

**No Concessions:  
Independent Media and the Reshaping of the Moroccan Public**

by

Annemarie Iddins

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Aswin Punathambekar, Co-Chair  
Assistant Professor Shazia Iftkhar, Co-Chair  
Assistant Professor Muzammil Hussain  
Emeritus Professor Paddy Scannell  
Associate Professor Geneviève Zubrzycki

Annemarie Iddins

amiddins@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-6251-255X

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## **Dedication**

To Jim and Lisa Iddins for their unwavering support

&

To Andrei Bodor for his unwavering skepticism

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## **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

- ABM – Association des Blogeurs Marocains/Association of Moroccan Bloggers
- ADB – African Development Bank
- ADN – Association des Droits Numérique/Digital Rights Association
- ADSL – Asymmetrical digital subscriber line
- AMDH – Association Marocaine des Droits de l’Homme/ Moroccan Association of Human Rights
- ANRT – Agence nationale des réglementation des télécommunications/National telecommunications regulatory agency
- AQIM – Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
- BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation
- CCM – Centre Cinématographique Marocain/Moroccan Cinematic Center
- CDT – Confédération démocratique du travail/Democratic Confederation of Labor
- CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- CIDE – Convention International des Droits de l’Enfant/International Convention on the Rights of the Child
- CNC – Centre nationale du cinéma/National Cinema Center (France)
- CNDH – Conseil National des Droits de l’Homme/National Council of Human Rights
- ESAV – L’École Supérieure des Arts Visuels
- EU – European Union
- FIFM – Festival International du Film de Marrakech/Marrakech International Film Festival
- FOTN – Freedom on the Net
- GSM – Global System for Mobile communication
- HRW – Human Rights Watch
- IAM – Itissalat al-Maghrib/Maroc Telecom
- ITU – International Telecommunication Union
- M20 – Mouvement de 20 Février/February 20 Movement

M6 – popular term used to refer to King Mohammed VI

MAD – Moroccan Dirham (currency)

MALI – Mouvement Alternatif pour les Libertés Individuelles/Alternative Movement for Individual Liberties

MAP – Agence Maghreb Arabe Presse/Arab Maghreb Press Agency

MENA – Middle East North Africa

MISOC – Moroccan Internet Society

MRE – Marocain Résident à l’Étranger/Moroccan Residing Abroad

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

NMC – New Moroccan Cinema

OJD – Organisme de Justification de la Diffusion

ONA/SNI – Omnium Nord Africain/Société Nationale d’Investissement

ONI – OpenNet Initiative

ONPT – Office National des Postes et Télécommunications/National Post and Telecommunications Office

PAM – Parti Authenticité et Modernité/Authenticity and Modernity Party

PJD – Parti de la Justice et du Développement/Justice and Development Party

PPS – Parti du Progrès et du Socialisme/Party of Progress and Socialism

PTT – Postes, Télégraphes et Téléphones/Post, Telegraph, and Telephone

RSF – Reporters Sans Frontières/Reporters Without Borders

RTM/SNRT – Radiodiffusion Télévision Marocaine/Société nationale de radiodiffusion et de télévision

TNC – Transnational Corporation

UAF – Union de l’Action Féminine/Women’s Action Union

UMT – Union Marocaine de Travail/Moroccan Workers’ Union

UNEM – Union Nationale des Étudiants du Maroc/National Students’ Union of Morocco

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund

USFP – Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires/Socialist Union of Popular Forces

## **Abstract**

Communication scholars attending to globalization increasingly look to the local as an articulation of how societies transform and are transformed by capital and communication technologies associated with globalization. This dissertation analyzes how the emergence of independent media in Morocco has remade the link between culture and politics in an era defined by economic liberalization, political transition and cultural globalization. Once the domain of the state and the monarchy, culture – understood as everyday, lived experience – has been re-mediated through magazines, film and various digital media platforms and practices. This project engages with media industry studies and cultural politics in examining three distinct, yet interconnected, sites of mediation: the newsmagazine *Telquel*, new Moroccan cinema and activist blogger collective *Mamfakinch*. Using thematic textual analyses, in-depth interviews and participant observation, I track cultural and political tensions as they play across these different mediated sites, signaling foundational shifts in Moroccan public culture and the emergence of a distinct new arena of socio-cultural and political interactions.

