



## Reformism, Corruption and Dissidence: An essay on Post-Arab Spring Restructuring of the Political in Morocco

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### **Abstract**

*This paper is a review and a reflection of the development of state and society interactions in Morocco in post Arab spring; it covers the interaction of collective as well as individual (non)movements in a period where Morocco lives under political restructuring, liberal opening and digital impact on society by the use of internet and social media. The paper analyses facts, interactions and topics which produced a new culture of doing politics in Morocco, the (non) social movements and their impacts on both institutional politics and policy reforms. It covers how 20 February movement impacted the constitutional reform in 2011; how (non)movement individuals and social media fought corruption; and how political dissidence is managed in Morocco. The paper hopes to contribute a new analysis in the social movements literature by deconstructing the state/society relationships in post Arab spring Morocco. The last crackdown on journalists and freedom of expression during the post Arab spring and the COVID 19 phases, the conflict over human rights limits in Morocco and the story of spying on individuals, the return of the strong state institutions are all push factors to rethink the backbones of Moroccan political state/society dynamics. The paper brings facts, analyses and highlight taboos and flaws in this complex relationship between society and the state.*

### **A Youth Movement Pushing the Boundaries of Constitutional Reforms**

Like many other North African states, an understanding of the political structure of Morocco must be situated in the context of colonial rule in the region. In many cases, colonial forces effectively destroy the political structures in place that dominated the pre-colonial period. Unlike Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya, the Moroccan political system post-independence used a careful blend of pre-colonial and colonial political structures. Joffe (1988) discusses the unique problems that arise from Morocco's political system, which has followed a very different

trajectory from that of its North African counterparts. Led by the opposition of the Istiqlal party to colonialism and solidified by negotiations between Mohammed V and France, independence was gained in 1956. The resulting governing body found connections between the leadership of the sultanate and the beginnings of the nationalist movements in Morocco.

After independence, the aspirations of the Istiqlal party to dominate the political scene and render the position of the king as only a symbolic one were shattered as the more extremist factions of the party began to split into different, weaker political parties such as the UNFP and USFP. New pro-monarchy political parties as well as labor unions emerged and entered the political scene, further weakening any one party's ability to dominate over the king. Instead, the king was able to put his support behind various parties while remaining the uncontested focus of power. King Hassan II continued his father's pattern of using his political advisers to direct policy, instead of cooperating with the actual government. This, combined with a constitutional reform which compelled a minority plurality in Parliament, secured the political power of the *makhzen* which drew on the political structure of pre-colonial times.

The post-independence regime in Morocco was understandably vulnerable to a great deal of threats to its stability. The economic changes in the 1970s initiated a drift of the rural population to urban centers, which led to slight increases in access to education without the suitable employment opportunities to meet the new labor market. The emerging economic inequality left the government as an facile target of hostility. At the same time, the *makhzen* guaranteed loyalty among various groups of society by adopting the pre-colonial patterns of the patronage system. Despite securing loyalty among members of the military and the elite, the growing instability and clandestine opposition was revealed after an attempted coup on the king in 1971.

The Moroccan state, notwithstanding the massive challenges of socioeconomic inequality, the war in the Western Sahara, and foreign debt and economic restructuring, has enjoyed a surprising degree of stability, which we can explore in the context of the 2011 Arab Spring protests. Galvanized by Tunisia, Egypt, and their other North African counterparts, Morocco too participated during the wave of uprisings in the Arab world during the year of 2011, which sparked reforms and toppled regimes worldwide. Hoffmann & König (2013) describe some of the features of the February 20 movement, and its effects on the wider society, which emerged in Morocco as a part of the Arab Spring. Prior to this movement, there was a sort of "political lethargy" (Hoffmann & König 2013) which plagued the Moroccan political scene; the way the state engaged in discourse about economic reform was done so in a way that seemed to absolve it from any responsibility to change the political status quo.

The February 20 movement revealed the political actors who were silently changing the status quo, though not involved in official political organizations; groups that came together included trade unions, leftist parties, various proponents of political Islam, as well as feminist and human rights associations, the Amazigh movement and groups of Unemployed Graduates. The various similar interests of these organizations allowed them to come together to share resources and mobilize large numbers of participants. However, this broad range of entrants in the movement led to a difficulty in articulating their demands. The February 20 movement, on the whole, was not simply challenging the state, it was attempting to redefine the relationship between state and society.

The movement was able to appeal to its participants and the state by using a number of framing strategies: they demanded individual freedoms, such as calling on the state to take action to include the Amazigh language and by denouncing the systematic discrimination of young women in Moroccan society. They also used the strategy of framing repression as a means of solidarity among all the members of the 20 February movement, denouncing the regime's crackdowns on public demonstrations and police brutality as contradictions to the ostensibly democratic rhetoric in which the state engages. They also denounced social and economic injustice by challenging the narrative that Morocco is an "economic success story" by highlighting the persistent unequal distribution of wealth that is prevalent in the country,

without actually crossing the red line of denouncing the king directly. A final framing strategy used by 20 February militants, kind of a culmination of all the previous strategies, was to claim political rights for the improvement of Morocco as a whole; calling for freedom, democracy, peaceful demonstrations.

