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**Title page: Politicizing African Urban Food Systems: The Contradiction of Food
Governance in Rabat and Casablanca, Morocco**

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Politicizing African Urban Food Systems:

The Contradiction of Food Governance in Rabat and Casablanca, Morocco

Abstract

The governance of urban food supply in Morocco is subject to deep contradictions. It involves actors with diversified interests that are guided by sometimes divergent rationale. One of the main contradictions sets "modernization" against conservatism. The former aims to create new "westernized" wholesale markets, "upgrade" food products for export, traceability and safety, reduce the informal food trade and support large retailers. The latter aims to prevent sociopolitical destabilization, such as the risk of increasing prices, changes in the supply of food to keep up with demand and social unrest involving merchants and informal vendors.

Our analysis of this contradictory situation is divided into two parts. First, we review the evolution of Morocco's food policy since independence. Then we present the main actors involved in the governance of urban food systems. We show that urban food governance is still dominated by the Ministry of the Interior, but that the decentralization process is likely to encourage modernization. In the second part, we highlight the tension between the "conservative" central actors and the "modernizing" local actors, by analysing the current controversy over the reform of the wholesale markets, a crucial issue for African urban food systems, in Casablanca and Rabat.

Keywords: governance, food policy, modernization, conservatism, decentralization, Morocco

Introduction: the contradiction in Morocco's food governance

Bringing policies back in: analysing urban food systems in relation to governance

In Morocco, the governance of the urban food supply is riddled with contradictions between “modernization” and “conservatism”. This is manifest at different government levels. As this paper will demonstrate, despite the widespread decentralization and the consequent evolution of food governance in Africa, there are gaps in our understanding with regard to the increasingly important role that local authorities play in the development of urban food systems (UFS). This calls for comparative research on local authorities that are struggling to cope with urban food insecurity across Africa. Morocco's example demonstrates that decentralization is largely incomplete. Depending on the local contexts and party politics, the role of local actors also appears to be increasingly complex, ranging from patronage to entrepreneurialism. A better understanding of these local strategies is important before taking further action to improve the UFS.

The term UFS refers to the various activities (production, distribution and consumption) that supply urban dwellers with food. Most analyses of current demographic and economic trends reveal an “urbanization of poverty” (Lucci *et al.*, 2018). Food insecurity, formerly perceived as a predominantly rural phenomenon, is now becoming an *urban* phenomenon. This explains the growing concern among policymakers about the “effectiveness” of the UFS, i.e. their ability to provide a high level of food security to all urban dwellers, while contributing to sustainable economic and social development (Ericksen, 2008). Therefore, it is no surprise that the exploration of the link between policies and urban food (in)security has been given more attention in the international literature over the last decade. For example, Crush and Frayne (2010) argue that the dominant paradigm in international organizations and national governments is scientifically dubious and politically problematic because it considers food insecurity as an issue that only affects rural populations. In North Africa, this topic has been the subject of an important body of literature on political economy, especially urban food riots (see Seddon, 1986) and the urban bias (see Sutton, 1989). However, the specific question of the impact of food system governance on the UFS in North Africa requires careful analysis. The same applies to the rest of the African continent, where the issue of food insecurity is the most salient.

In South Africa, for example, existing food system governance and policies are currently suspected to “potentially even amplify urban food insecurity” (Haysom, 2015). According to Battersby and Crush (2014), improving knowledge of local contexts is, therefore, crucial for a better understanding of the differentiated access to food. Since focusing on food deserts implies the risk of only considering poor neighbourhoods, Battersby and Crush (2014) argue for a broader view of the urban environment, stating that “there is little chance of reversing the continued growth of these urban food deserts without [the] development and implementation [of] comprehensive and rational food security strategies across the city”. By playing a crucial role in different sectors, which involves the regulation of urban markets or informal sellers, the impact of governance – in the analytical sense, i.e. the interrelationships between the different actors of a public policy on a territorial scale (Rakodi, 2004) – appears to be decisive when it comes to shaping urban food strategies. Indeed, as Smit (2016) convincingly argues, applying this concept to UFS involves recognizing the multiplicity and diversity of interests, actors and processes that shape urban food policy (i.e. different levels of government, as well as the

public and private actors involved in food production and distribution). Smit rightly recalls that governance presupposes an unequal distribution of power: established actors that control the most crucial resources have to find ways of coping with competition from emerging actors. Lastly, the concept also takes into account the political-administrative processes that occur *outside* the food system, such as, the growing decentralization in Africa. This is important because the empowerment of emerging actors in urban food governance can have a major impact on UFS.

In Africa, although the Ministry of Agriculture usually prevails, several institutions are generally involved in food security policies. This is the case in Morocco, where the Ministry of the Interior still has the most important role. Recently, however, given that food security is now an urban issue, local institutions responsible for urban development are increasingly involved. In Morocco, as in many African countries, the government has engaged in decentralization reforms. Generally speaking, they have to deal with many constraints. For example, in Côte-d'Ivoire, research has shown that municipalities often lack financial and human resources to implement their programmes, including the management of urban food markets (Boyet and Lançon, 2019).