Independent media use the forces of capital and technological affordances to create these new discursive spaces within a broader Moroccan media landscape. In doing so they act as a platform for a progressive counterpublic to advance a set of values associated with individual rights and secularism while countering the political power of the monarchy and the Islamist PJD. They generate interventions around language politics, alternative information infrastructures outside the purview of the state and new modes of publicness characterized by what I call flexible publics, or groups groups that coalesce around particular issues, operating outside institutional politics to assert claims in public and provocative ways. Ultimately, by engaging with the lived realities of contemporary Morocco, independent media both participate in Morocco's entry into global modernity and display a fundamental ambivalence toward modernities caught between increasing global inequality and the neoliberal authoritarian state.



## Introduction

On March 23, 1965 students took to the streets of Casablanca to protest limitations on access to higher education, setting off a wave of wide-ranging protests around the country that were violently repressed by authorities. On March 30, King Hassan II addressed the nation by saying “Let me tell you that there is no danger so serious for the State as that of an alleged intellectual. It would have been better if you were all illiterate...” (Hassan II, 1965). Universities had long been centers for the circulation of oppositional ideas, both before independence and after, and philosophy in particular became a target for authorities as Marxist-Leninist currents of thought became more influential in the *Union Nationale des Étudiants du Maroc* (UNEM). When universities were expanded in the 1980s, philosophy departments were replaced by Islamic studies in an effort to weaken the left and its challenges to traditional centers of power.

Fast forward to 2014 when Morocco’s National Library was overrun with people attending Morocco’s first edition of Philosophy Night.<sup>1</sup> An estimated 9,000 participants, including philosophy clubs from local high schools, gathered over two nights in Rabat and Casablanca for philosophical speeches and debates inspired by similar events in major European cities and orchestrated in conjunction with UNESCO’s World Philosophy Day. Telquel cultural journalist Kenza Sefrioui, who spoke about the relationship between philosophy and art, also covered the event in an article titled “Thirst for thinking” (Sefrioui, 2014). Sefrioui’s article noted the remarkable diversity of the crowd in terms of age and social milieu and quoted organizer Driss Jaydane that the event is proof that “questioning is inseparable from progress and

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<sup>1</sup> For a short video of the Rabat event see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWDnshQzgHo>

that youth want something else than a singular response from a closed and deadening culture” (Sefrioui, 2014, p. 32). And philosophy night is not alone – one can see in contemporary Morocco a general preoccupation with public culture and its possibilities, as evident in the growth of organizations<sup>2</sup> and initiatives, as well as media and events, dedicated to culture.

These types of events and mediated discourses signal foundational shifts in Moroccan public culture and the emergence of a distinct new arena of socio-cultural and political interactions. Several important dynamics are bound up in the emergence of this arena: first, the increasing penetration of capital associated with economic liberalization and accompanied by a rising middle class with more meaningful choices in culture and consumption than in politics; second, the growth of information infrastructures both as part of and independent of the state, as well as the increasing democratization of cultural production due to technological affordances; and finally, the simultaneous weakening of the left and the rise of political Islam in a moment of political transition, making the cultural field particularly fraught and a site of contestation over the meaning of Moroccan modernity. A fledgling independent media has become ground zero for this new cultural dynamism, taking up debates about public culture and constructing new discursive spaces within a broader Moroccan media landscape.

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<sup>2</sup> Included in these organizations is Racines, an “association dedicated to culture, development and the promotion of cultural and creative industries and cooperation in Africa” ([www.racines.ma](http://www.racines.ma)). In November 2014 Racines hosted a conference on “The General State of Culture in Morocco,” where journalist, university director, cultural advocate and playwright Driss Ksikes responded to a heated debate about the role of mosques in cultural life by saying mosques have not been spaces of open debate and critical thought for a long time (Racines, 2014). The search for spaces open to questioning and creative collaborations led the cultural advocacy group Racines to create Artmap.ma, a database of cultural spaces across Morocco. Included in this database is the National Library, which hosted the conference in Rabat and has become a dynamic space for cultural programming since it opened in 2008.

## **Independent media and cultural politics under Mohammed VI**

This dissertation is about independent media in Morocco in the era of Mohammed VI.<sup>3</sup> It explores shifts in Morocco's media system from the perspective of media industry studies and cultural politics, and tracks cultural and political tensions as they play across three different mediated sites in relation to debates about globalization and hybridity. I show that the emergence of independent media in Morocco derives from 30 years of economic liberalization and has produced a new relationship between culture and politics, ultimately arguing that the remediation of everyday cultural practices through independent media can be understood to be producing new kinds of mediated publics that have revitalized the Moroccan public sphere. In many ways independent media lay the groundwork for public debate, inviting people into new forms of subjectivity as citizen-subjects and building content around language based in secularism and human rights, as well as Moroccan specificity, through which claims can be directed to domestic and transnational institutions.