Hoffmann & König (2013) conclude by commending the 20 February Movement for the sheer breadth of the groups which organized to come together and protest, and for the multiplicity of interests and socioeconomic groups that they represented, “from Marxists to Islamists”. However, this movement was not able to truly contest the Moroccan regime’s deeply entrenched political, economic, ideological nature. It did, however, comprise the most far-reaching threat to the monarchy and offered new contexts through which future challenges to the regime can operate.

There are several factors and strategies which can explain the Moroccan regime’s stability amidst the highly effective attempts worldwide to topple and restructure existing political edifices. Based on Amaney A. Jamal notion of patronage published in her book (2007), one of the major benefits to the monarchy during this period was the extensive patronage system of the King, which includes strong networks at all levels of society, from low level public workers to royal nobles and elites. Parliament itself is entirely financially dependent upon the King, which therefore ensures that they are subservient to his interests. Even low ranking civil servants are given wages that comprise half of Moroccan tax revenues, and uses wages to ensure the loyalty of this broad support base.

Another technique the king uses to guarantee his stability is his manipulation of party politics. The king presents himself as an arbiter above all party politics, which is solidified through the minority pluralistic election system of Parliament. Using his religious and paternal authority and charisma to distance himself from unpopular parliamentary politics while taking credit for successful measures, he plays parties against one another and seats himself between the as a moderator. This allows the king to act efficiently without the accountability of needing to consult Parliament first.

In addition, Mohammed VI’s popular legitimacy adds to the already deeply entrenched traditional, historical, religious legitimacy that the monarchy has always enjoyed. In contrast to the more draconian rule of his father, Mohammed VI has enjoyed a large degree of popularity due to the distance from his father’s repressive tendencies. He is therefore able to appear to be the “liberal modernizer” of Morocco. This is further solidified by the “red lines” in the media, which, along with the Sahara issue and Islam, keeps criticism and denunciation of the king directly as quite strictly off-limits. As people do not intend to cross this red line, this media rule has transformed itself into a cultural custom as well, which has led to a great deal of self-censorship of the Moroccan population around these topics. This self-censorship carried over into the 20 February movement’s protests, which never directly criticized the king or called for the fall of the regime, but instead denounced “corruption”, “despotism”, and “authoritarianism” in its place.

All of these factors, which guarantee the king’s high level of consolidated power, allowed him to act swiftly and unilaterally in response to the 20 February Movement protests. Immediately, he appointed a constitutional commission and co-opted the discourse of the movement to appear as though he was directly responding to the protester’s demands. This made the regime more stable than if he had initiated a violent crackdown, like many of the other countries whose regimes were sent into turmoil during the Arab spring. Danon (2014) asserts that the king’s use of moderate repression and reforms allowed for much wider stability during the aftermath of the Moroccan Arab Spring protests.

Morocco’s long history of traditional, religious, and political legitimacy and its use of pre-colonial political structures in a modern context in conjunction with its growing popular legitimacy and ostensible willingness to make democratic reforms successfully guarantee its stability, at least for the present moment. This stability allows the regime to make cosmetic

reforms such implementing more institutions, separating the government's powers, and responding to popular demands which contribute to the perception that Morocco is a gradually democratizing state. There is evidence, based on the 20 February Movement, that the regime is willing to adjust to meet the demands of the people, though only to the extent that the regime's hegemony is never compromised. There is some significance to this; in a regime which relies so heavily on paternalistic rule and maintaining the favor of the people, once the regime gives up an aspect of its power, it can never return to the way it ruled in the past. Those who demand further reforms in the Moroccan political system must be careful not to confuse carefully disguised power consolidation with democratization.

## Corruption in Morocco: Social Movements and the Makhzen?

Morocco stands out in the Middle East and North Africa as one of the few countries to not have experienced political upheaval during the Arab Spring of 2011 and is considered with Lebanon as one of the most open Arab country, with an even more stable political system. That stability is largely due to the evolution of its political system over the course of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century under King Hassan II, which allowed the development of a fairly liberal constitutional monarchy. Despite multiple reforms, Morocco has been unable to curb the problem of corruption. Indeed, it is currently ranked 90<sup>th</sup> in the world in the corruption index and in 2013, 49% of Moroccans reported they had given a bribe in the last year. Corruption has been a continuous issue in Morocco for many years, which has led the government to enact legislative measures to combat it, but there is remains large gap between these measures and their actual impact. Thus, corruption in Morocco is a deeply rooted phenomenon that hurts society economically and politically, and while there have been many efforts against it, both by the government and by civil society, corruption remains a major obstacle to the expansion of Morocco into a global power.