This last issue is particularly important for the UFS in Africa. The market evolution, therefore, mirrors the complex changes in food governance. Typically, the traditional distribution of agricultural products in African cities involves a hierarchical market system: wholesale markets supply a multitude of small retail markets in different city districts. Wholesale markets are nodes through which agricultural products flow. They are close to retail markets, which are, in turn, close to consumers. However, African markets are often plagued with problems of a different nature: hygiene and safety; congestion; local authorities struggle to collect taxes (Groupe Huit, 2015). This weakens the UFS. Therefore, regulating the wholesale markets is essential for urban food governance, regardless of the conflicting “conservative” and “modernizing” views. The same applies to the regulation of the informal food trade. The highly diversified modernization of distribution should not obscure the fact that the informal economy plays a crucial role in food security. Indeed, it is the main source of food for poor neighbourhoods, where residents have limited resources in terms of mobility and access to diversified foods. Yet, many African governments implement repressive policies against the informal economy. Street vendors and buyers are frequently subject to increased surveillance and even arrests. The destruction of their goods leads to violent conflicts. Advocates of a “modernizing” approach to food policy, which we will present in detail, tend to consider the informal sector as an anachronistic, “archaic” form of distribution. Their “conservative” counterparts underline the risk of social destabilization that could be induced by massive repression.

Urban food governance is, therefore, not neutral. Competing approaches towards urban food policy impact the urban food systems and raise crucial social issues. When the concept of governance is applied to food policy, it can explain the contradictions that undermine the “effectiveness” of UFS, despite the claims made by policymakers. Yet urban food governance, including the role of local governments in food security, remains beyond the scope of most urban food research (Smit, 2016). By applying this concept to an empirical case study, this paper aims to reveal the contradictions that affect food policy and their impact on UFS.

“Conservatism” versus “modernization”: two approaches to the food policy in Moroccan cities

Morocco is a particularly interesting example for gauging contradictory food policies. The main tension is due to the incompatibility between two paradigms: “modernization”, which stems from (neo)liberalism, and “conservatism”, which safeguards the social order. This opposition, however, should only be understood as an ideal-typical representation of the main conflict within Morocco’s governance system at different scales. In reality, most of the same actors, especially the palace itself, appear to promote one or other of the paradigms depending on the circumstances. Tensions of this kind are not new, but are deeply rooted in Morocco’s history. The central tension between indigenous/“traditional” and foreign/“modern” dates back to the progressive infiltration of European interests in pre-colonial Morocco in the late 19th century. This eventually led to the establishment of a dual French Protectorate regime in the early 20th century, which took over most state policies, but maintained a facade of indigenous sovereignty (Abu-Lughod, 1980; Holden, 2009). The tension between modernization and conservatism shapes contemporary Morocco’s food policy and ultimately explains the dualization of the urban food systems in its metropolises. The contemporary “modernizing” paradigm aims to create new “westernized” wholesale markets, “upgrade” food products with a view to export, ensure product traceability and safety, control informal trade and support mass distribution. The “conservative” paradigm strives to prevent and “rectify” certain effects generated by the first: possible price rises and political and social disruption, a change in the food supply that fails to meet demand and growing unrest among retailers and street vendors. These tensions are manifest in the governance of the urban food systems. The Ministry of the Interior, which traditionally appears to be the main pillar of Morocco’s authoritarian regime and aims to protect the country’s social and political stability, is in conflict with the proponents of “modernization”. Modernization was initially driven by funders and the European Commission and is currently supported by a number of local actors.

The drive to modernize is manifest in the gradual and concomitant increase in power of the local actors and the private sector. It is at odds with the highly centralized institutional structures that are maintained for the purpose of social and political stability (the *makhzen*, i.e. the Moroccan dialectical Arabic term for the traditional and opaque state apparatus organized around the palace and the Ministry of the Interior). This dichotomy is clearly visible in the regulation of the informal trade sector, which is central in Morocco’s urban food systems. On one hand, regulations are emerging to limit informal trade and improve product labelling, packaging and traceability. On the other hand, there is increasing tolerance of the informal sector, considered to be a “major social safety valve” (cf. this function was recently illustrated during the Arab Spring, when informal traders often played an important role).

We propose a two part analysis to examine these contradictory food supply policies. First, we review the main developments in the Moroccan food policy since independence and present the principal actors involved in the governance of the urban food supply policy. We show that it is still dominated by the Ministry of the Interior, although the regionalization of public action is likely to promote the modernization approach. In the second part, we highlight the contradiction between the central “conservative” actors and the local “modernizers”, by analysing the current controversy over the reform of the wholesale markets in Casablanca and Rabat, a crucial issue for the urban food supply. In Morocco the spatial inequalities are high, not only between rural and urban areas, but also between the central axis of Rabat and Casablanca, Morocco’s economic and political heart, where there is a concentration of public and private expenditure and extreme social inequality (Bogaert, 2018). This

article focuses on this central axis, where the contradiction between both approaches and their social consequences is the most acute.

This article is based on a survey conducted in Morocco.¹ About 70 semi-structured interviews were conducted in the spring of 2016 with the main actors involved in Moroccan policy. They include: civil servants from the different ministries concerned; public and parastatal agencies; local technicians and elected representatives; consultants; managers of the wholesale markets, associations and the operators involved in large and medium-scale distribution, etc. To complement the survey, an in-depth visit was organized to the Casablanca wholesale market in the presence of the firm responsible for managing the site.

1. **The contradiction at the heart of the Moroccan urban food supply policy**

In order to understand the current situation, it is essential to grasp the major developments that have occurred in Moroccan food policy since independence. The “conservative” approach corresponds to the policy designed by a destabilized monarchy post independence. It is partly overlapped – but not superseded – by a neoliberal approach, introduced by the World Bank and the IMF in the early 1980s. This development is the cause of today’s conflict between “conservatism” and “modernization”. While the conservative approach is still dominant, the regionalization of public policies is now empowering new actors keen on modernization.