Once the domain of the state and the monarchy, more recently culture has been re-mediated through independent media such as magazines, film, and various digital media platforms and practices. As a result, mediated publics have emerged that link the cultural and political domains in novel ways with often surprising consequences. For this project I examine three mediated sites in different, yet interconnected, domains: print journalism, the film industry and an activist blogger collective. Each site mobilizes different aspects of Moroccan culture and transnational connections to reshape public political discourse. To analyze these phenomena, I use a combination of thematic textual analyses, in-depth interviews and participant observation

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<sup>3</sup> Mohammed VI is the current king of Morocco, who is popularly referred to as "M6." He took over the throne in 1999 after the death of his totalitarian father, Hassan II, and is widely popular due to his "prince of the people" persona and reformist agenda, although few of those reforms have resulted in any meaningful change to the governing authority of the monarchy.

to demonstrate how a generational transformation in media and communication, and the left more broadly, has constructed independent media as platforms for the cultural dynamism of a more liberal left to advance its own version of modernity and associated political projects as a counterpoint to those of the monarchy and increasingly the Islamists.

This project focuses on the reign of Morocco's current king, Mohammed VI, beginning in 1999 with his ascent to power, and reforms that resulted in the opening up of civil society via freedom of association and media liberalization. However, I situate these relatively recent events within the larger context of 30 years of economic liberalization and broader histories of dissent in Morocco's media. Theoretically I engage with global media scholars working at the nexus of cultural geographies of media production and critical cultural studies, particularly Kraidy's (2005) work on hybridity, where he recaptures the concept of hybridity as part of a critical repertoire of global communication. In looking at localized practices and interrogating the strategic use of discourses about hybridity in relation to power it becomes clear that multiple forms of Moroccan modernity are being advanced by various actors and competing for legitimacy among publics. With that in mind I examine the existing literatures around modernity, cultural geography and mediated activism. My intervention involves integrating analyses across industry logics, technological platforms and cultural politics, so that it becomes clear how political economic shifts and technological affordances create the conditions of possibility for certain types of claim-making, as well as how those mediated claims are then taken up in public culture. Additionally, in regard to the emergent field of digital studies, I make the case that the artificial separating out of the digital makes little sense and that in order to really understand the digital it must be understood as part of intermedia relationships and convergences. Given the way media systems have developed around the world, I adopt a comparative, cross-platform

approach in order to situate the digital in relation to other media forms. In examining these dynamics I attempt to theorize from the ground up, developing conceptual tools specific to the Moroccan case and thinking about the ways they may or may not travel in other contexts.

Together my three sites of analysis reveal a decisive shift from what is often described as “folkloric” conceptions of cultural heritage instrumentalized by the state to a more dynamic sense of culture as a transnational zone of encounter and contention grounded in everyday life. In other words, as one interviewee said, “the state likes dead culture, things it can stick in a museum” (Ksikes, personal communication, 2014). Fundamentally my sites of analysis demonstrate a decoupling of culture and politics as domains of the state and the use of culture to access, or put pressure on, the political realm. The entrance of capital from transnational corporations into Morocco’s media market and new modes of textual production and circulation in some ways frees media, or at least allows them more space to resist, the imperatives of the state. However, these dynamics also shift the agenda somewhat, in that discourses about culture are now being constructed in conjunction with transnational policy and development objectives, as well as those of a capitalist consumer culture. Ultimately this amounts to a new cultural politics spanning multiple scales – local, national, regional, transnational – that is heavily reliant on a politics of shame enacted through local media in conjunction with transnational civil society. In particular the independent media I examine act as a platform for a progressive counterpublic to emphasize the everyday culture of urban youth in order to counter the rise of Islamist political power and culture. While there has long been more liberty in the cultural field than in politics, independent media such as *Telquel*, the new Moroccan cinema and *Mamfakinch* are indicative of shifting cultural geographies and the increasing mediation of everyday life. This allows for the construction of discourses around controversial social issues and the deployment

of a dynamic popular culture that fundamentally challenges the cultural hegemony of the monarchy as well as the foundation on which traditional modes of political power rest.