Corruption, the dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, has been one of the most important factors hindering the economic development in Morocco since its independence. It is prominent in the governing circles with many people from the old guard and elites as well as in the police and judicial sector using bribes to maintain their status or obtain more revenue. Almost all sectors of the country suffer from widespread corruption. Morocco is marked by a culture of patronage, nepotism and *wasta* (the use of connections). Under the Moroccan Criminal Code, active and passive bribery, influence peddling and abuse of office are illegal, however, anti-corruption laws are not actually enforced by the government. Prosecutions of corruption cases have been accused of targeting only petty corruption, and, allegedly, companies owned by highly influential persons are rarely disciplined. Yet, these people are the ones that contribute the most to corruption in the state. These individuals are typically described as members of the "old guard": powerful generals, security chiefs, dignitaries and wealthy businesspersons who still wield considerable power in the country. In the past, they engaged in "high level" corruption, where the state used its power to favor these people in exchange for their loyalty to the regime. For example: "Senior military officers have been active participants in, and major beneficiaries of, this system, particularly through their involvement in smuggling and trafficking activities."<sup>1</sup> These people have very little to gain from any genuine move toward the greater respect for the rule of law and the creation of a level-playing field among economic and political actors as their whole empires could crumble from it. Its important to note that not only these people have the power to obstruct any reforms initiated by the government in the fight against corruption, but they also represent an important grip through which Mohamed VI maintains his power. Therefore, Mohamed VI is torn between his desire to transform the deeply flawed political structures he inherited, and his dependence on powerful forces that hold him back. Confronting the powerful conservative forces near him is a huge political risk as these elites could turn against him and he could lose a major source of legitimacy. Meanwhile, failure to distance himself from those forces will

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<sup>1</sup> Denoex, Guilain. "Morocco Democracy Assessment Update." Center for Democracy and Governance, The Inter-Agency Democracy Working Group (DWG) of the United States' Mission in Rabat, Morocco, 21 July 2001. Web. P.11

leave him prisoner of a system over which he only has limited control, limiting his aspirations for Morocco.

The problem of such high level of corruptions is that it hurts the development of the state economically and socially. It has been one of the most prominent factors hindering the development of Morocco due to it restricting of the rights of citizens, lengthening of bureaucratic procedures and reduction of transparency of both companies and the state. First of all, in Morocco, the high level of corruption has affected Morocco's economy negatively. Since many citizens evade taxation by paying officials, the government doesn't have access to a lot of potential revenue. Economically, high corruption is also a factor that turns away foreign companies, reducing FDI flows into Morocco. The Moroccan citizen also suffers from the lack of transparency and accountability of the government as it makes it difficult for him to have access to services that should be a right. Corruption extends throughout many sectors and levels, including the judicial system, police, land administration, infrastructure and public utilities (education and health). Indeed, in a system that experiences a lot of corruption, the quality of services provided to citizens is often very bad as people need to pay to receive services that may be offered by the state in other countries. The government is unwilling to provide aid to its larger population, instead favoring the elites who pledge allegiance to them against some power. This is hugely problematic as a large part of the population is ignored, doesn't receive access to basic services, which may bring health issues, and may not be able to participate politically as all government positions are given rather than gained. Meanwhile, due to the rampant corruption, the division between the legal and illegal was blurred. This suggests that the rule of law was no longer being really implemented throughout the country and would often be overlooked against briberies. Corruption had become a rule itself. It is extremely deeply rooted in Morocco and in people's attitudes.

In response to many condemning reports by international organizations and the international media regarding the pervasive role played by corruption in the economic and political life in Morocco, the King and the government started pursuing reforms meant to clean the state. In 1995, the state launched an anti-corruption campaign called the "campagne d'assainissement." This campaign was led by the King and the Makhzen with very little involvement from the Prime Minister, showing the campaign was a "determined and powerful display of arbitrary rule on the part of the centralized power."<sup>2</sup> It showed that the Makhzen was not going to allow the independent evolution of the private sector which had been developing rapidly. Many people saw this campaign as being very arbitrary as the King and the Makhzen used it as an excuse to imprison anyone who was gaining too much power vis-à-vis to the palace but was not actually implementing the same requirements to everyone in society, thus permitting the continuation of corruption in the state. The *Confederation Generale des Entreprises au Maroc* (CGEM), a representative of the private sector to the state, supported the development of a strong and independent private sector and stood up to the minister of the interior, negotiating a solution to this issue. This allowed them to carve themselves a new role within the political process but their power remains very limited compared to the state. Indeed, facing the rise of more vocal businessmen through the CGEM, the central power felt threatened and needed to crack down on these new elements of the business community: "The anti-corruption campaign of 1995-1996 [...] brought in line an association that attempted to become an autonomous source of power. The central power has used a dual strategy to prevent an autonomous private sector from emerging as a result of the economic liberalization measures."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the government's first effort at reducing corruption in the state were actually used as a strategy to repress a growing group in society and maintain their power and legitimacy. They used the CGEM to pass the new reforms while demonstrating the reach they still had and maintain control over the business industry.