Between social control and liberalization: the changes in post-colonial food policy

As Holden (2009) states, conservatism proved to be a remarkably lasting feature of food policies during late pre-colonial, colonial and early postcolonial periods. Precolonial sultans made an effort to ensure food availability, despite frequent drought and famine. This explains why the modern state "perpetuated a conservative ideology that shaped state institutions and the wielding of power" (Holden, 2009: 6). The French colonial authorities that followed also generally preferred traditional food processing methods because it was a way “to secure the loyalty of workers and the poor, the lynchpin of their authority” (Holden, 2009: 12). This type of conservatism can be explained by the fact that both the sultans (especially after the great famine in the 1880s) and the French administration considered food policy as particularly crucial for the political stability of their regime. The latter “hoped to eradicate the root cause of popular unrest by implementing policies that fostered full employment among Moroccans” (Holden, 2009: 118). However, in spite of these efforts, food policy proved to be the French administration’s Achilles heel. The long “drought and recession became the paradoxically fertile field for the emergence of a conservative form of nationalist network aimed at ending colonial rule” (Holden, 2009: 196). In Fez (the capital before the French protectorate), the recession in the 1930s combined with recurrent drought led to the pauperization of the traditional bourgeoisie. The latter became politicized for economic rather than political reasons. Born of the discontent of the Fassi bourgeoisie, the Istiqlal conservative party played a major role in independence and also shaped Morocco’s policy in the decades that followed. This partly explains the lasting

¹ The survey was conducted in the framework of the research project « Approvisionnement alimentaire des villes d'Afrique: repenser le rôle des marchés » (“Food supply of African cities: rethinking the role of markets”) sponsored by the AFD (French Agency for Development).

conservatism that has shaped Morocco's food policy.

At the end of the protectorate, Morocco implemented a food planning policy that was a straightforward agricultural plan: satisfying food requirements was considered to be the direct outcome of agricultural development. From the 1970s, as in other countries in the Maghreb, the state adopted a policy to subsidize basic commodities. The aim was to complement the supply policy (upstream) with a consumption policy (downstream) (Laraki, 1989). This strategy was developed in a post-colonial regional context marked by nationalism and the protection of industries. In the decades following independence, the goals of the 5-year plans (food self-sufficiency and increased agricultural exports), were supposed to be achieved through greater farm production (farmers were protected from international competition). In Morocco, this vision came in the form of "the dam policy". In the 1960s, the state invested massively in irrigated areas, organized land use, provided subsidies and tax benefits and organized product distribution (Akeski, 2013). Nevertheless, the choice to encourage development based on agriculture was also a political strategy adopted by the Moroccan monarchy, given that the political opposition was firmly established in cities (Leveau, 1976). Thus, the *makhzen's* authoritarian control system depended on the Ministry of the Interior's tight network in rural areas. In turn, this depended on the rural notables, who ensured that there was overwhelming support from the farming sector and stability for the regime (Leveau, 1976). The "dam policy" was a key element in the strategic control of rural areas (Kuper, 2011). In 1941, the Compensation Fund was created to secure the market supply of basic commodities. It controlled prices to limit the risks of unrest in inner-city areas.

The aim of achieving food self-sufficiency was to limit imports (Padilla, 1995), but it met with two major criticisms. It encouraged intermediaries to charge annual payments, but also increased consumption in the wealthiest sector, instead of benefitting the poor. The compensation system, based on subsidies for production and consumption, became increasingly controversial. With the growing economic hardship, this strategy clashed with the recommendations proposed by the World Bank and the IMF's Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). As a result, in the early 1980s, the self-sufficiency goal was abandoned in favour of food security, which could be achieved by juggling imports and exports on the international market (Akesbi, 2013). The adjustments advocated by the SAP led to a sharp increase in the price of basic food commodities and triggered "food riots" in large Moroccan cities throughout the 1980s (affecting about 50 cities in 1984 and Fez in 1990). The food riots sparked by the removal of price subsidies demonstrated that the post-independent food policy had reached a dead-end as a result of the rural-urban conflict: there was an almost impossible choice between providing public support to the urban poor in the form of food subsidies and support to the rural poor by stimulating more food production to make small, traditional farms more viable. As Swearingen (1987:163) writes, "the riots show that a point of no return is being reached".

The memory of these violent riots has consolidated the conservative approach, which still influences the supply policy and its principal actor, the Ministry of the Interior. However, the SAP introduced a major neoliberal shift. Even today, the country's main agricultural strategy, the Green Morocco Plan, shows that the aim of the state's renewed commitment to agriculture is to make it more competitive, rather than reduce rural poverty or food insecurity. It was drafted in a matter of months by an international consultancy. There was no discussion with the actors in the Moroccan farming community. Thus, this strategy has encouraged a capitalist style agriculture, with priority given to the export sectors (Mahdi, 2014).

Urban food supply, a national issue still dominated by the “conservative” approach

The Moroccan government is faced with two constraints: the first is social and political and prevents it from brutally jeopardizing the interests of poor volatile urban populations; the second is financial and is caused by the state’s withdrawal in line with the SAP (Leveau, 1987). Hence, finding a delicate compromise for the food issue is difficult. Consequently, public support has been maintained until now for two food commodities considered vital for poor urban populations: wheat flour (bread) and sugar. Therefore, the governance of the urban food systems is still largely organized at the national level. Yet, urban food security is not a political issue. Instead, it is overshadowed by the question of accessibility, as a direct result of the food riots in the 1980s and the *makhzen*’s resurgence. Overall, when it comes to food issues, Moroccan political parties tend to “discuss the social dimension”². More specifically, national political debate focuses primarily on the failure of food aid, a politically sensitive issue given the history of urban riots.

