the annual meetings of international financial institutions will bring it political (being a reliable and stable ally) and economic (being an economic gateway to Africa) advantages.

Through the counter-summit we want to show the other side of this neoliberal model: mass unemployment, endemic poverty, marginalization and the poverty in which the majority lives while a minority becomes scandalously rich.

Marrakesh: contributing to a political dynamic against imperialist institutions

More generally, these two institutions participate in the neocolonialism of the richest countries and exacerbate climate change, to the detriment of the people of the South and the periphery of the North.

The counter-summit aimed to bring together all the components of social movements on a global scale against the financial dictatorship of the IMF-WB, to discuss, from the point of view of the people, the crises of capitalism and the alternatives.

Can you tell us how the counter-summit was organized, what it was used for, its concrete results?

The international counter-summit to the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank held in Marrakech from October 12 to 15, 2023 was a success. It brought together more than 300 representatives of social movements from four continents: Europe, Africa, Asia, and America. Its preparation, which lasted more than eight months, was a collective and democratic process, with monthly expanded meeting at all levels – global, Africa, North Africa and the Middle East/Arab region and Morocco. In the latter, a national coordination of around twenty organizations served as a reception structure and monitored organizational issues on the ground. It was able to overcome the challenges which were aggravated by the terrible earthquake which struck the Marrakech region on September 8 and claimed nearly 3,000 lives. Working groups on the programme, communication and information, and logistics as well as a [site](#) in four languages (Arabic, English, French and Spanish) were set up. An appeal [“Let us raise the voice of social movements”, June 27, 2023](#) and an activity programme were developed jointly.

The counter-summit began on the morning of Thursday, 12 October with a protest march with more than 500 participants. In addition to slogans against the IMF and the World Bank, the denunciation of Israeli bombings on Gaza and solidarity with the Palestinian people were strongly chanted by the demonstrators. An opening conference was organized in the afternoon on the responsibility of the two institutions in the exacerbation of phenomena of social injustice, inequalities linked to neocolonial power, and the exploitation of the working class, with the speakers Aminata Dramane Traoré (Malian author and activist), Fernanda Melchionna (Brazilian MP, PSOL), Éric Toussaint (spokesperson for CADTM International), and Gilbert Achcar (professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London).

The mornings of Friday 13 October and Saturday 14 October were reserved for workshops: fifty-six workshops in total focusing on analyses to understand the multidimensional and interconnected crises of capitalism (social, food, economic, health, ecological, migratory, warmongering, democratic), on possible alternatives and prospects for mobilization. Plenary conferences in the afternoons contributed to reflection on its crises, financial colonialism, environmental injustice and debt.

The main conclusions of the workshops were presented in the plenary session on the morning of October 15 in the form of recommendations followed by a final declaration [“Marrakech Declaration: 79 years of exploitation and neocolonial destruction of the WB and the IMF, enough is enough!”, 17 October 2023](#). The work of the counter-summit was closed in the afternoon with a plenary conference in memory of Thomas Sankara, for the cancellation of the debt and on what synergies to build between social movements in the South and the North in the context of the new geopolitical situation.

The counter-summit was an opportunity to exchange experiences of struggle and to help the convergence of militant actions against the dictates of multinationals, imperialist powers and international financial institutions, including the WB and the IMF. Indeed, the interventions of the IMF and the WB are increasingly violent following the worsening of the multidimensional crisis which has affected the world, in particular since 2020. The populations of the South and the North bear the burden of the neoliberal policies and indebtedness imposed by these two institutions through the generalization of austerity, the privatization of public services, the reduction in income, the increase in unemployment, etc. Popular protests are increasingly repressed and democratic freedoms flouted. In this context, the

counter-summit relatively revived the hopes of anti-globalization mobilizations against these international financial institutions, hopes that were initiated by the mobilization of September 26, 2000 in Prague, where 5,000 demonstrators marched against the annual meetings of the IMF and the WB.

A part of civil society, marked by its alliance with the regime, adhered to the official propaganda, organized parallel initiatives at the IMF-WB assemblies in Marrakech and tried to sow confusion at the counter-summit. Another initiative, from the Moroccan Social Front, failed to be visible.

The counter-summit directly targeted the IMF and the WB, but also despotism and its alliance with Zionism and imperialism. This is a first initiative of this kind in Morocco since the first intervention of the World Bank in 1962 and that of the IMF in early 1980 which generated three major popular uprisings in 1981, 1984 and 1990. It is a small step in the perspective of anti-imperialism in our country, in the context of the major demonstrations of solidarity with Palestine and against normalization with the Israeli entity, and more broadly across our region (North Africa and the Middle East /Arab region) in the current context marked by the counter-revolution, whose main actors are despotic regimes, imperialist powers, Zionism and fundamentalist reactionary movements. The counter-summit created an anti-IMF-WB social dynamic, particularly in Iraq and Tunisia, and also in Egypt, limited by strong repression. This can help draw lessons from popular uprisings in the region which were limited to social and political demands that did not directly clash with imperialism, which is the key political element.