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2 Boussaid, Farid. "State Business Relations in Morocco." Knowledge Programme Civil Society in West Asia. University of Amsterdam, June 2010. Web. P.9

3 Boussaid, Farid. "State Business Relations in Morocco." Knowledge Programme Civil Society in West Asia. University of Amsterdam, June 2010. Web. p.13

The new king, Mohamed VI, decided to improve rule of law by pursuing reforms on corruption and has passed significant measures to improve the effectiveness of the system. In one of his first speeches in 1999, he called for a “new concept of authority” with a strong commitment to fight impunity, and the blurred lines between public and private interests. The new king sacked many members of the old government, including the Minister of the Interior Driss Basri, who had been considered as one of the main promulgators of corruption in the state. “His dismissal was the most concrete sign that Mohamed VI could have given of his determination to distance himself from the undemocratic practices of the past”.<sup>4</sup> He also attacked Basri’s network and patronage system, by largely reshuffling governors, walis, and other senior civil servants. Further, with the help of *Transparency Maroc*, the King implemented a program to educate the general public, in schools or in meetings, about the damages of corruption, to sensitize the population to the problem it represents. The King wanted to see the old patronage system be attacked as a way of warning them that what used to be tolerated in the earlier era would no longer be allowed. In 2007, Morocco ratified the United Nations Convention Against Corruption and established the Central Authority for the Prevention of Corruption. The agency launched a website to stop corruption in 2009, and it is exclusively dedicated to corruption incidents related to public tenders and investment operations pertinent to small and medium-sized enterprises. However, only 600 corruption incidents were reported during the first year after it was launched as small enterprises generally refrain from denouncing corruption and are skeptical about the effectiveness of this mechanism.

Despite the efforts of the king and the state, corruption remains very prevalent and is one of the main issues concerning civil society in Morocco. In 2007, the PJD (Parti de la Justice et du Développement), an Islamic political party, ran on a platform focused on public policy-related issues. Their main goals were the establishment of rule of law, the reinforcement of democracy and the fight against corruption. The Islamic parties had historically been pretty isolated from the state and the Makhzen and its main members were therefore outside this system of patronage, which has been ruling the state. In 2011, the PJD won the election while pushing for greater transparency and Abdelilah Benkirane became Prime Minister. In order to put the electoral promises into practice, the PJD decided to disclose a list of corrupt individuals that benefited from the system, as an act to “put an end to financial corruption.” However, this list was greatly delayed, most likely due to the intervention of the Makhzen, prompting Benkirane to admit the difficulty they faced in fighting the rampant corruption throughout the country. In 2012, Abdelaziz Aftati accused the ex-Finance Minister of stealing 400,000 dirhams monthly, trying to shine light on the corruption in the government. However, Aftati and the PJD were not supported by the King who asked Benkirane to “devote more time to confront the problems of the country instead of provoking polemics, which serve no Moroccans.”<sup>5</sup>

Due to the slow evolution of state led reforms, civil society and social movements in Morocco has also participated actively in fighting corruption with the help of social media and has managed to change people’s perception of corruption. Indeed, with the rise of social media, people have started reporting more corruption cases online, denouncing corrupt practices. This has led to many arrests and the creation of many online feeds to denounce corruption practices in Morocco. It started in 2007 when an unidentified person called “Targuist Sniper” posted four videos online portraying police officers stopping cars to take bribes. These videos went viral and led to the arrests of the concerned officers. Following his model, people have started using the Internet as a platform to denounce corruption and raise awareness about it. Civil society is replacing the State, which has been mainly ineffective at fighting corruption, using new technologies as channels to expand social mobilization. Thus corruption is starting to be a central issue in Morocco as shown by the large amount of social media groups denouncing it but also through the election of the PJD and its program of reducing state-led

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4 Denoëux, Guilain. “Morocco Democracy Assessment Update.” Center for Democracy and Governance, The Inter-Agency Democracy Working Group (DWG) of the United States’ Mission in Rabat, Morocco, 21 July 2001. Web. p.23

5 Perçekli, Feriha. “The Applicability of the “Turkish Model” to Morocco: The Case of the Parti De La Justice Et Du Développement (PJD).” *Insight Turkey* 14.3 (2012): 85-108. *Insight Turkey*. Web. p.101

corruption. People are starting to understand the challenge it faces and are clearly pushing for even more reforms.