Therefore, the *makhzen* linchpin, in other words the Ministry of the Interior and its devolved services, still appears to be the key actor in the governance of Moroccan urban food systems. As an agent from the Ministry of the Interior explained, “the Ministry of the Interior has the most expertise when it comes to monitoring supply”, and “it always intervenes in all food supply matters”³. Therefore, it is responsible for coordinating operations to control the price and quality of products, merchandise and services, and for designing strategies to control and monitor supply on the domestic market, particularly for basic commodities (flour, sugar, fruit and vegetables, red and white meat, butane gas and fuel, etc.). Lastly, the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for coordinating the actors in the supply chain. Its three main objectives are: to ensure food safety, in other words “make sure that the consumer’s physical integrity is preserved”; to regulate, i.e. ensure “smooth economic operations” and “good competition”; and lastly, to protect consumers in terms of price coherence⁴.

Although the Ministry of the Interior, the guarantor of the “conservative” approach, remains the key actor in terms of the supply policy, the rise of new actors reflects the growing popularity of “modernizing” food governance in Morocco. The Agricultural Development Agency (ADA), which emerged from the Green Morocco Plan, is one of the new actors. It strives to address issues of marketing for small producers and to limit the power of intermediaries and speculators, by protecting the actors’ margins (particularly farmers). However, the main actor now gaining power in terms of Moroccan food governance is the Exports Control and Coordination Agency (EACCE). Created in 1986, it was initially responsible for guaranteeing that Moroccan food commodities destined for export met the international market requirements – particularly in terms of controlling pesticides and maximum residue limits because the international market requirements are far stricter than the national standards. Gradually, the EACCE’s role went beyond that of exportation. It started changing farming and distribution practices on the domestic market (Ait Hou, Grazia and Malorgio, 2015).

However, over and above the space created by the growing importance of exports, the general difficulties

² Interview with a representative of the *Istiqlal* party, conducted on 29/05/2016 at the *Istiqlal* headquarters (Rabat).

³ Interview with an agent from the central supply division of the Ministry of the Interior’s Department of Economic Affairs, conducted on 15/07/2016 at the ministry headquarters (Rabat).

⁴ *Ditto*.

encountered by two actors in their attempt to influence the supply policy reveal the limitations of “modernizing” the supply chain. Thus, the Ministry of Trade and Industry is struggling to convince the Ministry of the Interior of its expertise-based vision, particularly regarding the decisions linked to applications to build supermarkets. Although the national authority for food safety (ONNSA) was created as part of the food safety law, it was underfunded. This shows that the regime gave greater priority to the standardization of products for export than for the domestic market. The urban food supply policy continues to be dominated by the “conservative” approach that is supported by the *makhzen*. However, the (limited) regionalization of Moroccan public policies may have a “modernizing” influence on the food supply policy.

Regionalization as a vector of “modernization” for the food supply?

When Mohammed VI acceded to the throne in 1999, new discourses emerged on the need to “modernize” the country. The normative register for “good governance” was adopted with a view to upgrading institutional operations by applying “good international practices” (Allal, 2007). However, the democratization remains incomplete and Morocco is actually more of a “governing monarchy” than a “parliamentary monarchy” (Bendourou, 2014a). Under the new reign, the tension between the “modernist” and “conservative” paradigms is more acute. For example, in the 1990s, there was growing discontent with the modernization of the retail sector. The latter involved a joint venture between the palace and the French firm Promodès to develop a local chain of Marjane supermarkets in Morocco’s main metropolises. The discontent crystallized during the Arab Spring of 2011, when demonstrators criticized the fact that a palace-owned firm sold alcohol in a Muslim country. In response, Marjane gradually stopped selling alcohol, despite it being their most lucrative market.

Nonetheless, the gradual regionalization of public action that began in the 1980s accelerated with the new discourses. The latter led to the adoption of a communal charter in 2002, which “reunifies” the communes (previously split into districts) into municipalities with democratic legitimacy. Decentralization is also a process of “advanced regionalization” that heralds the radical redefinition of the conditions for exercising power on a regional scale (Bendourou, 2014b; Melloni, 2013; Lokrifia and Moisseron, 2015). However, the regions, provinces and prefectures with elected assemblies still depend on the *makhzen* because a state representative (*wali* or governor) directs their executive committee. Thus, in Sabine Planel’s view (2009), “the devolved structures, whose decision-making autonomy remains very limited, are a local channel for central state power. They block the emergence of local politics and serve public policies that are regionalised, but not yet regional.” This observation is particularly significant for the city of Rabat, which is subject to even stricter supervision because of its status as capital and headquarters of the royal palace. Despite the close supervision still exercised by the central state, “the decentralisation movement, however tenuous, goes hand in hand with an attempt to encourage discussion between actors and more local actor participation in public decision-making” (Planel, 2009).