The key stakeholders across these sites are the state in the form of the monarchy or *makhzen*,<sup>4</sup> Islamist political parties and a range of progressive counterpublic voices traditionally affiliated with the left, but in many cases eschewing institutional political affiliations. In Morocco, a postcolonial politics defined by the consolidation of power in the monarchy and its web of influence is being transformed by the simultaneous rise of neoliberal globalization and political Islam, which has been coupled with widespread persecution of and disillusionment with the left. The dynamics of interaction between these three stakeholders and their alternatively complimentary and contradictory aims inform every aspect of this study because the subset of media addressed here are the product of a new and more liberal generation of the left – frequently bi-national elites or the product of a middle class educated in the French system – and that is responding to the rise in Islamist political power that followed the repression of their parents’ generation. The counterpublic voices present in *Telquel*, the new Moroccan cinema and *Mamfakinch* are generally progressive and largely secular, favoring individual liberties like freedom of conscience and a critical subjectivity that at least questions if not adopts a rather pejorative attitude toward popular religiosity. Here “Islamists” and “Islamism” are used to refer to the Justice and Development Party, or PJD, whose establishment as a legal political party in 1996 signified the incorporation of those favoring forms of societal organization based in Islamic

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<sup>4</sup> *Makhzen* is a Moroccan Arabic word meaning “storehouse,” that was used to refer to the state in the form of a governing establishment revolving around the sultan and associated notables in various sectors. More recently it has come to stand in for an extensive system of royal privilege and clientelism associated with the contemporary Moroccan state. This “deep state” surrounding the monarchy is understood to be the real center of power in Moroccan political life despite the existence of parliament and other ostensibly democratic institutions.

precepts into official politics and public life.<sup>5</sup> During the Years of Lead,<sup>6</sup> Hassan II favored Islamic traditions and influence in order to counter leftist opposition, but under Mohammed VI the situation has reversed somewhat, with the monarch frequently supporting leftist initiatives while actively invoking his role as Commander of the Faithful in order to counter the rising influence of political Islam under the PJD. That both Islamists and the left have been public enemy number one of the monarchy at various points in time means there are sometimes interesting and often surprising intersections in their interests.<sup>7</sup> However, the left, and elites in particular with their close business, education and cultural ties to former colonizer France, are often seen as advocating for foreign intervention or domination in their support for cosmopolitanism and a set of values emphasizing individual rights over community identity. These concerns become especially salient in light of the increasing penetration of global capital and cultural producers' openness to making use of that capital in the interest of independence from the state.

This dissertation looks locally at this complex interweaving of stakeholders and interests characterizing Morocco's contemporary communicative environment, focusing on the implications of increasingly democratic cultural production in a society that is fundamentally authoritarian. When I began asking about media in Morocco, the story most people told was one of stasis and stagnation. However, it quickly became clear that Moroccan media in the 21st century constituted a much more variegated space than these comments let on and taking

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<sup>5</sup> The PJD emerged in 1996-1998 out of earlier Islamist groups such as Chabiba Islamiya and the Unity and Reform Movement (MUR), encouraged by Interior Minister Driss Basri as a way to cultivate a moderate Islamism and bring Islamists into the realm of royal influence. Significantly, the party's original founder in the 1960s, Abdelkrim El Khatib, was an important member of the nationalist movement and supported the monarchy's role as religious leader.

<sup>6</sup> The Years of Lead refers to a period between 1965-1990 when an increasingly totalitarian Hassan II used violence against dissidents, particularly the left. The period was characterized by disappearances, torture, secret prisons and arbitrary judicial proceedings, leading to widespread paranoia and distrust of authorities.

<sup>7</sup> One example of these intersections is seen in the case of Mamfakinch, when Islamists and leftists both take up the cause of freedom of expression online.

seriously recent shifts in the media landscape allows us to see how Moroccan independent media alternatively complement and contradict the workings of power, ultimately negotiating new narratives and making public culture a domain of contestation over diverse societal projects. Many of these dynamics are by no means unique to Morocco, but are instead relevant to many nations of the Global South that underwent World Bank coordinated economic restructuring in the 1980s, opening them up to flows of capital and culture from elsewhere, as well as nations whose media combine strong state influence with neoliberal tendencies.

### **Reterritorialization and transformations of the state**

When I refer to Morocco, I refer only marginally to the territorial nation-state, and primarily to a locality that is a space of flows defined by its intersectionality. For the purposes of this project these flows are centered on the coastal Casablanca-Rabat corridor as the centers of media and cultural production, as well as economic and political power. By understanding the local as an intersectional space of trans local flows and frictions rather than a static territorial space, we start to understand the ways that the nation has been reterritorialized in accordance with capital and new forms of the national emerging.