Since the 1990's Morocco has thus attempted to combat corruption through both government initiatives and civil society actions to reduce the damage caused by the phenomenon. However, as we have seen, previously, while these efforts have contributed to the explosion of old corruption circles, such as the ones led by former Minister of the Interior Drill Basri, and helped reform the justice system by having significant personnel turnover and overturning previous cases that had been mired by corruption. Finally, the government and civil society has made a genuine effort to educate people on the danger of corruption in an attempt to undermine the normalization of this phenomenon. However, despite all these efforts, the public administration remains as bloated and inefficient as ever. The state serves citizens poorly and remains a major impediment to economic activity. Morocco remains dominated by an older leadership who has been able to maintain their power despite the king's efforts. This older group has been able to stop the set of reforms initiated by the king to preserve their positions and remain as present as ever. Meanwhile, the judicial and executive system remain very vulnerable to pressure from elites and can be bypassed by them at any times. The reforms initiated by the government have only had a small impact and they continue to resist calls by civil society activists to commit themselves to a broader, long-term national strategy. Meanwhile, political parties in Morocco continue to have a terrible image due to their lack of internal democracy, their inability to articulate a specific platform, especially the PJD vis-à-vis to the reduction of corruption, and many remain controlled by the old leaders, thus not transitioning power to younger leaders promoting new ideas. The civil societies' efforts to create platforms to denounce corruption remain very limited as they only affected low-level corruption and not the elites who are concerned with most 'high level' corruption in the country. Additionally, the absence of an effective online platforms, possibly powered by the government, to report bribery cases has made it difficult to allow individuals to exercise their rights and have a say against this phenomenon, limiting their impact.

Therefore, corruption is a phenomenon very deeply rooted in Moroccan society that continues to hurt the Moroccan state and its citizens. Efforts by the government, led by both the King and the elected PJD, have been very limited in effectively reducing this phenomenon, only bringing small changes, often for their own personal gain and not for the advancement of the rights of citizens. This issue is starting to become one of the most important concerns of Moroccans as represented by efforts from civil society to try to create circles to combat it as well as by the recent election of the PJD on promises of fighting the institutional corruption ruining the country.

### **From Hassan II to Mohammad VI: How to manage political dissidence?**

Hassan II (1961-1999), during the years of lead, built a population based on fear, but during the end of his life became less hard-lined and opened up freedoms for people that they had never had throughout his reign. The global north has painted Mohammad VI to be more democratic than his father, but studies have shown that this is not the case. Immediately following the bombings in Casablanca, Mohammad VI implemented new legislation to combat terrorism within the country, and academics state that that this legislation makes it possible for him to jail dissidents as a means of 'stopping terror.' Mohammad VI's use of private contractors within the realm of cyber security will show the lengths at which this king will take to stop any dissidence, and frame this breach in privacy as a means of protection for the whole nation. Mohammad VI's incredible skills at public diplomacy might have been inherited by his father, but due to technology and the growth of the Internet, nothing will stop dissidents from getting their opinions heard to the mass international public, except for themselves. Self-monitoring is Mohammad VI's new form of stopping dissidence, instead of his fathers old "disappearance" techniques.

Hassan II was a figure that many in the Arab world had feelings of "anger and envy" towards. He understood how to use geopolitics to his benefit, and put an emphasis in making the whole

world acknowledge his willingness to work with the West. Hassan II was a leader within the Arab-Israeli peace talks; and understood the need for the west to see his monarchical reign as something positive for the future of the region and its relationship to the West. Hassan II was amazing at understanding the balance of power and how to play with the international hegemonic system to his advantage.

Although he had allegiance with the hegemonic powers of the west, he was not praised by his domestic state or the military within it. There was an attempted military coup, which led to many military leaders to be jailed for life, or “disappeared” and were never found by the public again. Many grew to distrust the man, as more and more civilians began disappear. Amnesty International covered many cases of torture and overall ill treatment of Moroccans that the King or the King’s secret service claimed to be dissidents. Yet the fear that was instilled into the population led to complete silence from the general public.

The last years of Hassan II’s reign in power led to complete shift in dissidence discourse, so that Hassan II could lead to a simple and strong power transition between him and his son, Mohammad VI. By the 1990s, he was releasing previous political dissidents that he had given life or death sentences. In the end, he released more than 800 political prisoners and 195 death sentences were commuted (Independent). Many that had been jailed in Hassan II’s secret prison were finally “freed” from jail.

This incredible change within the Monarchy led to the ability of human rights organizations to enter the realm of Morocco, and they began to publish articles calling for attention to what Hassan II had done in the past, as well as what he was continuing to do. Amnesty International published documents stating Hassan II’s “secret police ‘disappeared’ hundreds of men and women, including the exiled opposition leader Mehdi Ben Bakra, who was kidnapped on a Paris street in 1965 and never seen again” (HRW Report). They claimed that Hassan II’s secret service had been using methods of torture and kidnapping in order to keep dissidence at a minimum, and hold the monarch’s power. Hassan II’s response to the allegations was that of naivety, and claimed that they were completely falsified. He stated in a television interview that, “If one percent of the human rights violations denounced by Amnesty International were true, I would no longer be able to sleep” (HRW Report). International pressure led the King to make physical change that would prove the world wrong, or show that he wanted to make a difference.