Some municipalities have seized upon the favourable context created by regionalization (under strict supervision). They appear to be emerging actors in food supply policy matters that advocate “modernization”. Clearly, on an official level, the municipality simply has to manage the public equipment and services required to provide local services (water and sanitation, public transport, electricity, refuse collection, etc.). Yet, food policy

does seem to be regulated at the municipal level. The municipality actually has to develop and manage wholesale markets, slaughterhouses and fish markets and halls (Royaume du Maroc, 2015). In addition, the municipality's mission must be coherent with the "modernizing" vision and modern management practices, according to the law enacted in 2015. Therefore, the municipality is an actor when it comes to food supply policies. However, it finds it difficult to fully assume this function and often limits itself to fighting fraud and optimizing revenue.

Overall, the municipality has an increasing influence on food issues, although its role is primarily indirect. For example, municipalities play a major role in the current development of supermarket outlets, especially in the Rabat-Casablanca megalopolis. Indeed, Moroccan legislation allows supermarket operators to choose their location in accordance with preliminary studies. Their choice of location often concerns zones that the urban development plan did not envisage for that purpose. In this case, applications for supermarket sites are considered by a body that deals with derogations. Given that the Ministry of Trade does not supervise the authorization or planning of supermarket sites, decisions are made at a municipal level or directly by the regional derogation body, where the *wali* plays a crucial role. These lenient regulations explain the rapid development of supermarkets in Morocco. At the moment, over 100 new supermarkets are opening each year, compared to about 15 per year in the early 2000s (Royaume du Maroc, 2011). This development is localized in the Rabat-Casablanca megalopolis, where 50% of Morocco's modern distribution points are now found – even though supermarkets have also developed in secondary cities since 2003. The rapid development of this type of distribution has a significant effect on the food distribution system in Rabat-Salé.

Overall, the city councils tend to be driven more by clientelism than by the desire to improve food security. However, a "new" "entrepreneurial" approach has emerged in local governance and is being implemented in the Coastal metropolis and Casablanca (Harvey, 1989; X, 2014). In Casablanca, international "best practices" in neoliberal urban governance are being applied (megaprojects, gentrification, financial districts, public-private partnerships, urban marketing). Nonetheless, this entrepreneurial strategy is deeply rooted in the national political context, which is structured around the conflict opposing the palace and the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD). In Casablanca, the city council is governed by the PJD, the monarchy's main opponent since the dismantling of the socialist opposition during the "Years of lead" (Daooud: 2007). The highly controversial reform of Casablanca's wholesale market, which embodies the contradiction between "modernist" and "conservative" approaches, should be considered in this context.

Today, the PJD is attempting to radically reorganize the wholesale market, by introducing mechanisms borrowed from the private sector. The aim is twofold: first, to make the PJD look efficient, by "modernizing" the wholesale market itself; second, to maximize the tax revenue generated by market transactions in order to boost the municipal finances, which can then be used to fund a profusion of urban development projects. This strategy should be compared to the muted struggle between the *makhzen* and the Islamist party, which is using urban management as a political showcase. While overall the electoral system is conceived to give priority to the representation of rural Morocco to the detriment of urban Morocco, the Islamist party's success in numerous cities that support "modernization" has nonetheless sparked severe opposition from the Ministry of the Interior (Catusse and Zaki, 2009). Interviews with various local councillors reveal that the chances of an Islamist-led municipality receiving public funds are significantly lower than for their counterparts, the parties that support the *Makhzen* (i.e. the *administrative parties* created by palace supporters). This has not prevented the PJD from

enjoying growing electoral support, especially in poor neighbourhoods in middle-sized and large cities. As a result, in contemporary Morocco, support for the *Makhzen* is reflected in the traditional urban/rural divide. This is apparent in the current political landscape (Leveau, 1985): the major cities, previously under Socialist Party rule and now governed by the Islamist Party, still constitute the stronghold of opposition to the *Makhzen*. In contrast, the countryside is run by the Parti Authenticité et Modernité, Morocco's main *administrative party*, which was created by one of the King's close friends (Desrues, 2016). The Islamist Party's influence is confined to the major cities. Inspired by the Turkish AKP, which the PJD upholds as a model, the Islamist Party wants to capitalize on its two decades of experience in local government to run for the national government. Despite party divisions (different political and religious sensibilities), the transparency and efficiency of local governance provides a springboard for their political aspirations. As Mohsen-Finan and Zeghal (2006: 117) state, the Islamist councillors "intend to equate transparency, honesty and competence with the "Islamist" management of cities. They want to stand out from other aging formations, often monopolized by struggles for influence and internal dissension." In this respect, demonstrating the efficiency of the PJD's entrepreneurial governance of Casablanca, the largest city in the Maghreb and Morocco's economic capital, is crucial. The *Makhzen's* reluctance to let this political strategy take hold explains why tension is rising over the move to restructure the management of the wholesale market, one of Casablanca's principal municipal assets. All in all, this illustrates that decentralization in Morocco is not over. The difficulties involved in reforming the management of the wholesale markets in Casablanca and Rabat highlight the frustrated decentralization process and reflect the contradictions between the two approaches that now pervade the food supply policy in Moroccan cities. They also reveal that the contradiction has an impact on crucial issues of social justice.

2. The reform of the wholesale markets reveals a contradictory policy

The highly controversial reform of the wholesale markets in Morocco clearly illustrates the muted war between the conservative vision promulgated by the central actors and the modernization envisaged by local actors, particularly those who are gaining power. The reform is extremely important for the supply of Moroccan cities. The activities involved in the distribution of fruit and vegetables are concentrated in the wholesale markets and slaughterhouses are often located nearby. Since the 1990s, wholesale markets have regularly been considered as one of the main obstacles to the modernization of food distribution systems on a national scale.