To some extent Morocco's geographic location at the intersection of the Middle East, Africa and Europe has always linked it to global flows and makes the nation a unique ethnocultural formation described in the preamble to the 2011 constitution as "unity... forged by the convergence of its Arab-Islamist, Berber [amazighe] and Saharan-Hassanic [saharo-hassanie] components, nourished and enriched by its African, Andalusian, Hebraic and Mediterranean influences [affluents]" (WLP, 2014). It is important to note that the 2011 constitution is among the few times this diversity has been fully acknowledged, and in many ways the denial of this diversity has been central to a Moroccan nationalism based in the Malekite rite of Sunni Islam



and its Arab heritage under the Alouite monarchy. Morocco's history as a socio-spatial formation is defined by its position on the Mediterranean basin and the region's indigenous people identify as Amazigh/Imazighen, or "free men," in reference to their opposition to external control, whether from Rome/Byzantines, the Ottomans, Arabs or France. According to Laroui (1977) with the Arab invasion of the early 8<sup>th</sup> century, "It is obvious that the two generals whose conquests were most enduring...carried out the same policy as the earlier conquerors of the Maghrib, that is, to occupy the cities and leave the indigenous Berber masses under the authority of their chiefs" (p. 85). As a diverse space characterized by uneven degrees of outside influence and engagement, Morocco's processes of Arabization and the adoption of Islam by the Amazigh were centuries long (and sometimes incomplete) affairs, even at the height of empire. Sultans issued from the Alaouite dynasty have ruled Morocco since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, claiming direct lineage from the Prophet Mohammed and authority through affiliations with and arbitration among these diverse communities.

In many ways colonialism<sup>8</sup> expanded and institutionalized the array of influences and connections to external capital, while reinforcing societal divisions based on geography and ethnolinguistic identity. Colonialist historians have often divided Morocco into two domains: that of government administration (*bled al-makhzen*) and that outside its administrative authority (*bled as-siba*), a division used to justify France's divide and conquer policies. The French Protectorate instituted a Berber policy aimed at "pacification" and incorporation of Amazigh into the state that culminated in the Berber Dahir of May 16, 1930 (Wyrzten, 2011). The Berber Dahir, which very basically excluded Amazigh from the Islamic judicial system, acted as a

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<sup>8</sup> The Treaty of Fes in 1912 formally established Morocco as a protectorate of the French, and, to a lesser extent, the Spanish in the northern and southern extremities of the country. After 44 years under French administration, Morocco regained its independence in 1956. France continues to occupy a privileged place in Moroccan business, politics and cultural life, particularly for elites educated in the French system.

rallying cry for a nascent nationalist movement closely associated with pan-Arabism, for which the sultan became the symbolic center in Morocco. Under the protectorate the monarchy maintained its religious and cultural authority as part of a “Muslim policy” that sought to partition society and reinforce the institution of the monarchy while depriving it of real power (Rivet, 2012). The protectorate also shifted the centers of power away from inland trade routes associated with imperial Morocco and its traditional centers of power toward the coasts, particularly the port city of Casablanca and Rabat as an administrative capital.

Perhaps the defining logics of postcolonial political economy in Morocco are the continuity of colonial power structures under new nationalist administrators and the consolidation of power under the monarchy. However, the strategic manipulation of alliances through which the monarchy established these logics did not occur without opposition, as indicated by the country’s eleven governments between 1956 and 1966. Tumultuous post-independence politics gave way to a state of exception declared by Hassan II in 1965 when the series of student protests referenced above took on a much more widespread character and were violently repressed. This became a formative moment for a new and more revolutionary generation of the left, Marxist-Leninist in nature and inspired by Mao’s cultural revolution, but also indicative of major ideological schisms in the Moroccan left (Rollinde, 2002). As early as 1970, Waterbury (1970) argued that “stalemate has been and will continue to be the dominant trait of Moroccan politics” (p. 61). At the same time, Morocco came to be isolated diplomatically from Algeria over a series of border disputes, and much of the MENA region with its Cold War Soviet alignment, as the regime adopted a relatively liberal orientation and more measured stance

on Palestine<sup>9</sup> that aligned it with the West, while enacting nationalist economic policies and subscribing to the Islamic *umma*.<sup>10</sup>