In 1990, Hassan II created an Advisory Council on Human Rights (ACHR) that would, as the king himself stated, “put an end to all of the allegations... and to close this file” (HRW Report). He claimed that he wanted a positive change within Morocco, and that it would lead to building a positive future for the long run of the nation to put this “issue” behind. The ACHR found that there had been a total of 112 Moroccans that had been victims of disappearances, and that of that number, a little less than half were found dead (HRW Report). The King publicly agreed with the number given by ACHR, and asked the council to make an action plan that would resolve the issues. The committee declared that the King should compensate the families of those that had been declared, “disappeared,” and that this would lead to the file being closed. Many human rights organizations claimed that this number should have been much higher, closer to 600 or more, and that the committee did not give any real information on what these “disappearances” were (HRW Report). There would be a long road ahead for the file of the “disappeared” to truly be closed.

While these public cases were underway, Hassan II allowed the media to have rights that they had not seen in years. Hassan II was proving that he wanted a smooth transition for his son, and that meant fully loosening his grip on power. . “Freedom of opinion and expression – included in the Constitution – ceased to be ignored and many new publications emerged. ‘All of a sudden in Morocco, we started seeing investigations, papers were tackling all the religious and moral taboos’” (Their Eyes on Me. 15). People began to have the ability to write about whatever they chose, without the fear of being labeled as a dissident. Maria Moukrim, a journalist within Morocco says, “...I published a scoop on a massive corruption scheme. I did

not get any problem at the time..." (Their Eyes on Me. 15). Suddenly, Hassan II was allowing Journalism to blossom in a way that allowed for political dissidence and questioning of the government.

When Mohammad VI officially took the throne, he continued on the path created by his father towards more transparency, making the international public believe he was heading down a path of democratization. Although his father had publicly agreed on the number published by the ACHR, Hassan II never publicly acknowledged responsibility for the disappearances. One of the first measures Mohammad VI took, was to take responsibility, and create a committee that would expand the study of the "disappeared." This committee opened up thousands of applications for people who claimed family member had been "disappeared" by the monarchy, and they continued to compensate for these cases. The total amount of compensation within the committee was equivalent to almost \$100 million USD (HRW Report). Although this was an incredible step towards justice of the "disappeared," many international human rights organizations claimed that this was just a public diplomacy stunt. It was created to make both the domestic and international public believe that Mohammad VI was fighting for freedom of expression and equality, while in reality, was continuing to "buy-off" dissidents, but instead of behind doors, it was now done publicly in a way that was legal under both domestic law and international law.

Human rights organizations also claimed that the committee made no real cause towards exposing the real truth behind these atrocities, and did not hold the perpetrators accountable for their actions (HRW Report). They also claimed that it was a puppet show from the King himself, considering that he was the one that created the committees, and there was no real diversity amongst the board itself. This meant that there was a conservative hierarchy of violations, and that compensation only occurred towards "certain victims of abuse but not others" (HRW Report). Although thousands of cases went through to compensation, many claim that true justice was never implemented.

On May 16, 2003, Morocco experienced their first terrorist attack that would shake the monarchy down a path of extreme vigilance. 45 people were killed on site, and many more severely injured. Less than a week after the attacks, parliament implemented a law that would change the progress of human rights within Morocco. This new law defined an act of terrorism by stating that if its "main objective is to disrupt public order by intimidation, force, violence, fear or terror" (HRW Report). The law also stated that "the involvement in organized groups or congregations with the intent of committing an act of terrorism," and "the promulgation and dissemination of propaganda or advertisement in support of the above-mentioned acts," would also be deemed as an act of terrorism (HRW Report). Many human rights organizations condemned these new laws because of their generality and ability to be molded to benefit many different parties in whichever way needed. Political dissidence would once again, be impossible to do legally within the country.

Immediately following the new legislation, security forces detained more than 2,000 people under grounds of terrorist actions. They were held "for days or weeks in secret detention centers, and were often subject to various forms of ill treatment including torture" (HRW Report). Courts denied many of fair hearings with some lasting just minutes before the judge had made up their mind.