It is in this spirit that the Al Mounadil-aa current issued the call [“Against international financial institutions, instruments of imperialist domination, Against dependence on neo-colonialism, For the right of peoples to their sovereignty”](#) for a political dynamic against imperialist institutions in parallel and in support of the summit of social movements against the IMF-WB assemblies. Meetings were held with some left-wing organizations in Tunisia and Iraq. We organized an international conference on the crises of capitalism and ecosocialist alternatives on 11 October, with the participation of around a hundred people.

Much work still remains to be done to build a working-class and popular centre of struggle against despotism and imperialism and to overcome the dominant sectarianism in radical left organizations in Morocco and the region.

Popular demonstrations in Morocco against Israeli aggression on Gaza

Since the start of the Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip on October 7, 2023, demonstrations have continued in several towns and villages in Morocco. The slogans focus on the need for emergency aid to the victims, an end to the bombings and to normalization with the Zionist entity.

On October 20, 2023, more than 114 towns and villages saw marches in response to the call of the Moroccan Front for Support of Palestine and Against Normalization (which includes left-wing political parties, political Islam associations and also liberals). The Front has already called a national popular march in the capital, Rabat, on October 15 in which tens of thousands of people participated.

The Democratic Confederation of Labour also called for a one-hour work stoppage. Students from several universities also demonstrated for Gaza.

Normalization of the Moroccan regime with

the Zionist entity

The Moroccan regime has historically maintained benevolent relations with the Zionist entity, with secret security, economic and political cooperation agreements. The latter are maintained by a strong presence of Jews of Moroccan origin who emigrated to Israel (around 600,000 people) and by the role of the regime in the imperialist strategy in the region.

King Hassan II officially received Shimon Peres on July 21, 1986. A liaison office was opened in Rabat in 1994. It was closed on October 23, 2000 following a statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation announcing that Morocco took this decision due to "the failure of the peace process following the inhumane acts committed in recent weeks by Israeli forces against the unarmed Palestinian people and their use of a military machine to kill innocent civilians ." In 2003, Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom met with Mohammed VI in Morocco. On December 10, 2020, Israel and Morocco agreed to establish full diplomatic relations, under the auspices of the USA, which will in return recognize Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara. It is true that this latest normalization aroused less popular anger because of its link with the Sahara issue, generally used by the regime as a blackmail card. The continuation of Israeli aggression and the intensification of its violence fuel popular anger, which in the long run will exert more pressure on the regime to review its normalization with the Zionist entity to avoid the expansion and radicalization of the popular movement in an anti-imperialist perspective.

The mobilizing role of the Palestinian question in local struggles

The Palestinian cause has played an important role in rallying many generations to social struggles. The wave of radicalization of youth that the world experienced in the 1960s coincided in our region with the shock of the defeat in 1967 of the armies of the Arab regimes against the Israeli army. A new left emerged outside of the nationalist and Stalinist communist parties. On the other hand, the influence of fundamentalist reactionary movements has continued to increase since the 1980s. However, this does not deny the fact that the Palestinian question remains a factor which fuels the struggles in our countries, pushing the people, and on the front line youth, to join the movement of struggle for the liberation of Palestine and against the regimes which participate in the strategies of imperialism.

The calls by regimes in the region to stop the war against Gaza come rather from their fear of this wave of popular solidarity with Palestine, which could encourage a questioning of their complicity with the Zionist enemy.

Reactionary fundamentalist movements in our region benefit politically from widespread popular anger in support of the Palestinian struggle because of their organizational strength and because the largest factions leading the Palestinian struggle belong to the same ideological and political school. This allowed them to come back in force after major setbacks since 2013, with the defeat of their largest organization, represented by the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt, the collapse of the regime of Omar Al-Bashir in Sudan, the involvement of religious militias in crimes against the Syrian people, Hezbollah's opposition to the Lebanese people after the Tishreen uprising and the role of sectarian militias against the Iraqi Intifada. The radical left must join popular solidarity movements, present internationalist perspectives to the Palestinian question, and mobilize in global campaigns to break down reactionary alternatives to the Palestinian question that only worsen human tragedy.

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Marrakesh: contributing to a political dynamic against imperialist institutions

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