The consolidation of power under the monarchy facilitated its transition to becoming what Leveau (1976) has called “the premier private entrepreneur in Morocco” (p. 257). Morocco definitively integrated into the global economic order when it signed on to the World Bank’s Structural Adjustment Program in 1983 (Cammett, 2007; Vandendries, 1997; White, 2001). These neoliberal market reforms and subsequent economic liberalization led to opening markets and privatizing major industries, which saw certain segments of the population benefit enormously and others left behind, with uneven development leading to dramatic increases in inequality. King Hassan II’s transfer of majority foreign-owned assets to political allies in the 1970s resulted in “thirty-six major families who controlled two-thirds of the moroccanized economy; suddenly, Morocco became a country with a sizeable class of multimillionaires” (Miller, 2012). These multimillionaires, including the monarchy, which had been expanding its assets, were in a prime position to profit from later economic liberalization. We see here the state attempt to instrumentalize neoliberalism in accordance with its interests, specifically by taking advantage of opportunities to extend its authority in the economic realm, giving rise to what Yesil (2016) has called “the authoritarian neoliberal state” marked by “state-market interpenetration” (p. 12-13). Here the term “neoliberal state” refers to a shift in the way power is orchestrated by the state in the form of the monarchy. Many of my sources discussed Mohammed VI’s apparent lack of interest in governing (as opposed to his father), and his limitation of public intervention to specific issues or major moments of crisis, as in the case of

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<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that despite this being the official position adopted by the Moroccan regime, Moroccans for the most part understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a domestic issue.

<sup>10</sup> *Umma* is the Arabic word for “community” and refers to a supranational community of common faith in Islam.

Moudawana<sup>11</sup> reforms or constitutional reform in the wake of the Arab Spring. Instead, the monarchy has become an increasingly important player in the economy through its holdings in key sectors and seems to prefer to orchestrate influence through the economic realm, presenting itself as above politics and showing favor (or lack thereof) through the allocation of resources and investments. In his comparative political economy of Tunisia and Morocco, White (2001) argues that the Maghreb is part of a Mediterranean regional economy dominated by the EU, and that Morocco's relatively late post-independence economic opening and policies have only increased its dependency on Europe and a few economic sectors. I want to emphasize here that I am not making a case for economic determination, but rather for the economy's role in establishing limits and links (Williams, 1980, p. 35). Economic liberalization set in motion deep structural transformations in Moroccan society and its cultural geography through such phenomena as industrialization, urbanization and a demographic explosion from a population of less than 12 million in 1960 to 24 million in 1990. By focusing on the reign of Mohammed VI from 1999 to the present, we see how a historical moment defined by hopes for a new left and democratic reform opened up new spaces for media and civil society before widespread disillusionment with the left, the post 9/11 remilitarization of the nation and cooperation with the war on terror led to many reversals of freedoms instituted earlier in the current king's reign.<sup>12</sup>

### **Culture and politics**

The subsequent acceleration of capital flows and communication technologies defining globalization mean that contemporary cultural geography, or the study of relationships between

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<sup>11</sup> The Moudawana is the Moroccan family code, which deals with rights surrounding the status of women and children as well as issues like marriage and inheritance. After a decades-long struggle by women's rights groups, the Moudawana was finally reformed with royal support from the new monarch, Mohammed VI, in 2004. Since then, Morocco has frequently been cited as an example of legal rights for women in the MENA region, yet many of these rights continue to exist solely on paper rather than in practice.

<sup>12</sup> For a timeline of major political moments in Moroccan history, see Appendix A.

cultural norms and space/place, “insists on the necessity of rethinking our sense of place in the context of the transformations and destabilizations wrought both by the forces of economic globalization and by the global media industries” (Morley, 2000, p. 5). Against the backdrop of top-down politics and culture emanating from the monarchy, new cultural (especially popular and mediated) forms have emerged and been elevated in conjunction with independent media in recent years. When I say culture I follow Raymond Williams’ definition of culture as the conjunction of everyday life experiences and symbolic systems (Williams, 1976, p. 91). The important thing to recognize in Morocco is that these two definitions of culture have often been at odds as symbolic systems advanced by the state attempt to “fix” Morocco within a static Arabo-Islamic conception of culture that legitimizes the monarchy as descendant from the Prophet Mohammed and offer a unifying narrative for a diverse society. Despite the monarchy’s general popularity, the failure of these homogenizing narratives to resonate with the complexities of contemporary life and everyday experiences of Moroccan publics means that independent media frequently talk about dealing in the “real,” which can be understood as a certain set of realities considered taboo, controversial and often subversive. Independent media’s frequent invocation of the real and its association with modernity recalls Berman’s (1982) claim that: “...for all of us, modernism is realism. This will not resolve the contradictions that pervade modern life; but it should help us to understand them, so that we can be clear and honest in facing and sorting out and working through the forces that make us what we are” (p. 14). For a progressive counterpublic, culture, and independent media in particular, offer a place for this “working through” of self and society.