Everything took a turn for the worst on July 11, 2003, when Moustapha Alaoui, the director of the newspaper *al-Ousbou*, of "justifying acts of terrorism via a publication" and sentenced him to one year in prison, suspended, and ordered his weekly banned for three months. (HRW Report). The court claimed that Alaoui had published a section by an unknown source that had claimed responsibility for over half of the terror attacks that had taken place (HRW Report). The court deemed the Alaoui had supported terrorists. Soon after Alaoui, many other journalists began to be summoned by the courts, like Mohamed el-Hour, Abdelmajid Bentaher, and Ali Mrabet. Each allegedly "praising actions done by Islamist extremists," "inciting violence", and "undermining the monarchy", when in reality were merely publishing these actions that others had done for news and public awareness (HRW Report). Many were

banned from practicing journalism for lengthy periods, imprisoned, and detained, while given unfair trials. Hisham says “Starting from 2001 to 2003 we witnessed a slow decline until we reached a situation where most media are either under the regime’s direct control or under its economic grip. Either way the media was no longer free” (Their Eyes on Me. 15). The shift from the ending years of Hassan II towards media freedom began to slowly end.

Yet even with this incredibly fast shift towards media censorship, the Internet continued to grow in ways in which the monarchy did not yet have the ability to control. Citizen journalism began to spread all over the world, including Morocco. Hisham Almiraat, a medical doctor by training, recalls the beginning of this realization of citizen journalism and the power that it could take, by stating, “I started blogging in 2007. I found it great that people could speak in their own name. They did not belong to any group or political party and did not receive any funding” (Their Eyes on Me. 16). He believes that the Internet, “if it is used properly is a game changer, it can – still today – take down regimes” (Their Eyes on Me. 16). People from all across Morocco began publishing their experiences with the monarchy online for all to read.<sup>6</sup>

The monarch soon found ways of controlling dissidence within the Internet when in 2008, Fouad Mourtada, who had a satirical Facebook page of the Kings brother, was accused of identity theft (Their Eyes on Me. 16). Mourtada was the first Moroccan to be jailed “based on the content posted on Facebook” (Their Eyes on Me. 16). The trial condemned what Mourtada had done, and sentenced him to three years in jail, but soon after, the King granted him a royal pardon, and he was released after 43 days (Their Eyes on Me. 16). This case led to outrage within the Moroccan human rights communities, that would change the public sphere’s role in media freedoms. After this incident, there was a community created defending online freedom of speech. “It was the first of many episodes that gathered a community of people, who would have otherwise never met, if it was not for the internet.” (16). People from all across Morocco began to see that this outlet that they had deemed as free, was officially under the control of the regime, but citizens were ready to fight to gain that freedom back.

The Arab Spring began in Tunisia, and the internet began to form as a completely different tool altogether; it was now used to organize activism and political dissidence. Hisham Almiraat was one of the supporters and members of the February 20<sup>th</sup> movement. He says that at the beginning of the creation of the movement, they were using tools such as Facebook to plan events, and to organize different protests. But a few days before their first protest, Maghreb Arab Press and other national newspapers were spreading lies about the February 20<sup>th</sup> movement saying that the protests were canceled, or that the leaders of the movement were homosexuals and liars. Hisham Almiraat decided that the best way to combat such lies, was by starting a website that would be solely for the purpose of the movement. It was kept with up to date news, and other useful tips on how to stay active and safe within the movement. The website began to grow, and although the February 20<sup>th</sup> movements Facebook pages had been found by the government, this site seemed to stay as the one source not tainted by the regime (Their Eyes on Me. 17).

Mamfakinch, Almiraat’s website name, means “not giving up” in Arabic (Their Eyes on Us. 17). This sight grew in popularity immensely, and more and more people were beginning to join the movement. But things took a turn for the website and movement as a whole, when they began to lose their audience due to fear from the monarch as well as an influx in Syrian refugees. “The dominant mood in the Arab world is resignation: ‘between the Islamists on one side and dictatorships on the other, I’d rather stay home and do nothing’” (Their Eyes on Me. 17). People began retreating, and as they began to lose their audience, they began to get hacked.

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<sup>6</sup> for a fresh look at digital culture and the blogosphere in Morocco, I recommend a newly defended thesis: Youssef Baahmad. (July 2020). Digital Culture: An Exploration of the Chilling Effects on Freedom of Expression in the Moroccan Blogosphere 2008-2016. Unpublished Manuscript, Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco.

Mamfakinch's website has a send-in letter page, where it allows people to write letters to the editors. All 15 people from the editorial team got sent an email saying that it had a story that would change everything. Of the 15 editors, 7 opened up the emails to find a malware system on their computer. They sent the computers to Citizen Lab, which is a lab at the University of Toronto that focuses on issues of information pertaining to human rights and global security. Citizen Lab came to the solution that it was the Hacking Team's spyware and that it costs 200,000 euros (Their Eyes on Me. 17. The New York Times). This meant that the Moroccan government thought that Mamfakinch's website was so important that it was willing to spend vast amounts of money to find political dissidents. This began to horrify many members of the movement, and they began to retreat. They couldn't take any more risks.