Municipal wholesale markets: a controversial system

The 38 wholesale markets in Morocco actually have a genuine monopoly over the urban food supply. According to the 1962 law/*dahir*, all merchandise retailed in the city should "legally/officially" go through the wholesale market, "essentially for tax purposes" (Gergely, 1997; Tollens, 1997). In fact, the wholesale markets are taxed at a rate of 7% *ad valorem*, which is levied by the local authorities (Royaume du Maroc, 2010). On a historical level, the sale of fruit and vegetables through the municipal wholesale markets in Morocco is the result of the successful development of structures designed to modernize marketing in order to: concentrate supply and demand and facilitate price fixing and stability. Over time, mechanisms have developed within the wholesale

markets to safeguard the revenue generated by the monopoly. However, the absence of product differentiation and standardization, combined with more widespread and prohibitively high taxes, has strengthened the incentives for fraud and increased health risks. Fraud is now commonplace at the wholesale market (underestimating weights, declaring cheaper products to avoid taxes, etc.) and illegal wholesale markets have mushroomed. They have gained an important share in the trade of fruit and vegetables outside the structure that has the legal monopoly. For example, in Rabat, a highly publicized report by the Court of Auditors estimates that the proportion of fruit and vegetables sold in the city outside the wholesale market is 78% (+10% compared to the 2004-2009 period). This is prejudicial for the city council in terms of tax losses, which represent approximately 20 million dirhams per year (Royaume du Maroc and the Court of Auditors, 2010). The publication of the report prompted the government to commission a report on Morocco's wholesale markets from the consultancy firm Valyans Consulting (a major Moroccan firm, established in 2005 when the Moroccan branch of Ernst & Young fused with its Arthur Andersen counterpart).

Generally speaking, the “modernizing” approach challenges “conservatism” by brandishing a “technical” legitimacy, extensively based on recourse to (mainly foreign) expertise. For example, according to the Valyans report, the national wholesale fruit and vegetable marketing network, which operates *through* the wholesale markets, lacks efficiency due to its many failings. The report highlights diverse factors: obsolete infrastructure, inadequate services, an outdated economic model, an ill-adapted regulatory framework, a huge informal sector, an imbalance between the network and the flows, a lack of standardization, a large number of intermediaries, poor transparency in terms of market prices, no incentives to improve quality and, above all, a reluctance to change (Valyans, 2010). The city council is generally held responsible for the numerous shortcomings. Yet, it is the first to lose out because its tax resources diminish with the weakening of the wholesale market's role in the urban food supply.

In response to the producers' growing unrest, the central authorities have started to regain control with a view to modernizing the wholesale markets throughout the kingdom. The first goal is to add value to products. The second goal is in line with the Moroccan government's general policy, namely, to increase the number of mega-projects to develop major infrastructure (roads, airports, new cities, etc.) in the name of international competitiveness and investment appeal (Barthel and Planel, 2010). The focus of the debate on the wholesale markets of Casablanca and Rabat demonstrates the intensification of the competition between the “modernizing” and “conservative” approaches. It clearly indicates the complex relationship between the local and national actors involved in urban food governance. In addition, given the importance of the wholesale markets in the urban food supply, this debate raises crucial social issues regarding the urban food systems in Morocco's biggest cities, as discussed below.

The challenges of “modernization” 1.: the controversial privatization of Casablanca's wholesale market

The report by the private firm Valyans Consulting proposes preliminary options for reforming the wholesale markets. Their recommendations focus on four areas, which all converge towards the “modernizing” vision. First, the restructuration aims to improve the regional network and provide a better service to the population. Second, it proposes new infrastructure that meets the highest international standards and norms – Rungis (France) and Mercamadrid (Spain) are the two models mentioned as references. Third, the consultancy advocates

the widespread use of a new management model involving private operators. Fourth, it recommends an overhaul of the revenue and compensation system. This is a major challenge for the government and the ministries because “it will be difficult to wean the municipalities off the tax windfall in the wholesale markets” (*L'Économiste*, 2014).

Following the report's recommendations, the pioneering city of Casablanca decided to transfer the management of its wholesale market to Casa Prestations, a *Société de Développement Local* (Local Development Society, LDS) in 2014. This decision should be considered in the context of the PJD's rise in power on the municipal level. As we have seen with the Islamist Party, demonstrating efficient city management is part of a muffled strategy to oppose the *makhzen* (Catusse and Zaki, 2009). As the country's economic hub, Casablanca constitutes an ideal laboratory for this type of management. The aim is to achieve legitimacy on the basis of “the outputs”, rather than “the inputs” (Pinson, 2009), and efficiency and not clientelism. As far as the PJD and the *wali* are concerned, the idea is to make the city into a model, especially because in 2013 the royal discourse blamed local actors for the failings in the urban services. In this context, recovering control of the wholesale market, which has many shortcomings, appears even more crucial because the tax revenue constitutes the city council's second most important resource. Casa Prestations is a limited company that was established in 2014. Its board of directors is split between the decentralized and the devolved⁵. Their mission is to “rationalize” the management of the wholesale fruit and vegetable market. The goals include improving revenues, particularly by increasing the number of controls, as well as “changing the system of agents because it is archaic” (interview, LDS).