I use the term “cultural politics” to mean very basically the relationship of culture with power. In other words, what is political about the cultural shifts I’m pointing to, especially in a

country where public access to the political field is limited? This new relationship between culture and power involves a shift away from official, state-sanctioned cultural forms instrumentalized by the monarchy for a myriad of purposes, to the emergence of larger margins for popular culture and mediated practices. Central to this cultural politics are dynamics of economic liberalization and neoliberal globalization, flows of culture and capital, and media and technological affordances. Through the conjunction of these forces, the cultural politics of independent media can be understood as a leftist challenge to both the cultural hegemony of the monarchy and its top-down version of modernity, and increasingly to Islamist versions of modernity as well. Here modernity means a rupture in social structures associated with capital and nationalism, but also in social imaginaries about what is possible individually, socially and politically. While modernity has for a long time been portrayed as a moral order and/or a linear development narrative, the modernity being advanced by these Moroccan independent media recognizes that modernity is always riddled with paradoxes and is not a binary split, but rather a push-pull negotiation that engages with increasingly complex forms of societal organization. It is a modernity that is insistently global in outlook, based on the movement of people and culture associated with globalization as well as the fusion of global capital with the materialities of everyday urban culture. This hybrid, translocal and deeply specific modernity assumes Enlightenment values like secularism and universal rights, but also the validity of forms of knowledge and ways of being in public that eschew consensus, engage with difference and hold that universality cannot be considered outside material realities, so that the way to the universal is through the specific. As a result we see an ambivalent engagement on the part of independent media with various pressures while trying to produce a persuasive politics that uses language, information infrastructures, and new modes of publicness as ways of making the informal or

private public and using that grounding in everyday life as a platform for a new political project based on the claims of citizen-subjects.

In a society where culture has often been seen as coterminous with religion and the monarchy (Entelis, 1989; Touzani, 2003), an emergent public culture can be seen as an arena where various forms and domains of culture – popular, folk, religious, and transnational media – are “encountering, interrogating and contesting each other in new and unexpected ways” (Appadurai & Breckenridge, 1988, p. 6). Independent media’s emphasis on cosmopolitan cultural forms, hybrid texts and public culture more broadly seeks to circumvent the stalemate that is Moroccan politics and produce spaces of public engagement outside the realm of institutional politics. The political alienation of the general population and the impossibility of orchestrating change through institutional political channels in a system where the consolidation of power in the *makhzen*, corruption and a high number of political parties effectively eliminate the possibility of a viable opposition, have made public culture a key site of engagement with the political for a new generation of independent media.

When I say independent media, I mean independent – non-state, non-affiliated – Moroccan media as distinct from the traditionally state-centric Moroccan media landscape founded on the French model of government, partisan and union-based publications that keeps media particularly close to power. I use the phrase “independent media” to signal a range of commercial and NGO-funded media projects not affiliated with the Moroccan state apparatus, while acknowledging that the dominant interpretation of the phrase in Western academic literature is media free from both government and commercial interests. This independent media is dependent on what Fahmy (2011) calls “media capitalism” (p. 15). Fahmy proposes media capitalism as an alternative to Anderson’s (1983) print capitalism, to describe “the

commodification of mass media, including print, and their function as part of a media market” (Fahmy, 2011, p. 16). This market includes not only print materials, but culture in all sensory forms, which is particularly important when considering the digital and its possibilities for convergence and multimedia forms. The commodification of culture through media and the recognition of culture as an economic good in the information society mean that there are fewer and fewer spaces outside the market, raising questions about how people creatively and practically exploit capital for their own purposes and goals in a way that doesn’t just make them dupes of the capitalist system. Yue (2012) refers to this phenomenon as “illiberal pragmatism,” or an “ambivalence between non-liberalism and neoliberalism” (p. 2). In Morocco, illiberal pragmatism manifests in the flows and frictions associated with an independent media determined to be a point of openness and engagement with the world. Independent media create new discursive spaces within the Moroccan media landscape while also being to some extent complicit with the logics of capital, which in turn gives them some critical leverage in constructing a cultural politics characterized by ambivalence about modernity.

### **Modernity, cultural geography, and mediated activism**

This dissertation engages with three primary literatures while attempting to draw from a diverse range of ideas and put them into conversation with each other. The first is the literature on modernity, which is used to make sense of tensions between official articulations by the state and those coming from an emergent independent media with its emphasis on cosmopolitan cultural forms and everyday urban culture. The second is cultural geography, which deals with transformations in the local accompanying globalization and the impact of capital on culture and information infrastructures, as well as the rise of regional centers of cultural production. Last is the much newer literature on mediated activism, which is born out of the work on contentious



politics and social movements, as well as that on publics and the public sphere. I use this literature to situate independent media associated with a progressive counterpublic in relation to historical trajectories of leftist opposition and dissent in Moroccan society while considering the role of (global) media in authoritarian states.