Ali Anouzla, a renowned journalist and Editor-in-Chief of Lakome, as well as award winner of Leaders for Democracy prize from the Project on Middle East Democracy in 2013, also found that he was being watched by the Moroccan government. It all began when he realized that his phone had been tapped when he had made a phone call to a Belgian senator who was attempting to set up a meeting. Shortly after the phone call took place, the senator was contacted by the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and they had to cancel the meeting. This meeting was not made public by anyone, nobody within her administration knew of the potential meeting, and the only means by which the government could have figured it out was by phone tapping (Their Eyes on Me. 33).

Anouzla was also sent to court when he published an article on Al Qaeda, and he linked a video from the terrorist organization threatening Morocco. The court claimed that he was "glorifying terrorism" and was immediately sent to jail for 5 weeks, and the charges have still not been dropped. Anouzla claims that the true reason he was sentenced was because prior to this article, he published a piece showing the King pardoning a Spanish pedophile that ended up sparking outrage amongst the country. This created an outrage across all different realms of Moroccan public discourse about the "dysfunctionality of the Moroccan judicial system" (Their Eyes on Us. 33). The King used the terrorist laws to his advantage in finding a way to stop a dissident. This was not only stopping Anouzla of dissidence, it was instilling fear into the Moroccan human rights communities that if they attempted to create any changes within the system, they would be taken to court.

The New Press Code of 2016 was another tool that has been used by the King for public diplomacy purposes. The King claimed that this law provides new civil liberties for journalists, but many would argue that it is the same law, just in different language. Both of the laws prohibit any "publication containing an offense to the King, the royal family, Islam, or territorial integrity," but the difference being that instead of prison sentences, the courts can now "withdraw and seize publications, as well as suspend the activities of news organizations as punishments" (CPJ Article). The main problem being that the penal code has not changed, and in this code, prison time is still legal, which ends up debunking the new law, and allowing officials to get around it with the old code (CPJ Article).

Karima Nadir "was interrogated for five hours in early September [2015] as part of a defamation lawsuit by the Interior Ministry in May against the Moroccan Digital Rights Association" (NY TIMES). The interviews that I displayed in this piece were done within this report. This report, which simply stated the experiences of 4 activist journalists, is now being accused of defaming the state. Once the article was published, it found that the state of Morocco had spent close to \$3.3 million USD worth on an Italian company called the Hacking Team (NY TIMES).

Chris Coleman was recently in the media when he leaked what he claimed to be letters from Moroccan Intelligence agents to American and French Journalists to come to Morocco and write positive pieces on Morocco. These bribes from the Moroccan government were proved to be credible when a cyber security company authenticated some of the emails. All parties denied the allegations, but it was clear that the case did occur (NY TIMES).

The King has always been a keen observer of his fathers amazing skills at public diplomacy, and he has also found his way into that realm by hiring U.S. lobbying firms for a total of roughly \$20 million USD (FP Article). The King has been found to be hiring “policymakers and soliciting sympathetic coverage from journalists in the United States on all issues” (FP Article). They use this interlocking of NGO’s nonprofits, and lobbying firms to find the loopholes in the system to their advantage. A study of Foreign Policy Magazine on the Western Sahara showed the length of monitoring within the state. Every move they made, they were followed by what they called “watchers” that were monitoring the ways in which they viewed each situation. Although they did not specifically state any use of spyware or malware during their visit, this other vehicle of fear was enough for them. This sense of monitoring eats away at people’s ability to have freedom of press or speech.

The Moroccan government has found that the new platform of dissidence is involved online. “Repressive regimes have understood that the internet is not something to be left in the hands of citizens. They realized censorship is pretty obvious and so those companies are offering them a magic toy that instill fear among people and lead them to self-censorship. The very thought of being surveilled lead people to decided by themselves to withdraw” (Their Eyes on Us. 20). Mohammad VI has found a new way to control the population that no longer means “disappeared” people. The ability for the king to make precedence of the issue simply by putting one reporter on trial under defamation, or terrorism charges, allows for a sense of fear that has been instilled in the populations. “Surveillance creates power. Secret surveillance by Governments, state agencies and corporations is the most dangerous form because as an individual we cannot easily hold that power in check” (Their Eyes on Me. 8). The King no longer needs to make new laws or put people on trial, the public is now doing it for themselves.

Post Arab Spring political restructuring of the public culture in Morocco echoes the hybrid regimes tactics of manipulation and patronage; (non) social movements in the post 2011, including the online boycott of 2018 and the Rif Hirak of 2016 are instances of resistance and bargaining with the margins left to counter-movements in Morocco asking for more freedoms and democratization. The emerging dissident voices in Morocco, from intellectuals, bloggers, journalists, politicians, human rights activists, are restructuring the political discursive landscape in Morocco; added to the growing marginality and precarity in urban spaces would lead to new strategies and tactics from both state and Society in their daily interactions.

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