According to the actors interviewed, having recourse to the LDS is a direct response to the rationale of privatization. It significantly modifies the governance of food policy, in the sense that “the Moroccan state is giving the food market to the private sector⁶”. Here, the local actors that have been devolved and delocalized (*wali* and the city council) are obviously keen to work together to “modernize” management by transferring it to the private sector: “we must make sure that the informal markets join the wholesale market and modernize the latter at the same time. The *wali* has instructed the governor to tackle and eradicate the black markets. They have started demolishing them.⁷” However, the privatization of the management of the wholesale market rapidly met with resistance from the “archaic system”, which culminated in the dismissal of Casa Prestations' director in December 2016. This cast uncertainty over the future of the “modernization” of the wholesale market.

However, this example clearly demonstrates major social challenges resulting from the competition between the two approaches to the urban food supply policy in Morocco. In line with urban entrepreneurialism in general, the actors keen to “modernize” food policy recognize that a change in the urban food system will increase social inequalities, which are already high in Morocco. For example, one of the members of the team responsible for the “modernization” of the wholesale market in Casablanca stated: “It is a pilot site for Morocco, the other markets come to visit us. There are other practices in Rabat or elsewhere that could also help us to improve. We want to create a model for Morocco here. (...). Hotels, caterers, all those that target a wealthy clientele, Marjane

⁵ Its board of directors is chaired by the *wali*. The other board members include the town council chair, the regional president and the secretary general of the *Wilaya*.

⁶ Interview with an agent from the agribusiness division of the Ministry of Agriculture's department for the development of production chains, conducted on 06/06/2016 at the ministry headquarters (Rabat).

⁷ Interviews with the president and directors of the SDL “Casa Prestations”, which manages the Casablanca wholesale market, conducted on 15/05/2016 in the firm's offices at the wholesale market site in Casablanca.

[one of the main Moroccan groups of mass distribution] and others, all come to the wholesale market. (...) Overall, it is a two-tiered system. The clients interested in quality come to us and the blackmarket permeates the poor districts.⁸” Lastly, the reform clearly indicates the emergence of a dual urban food supply system. The official wholesale markets and the urban services provided to the well-off populations, in general, are being “upgraded” (X, 2012). In contrast, the situation faced by the informal sector, which targets poor neighbourhoods, is increasingly difficult.

⁸ Interviews with the directors of the SDL “Casa Prestations”, which manages the wholesale market in Casablanca, conducted on 15/05/2016 in the firm’s offices at the wholesale market site in Casablanca.



The “two-tiered” wholesale market in Casablanca: the sale of fresh mint on the ground and an ultra-modern warehouse for imported high quality produce (photo credits: X, May 2016).

The challenges of modernization 2.: The controversial relocation of Rabat’s wholesale market

In Rabat, the palace headquarters and capital city dominated by the central authority, the devolved actors in the food sector seriously criticize the local political class and minimize its role: “Today, councillors lack credibility

on these matters (the wholesale market, street vendors and food policy) because they only stay for 3 years and then leave.⁹ In turn, the local councillors usually say that food issues are not one of their priorities. They simply talk about urban food security in general, which they claim is the responsibility of national public actors. “The city council has limited power (...); it is responsible for certain operations (...) that are essentially technical^{10 11}.” However, no date has been given for implementing the reform in Rabat: “it is a reform that has been dragging on for 10 years or more, but today there is hope.¹²” As far as financing the reform is concerned, the city councils have limited financial resources and are struggling to attract investors. Consequently, the majority of investments will be provided by the state actors, followed by agencies, funds or ministerial organizations (Planel, 2009). Lastly, there is every indication that the society Rabat Région Aménagement will be first in line for the construction and that an SDL will be set up to manage the project (*Libération*, 2015).

The reform of the wholesale market in Rabat is envisaged with caution for two reasons: difficulties were observed with the reform of the Casablanca wholesale market and Rabat, as the capital, constitutes a pilot project. The mega-project of the new wholesale market in Rabat will bring together several wholesale fruit and vegetable markets located within a radius of 50km from Rabat (Témara, Salé and Bouknadel). On the basis of five technical criteria and in accordance with the ministerial consortium (Interior, Trade and Agriculture), the Valyans study identified the new city of Tamesna as being the most suitable site for the new wholesale market. Tamesna is situated 20km from Rabat, 25km from Salé and 10km from Témara and Skhriat (Valyans, 2011). However, over and above the technical criteria, this choice was influenced by more political issues. One of the most important relates to the uncertain future of Rabat’s satellite city: Tamesna. Created as part of Morocco’s new cities mega-project, it was presented as the cornerstone of a new national development strategy designed to attract private capital when it was launched in the early 2000s. Tamesna has gradually come to embody a symbolic and financial disaster for Morocco (X, 2016). In addition, the mobilization of the Tamesna residents received significant political and media attention. As a result, a parliamentary enquiry was launched to examine the causes of the new city’s failure (it is under-equipped, has failing urban services, an unfinished road network, abandoned buildings, etc.). This explains why the authorities are attempting to kick-start the project, by transferring as many activities as possible to give it fresh impetus. In addition, the advantage of choosing Tamesna is that the 7% tax system considered obsolete can be avoided because the satellite city is officially a rural municipality, not an urban one. Yet, as the actors interviewed confirmed, the ministerial consortium (Agriculture, Interior, Trade and Industry) would like to change the 1962 tax system, which is thought to be the cause of the “archaic” practices that regiment the wholesale markets. From this point of view, the project to construct a wholesale market in Tamesna that meets international standards constitutes a laboratory for public actors in Morocco.

⁹ Interview with an engineer and technician, head of the Rabat town council’s building services, conducted on 13/06/2016 at the agent’s office (Rabat).

¹⁰ Interview with a representative of the *Istiqlal* party, conducted on 29/05/2016 at the *Istiqlal* headquarters (Rabat).

¹¹ However, within the town council, there is an all-party committee, which deals with major food issues. In addition, the council is involved in joint local committees for prices, supply and control *through* agents from the municipal health and safety offices (Bureau Communal d’Hygiène, BCH), but they seriously lack funding and expertise.

¹² Interview with an agent from the agro-business division of the Ministry of Agriculture’s department for the development of production chains, conducted on 06/06/2016 at the ministry headquarters (Rabat).

Despite the observed losses, the revenues generated by Rabat's wholesale market amount to over 20 million dirhams per year and constitute the municipality's second most important source of income. Thus, it represents a crucial windfall (Fathallah Debbi *et al.*, 2012; Valyans, 2010). From this perspective, the project to move the wholesale market from Rabat to Tamesna is perceived as a threat to local councillors. According to our interviews, the *wilaya* in Rabat-Salé has already decided to transfer the wholesale fruit and vegetable market from Rabat, Salé and Témara to Tamesna and has purchased land for that purpose. However, the subject remains highly controversial: "the Rabat *wilaya*'s decision regarding relocation (...) has sparked major controversy within the elected councils. Today, Rabat's councillors have adopted the 'empty chair' policy in an attempt to regain control of the project, which is crucial for the city council's finances". However, the state actors do not seem worried about the reform:

"If the Ministry of the Interior has decided, the local actors will follow, on condition that they receive compensation (...). The personality of the local actors and councillors is important, but the Ministry of the Interior has the last word. It is not business as usual, but still".¹³

The compensation packages appear to be the key to the project's success. In addition, they are key to the relations between the state administrations (the ministries and the *wilaya*) and local authorities. In fact, while the city council risks losing revenue as a result of moving the wholesale market from Rabat, it stands to gain from the extremely high value of land made available by moving the existing markets. This land could be part of a large development project for the waterfront (Mouloudi, 2015). Another issue is the compensation for the agents responsible for levying taxes. Here, discussions focus on how to encourage them to give up this revenue or to propose new sources of income (taxi licences, concessions for restaurants, etc.). In addition, while the large producer groups support the reform to modernize, the wholesale and retail market operators do not seem to have been consulted, which is potentially problematic: "if there is no impact analysis or foresight study and nothing is explained to the people who work in the wholesale market, the move is likely to lead to a new informal market: other wholesale street markets may develop in Salé or even Rabat if prices increase after the move to Tamesna."¹⁴

Lastly, the nationwide reform of wholesale markets conducted with a view to "modernization" has met with resistance along the marketing channels. The central authorities should negotiate with the city councils to ensure that the reform includes a number of adaptations, particularly tax related. All in all, the controversy illustrates how the governance of the urban food supply is currently being restructured as a result of regionalization. In the case of Rabat, a city where the municipal actors are particularly marginalized by the central authorities because it is the capital, the vision to "modernize" the food supply chain is, above all, defended by local actors (the *wilaya*).

Conclusion

In Morocco, the governance of urban food supply is riddled with major contradictions because it involves actors

¹³ Interview with an agent from the Ministry of the Interior's department of economic affairs, central supply division, conducted on 15/07/2016 at the ministry headquarters (Rabat).

¹⁴ Interview with an engineer and technician, head of Rabat town council's building department, conducted on 13/06/2016 at the agent's office (Rabat).

with diverse interests, driven by sometimes very different rationale. One of the main contradictions sets a “modernization” approach (the creation of new “westernized” wholesale markets, “upgrading” food products for export, product traceability and food safety, the desire to combat informal food trade, support for mass distribution) against a conservative approach. The latter aims to prevent social and political disruption, such as the risk of price rises, a change in the food supply that fails to meet demand, unrest among traders and street vendors. In Morocco, this contradiction does not just affect food policy. It is also manifest at different government levels. On the one hand, the state wants to maintain its control over the sector and, on the other hand, local actors with a modern vision are gaining in power. These discrepancies explain the controversial reforms of the wholesale markets. The complexification of the urban food policy ultimately raises social concerns over the future evolution of Morocco’s urban food systems.

As this article demonstrates, despite widespread decentralization and the consequent evolution of food governance in Africa, there are many gaps in our understanding of the growing role of local authorities in the evolution of UFS. Comparative research on local authorities struggling with urban food insecurity in different parts of Africa would further our understanding of the issue. As Morocco’s example demonstrates, decentralization is largely incomplete. Conducting a detailed analysis of the roles of the different actors involved at different scales of government is essential. Depending on the local contexts and party politics, the local actors also appear to have an increasingly complex role, ranging from patronage and entrepreneurialism. A better understanding of these local strategies is important before further actions are implemented to improve the UFS.

In the light of this article, policy should focus on empowering local authorities and reinforcing food democracy in African cities. Capacity-building programmes geared to funding and decision-making could help local authorities deal with the dualization of the urban food systems. Redefining food policy with the different actors involved in the urban food systems at local and national level would also be constructive. These programmes could also target producers, as well as formal and informal traders, especially those operating in short circuits, to strengthen their collective organization. In the United States, the food policy councils have experience of bringing together all the actors in the urban food system. This has demonstrated their capacity to strengthen urban food security. Experiments of this type could be introduced in Morocco, particularly, given the current attempts to promote collective action among peri-urban peasants and civil society’s growing interest in food issues (consumer protection associations).

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