### *Modernity*

Scholars from postcolonial countries have long questioned the universalizing narrative of modernity. The emergence of a “multiple modernities” or “alternative modernities” perspective emphasizes the diversity of daily realities and lived experiences as the European heritage of modernity is taken up in various ways and at various levels around the globe. Even if Enlightenment values – inalienable rights, democracy, instrumental reason, individual autonomy, etc – are central to the project of modernity, certain societies emphasize particular values over others, which “has loosened the internal coherence which held these terms and images together in a Euro-American master-narrative, and provided instead a loosely structured synopticon of politics, in which different nation-states, as part of their evolution, have organized their political cultures around different ‘keywords’ (Williams, 1976)” (Appadurai, 1990, p. 299-300). As a postcolonial nation Morocco has placed its emphasis on state sovereignty and territorial integrity, aiming to present a united and stable front to the world via the monarchy and aspiring to reclaim even a small portion of its territory at the height of empire, most notably the Western Sahara.

In the MENA region, modernity has frequently been approached through the lens of religion (as is evident from the overwhelming number of books and articles about Islam and modernity), with the key question often being reduced to “Is Islam compatible with modernity?” In response to the rise of identity politics in the 1980s/90s, al-Azmeh (2009) takes an anti-essentialist position in arguing against “the insistent global salience of culturalism” (p. xi), that

marginalizes history and uses categories such as Islam to make causal claims (p. xii). This debate over a (fabricated) religion/secularism binary can be more usefully approached through examination of situated everyday experiences in which religion comes into play because as al-Azmeh (2009) contends “there are as many Islams as there are situations that sustain it” (p. 1). In Morocco, Islam runs the gamut from radical fundamentalist ideology to mere cultural heritage. Notably, Islam is used as justification for both authoritarian and social justice claims, particularly as part of campaigns against materialism or for women’s rights. Al-Azmeh’s anti-essentialist approach is adopted by Sabry (2010) who argues “By making both the modern and the traditional subject to a double-critique, we are not really abolishing the duality problematic, but we are undoubtedly changing how we think it...[making] both modernity and tradition vulnerable, championing critical reason instead of authenticity, difference instead of sameness and creativity instead of orthodoxy” (p. 41). Due to marginalization in modernist narratives, Arab societies have tended to privilege the past over the present in order to reconcile authenticity and modernity, often describing the historic accomplishments of Arab societies as the building blocks of Western civilization. Yet anti-essentialism contends that there is no one authenticity and that there are multiple ways of being modern in the world.

Recognition of oneself as possessing individual subjectivity – or the capacity for and particularity of a person’s perspectives, experiences, feelings, beliefs, desires and/or power – among other individual subjectivities is fundamental to contemporary understandings of individual agency and democratic social structures. Modernity is a background understanding of human beings as autonomous agents among other autonomous agents (Taylor, 2004, p. 166). Thus according to Kolakowski (1990), modernity is not a “history of ideas,” but “a history of mentalities” (p. 3), similar to Williams’ (1961) “structure of feeling” that sets apart moments in

history as “the new generation responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting (p. 64-5). Sabry (2010) analyzes modernity as a state of mind involving what Giddens (1991) describes as the institutionalization of self-doubt. The modern moment is characterized by a profound awareness of the multiplicity of subjectivities, which are not necessarily divisible along the lines of Self/Other as “we still know ourselves to be this or that, but the knowledge is uncertain, for we are also this and that” (Walzer, 1997, p. 90 cited in Silverstone, 2007, p. 17). The awareness of otherness in oneself and vice versa is a key contribution of the multiple modernities perspective.

If culture is a site of contestation over modernity, then the media are an increasingly important arena for the negotiation of culture and generating of social imaginaries. Media in a variety of forms are part of everyday life in most societies and thus characterize modern ways of life. Central to this modernity is the connectivity of the local with the global, whereby globally circulating texts saturate locales around the world and local cultural forms have the potential for global distribution. Thus Silverstone “insists on the significance of the media for our orientation in the world, in a world that is available to us, within reach, albeit only symbolically, in ways unimaginable before the electronic age” (Silverstone, 2007, p. 6). Even those who are not elite cosmopolitans experience the expanded horizons of everyday life through the increased circulation of media texts. John Tomlinson (1999) argued that it through media that most people experience the world because “for most people, most of the time the impact of globalization is felt not in travel but in staying at home.” As a result, media consumption shapes modern subjectivities on two levels: 1) the level of self-understanding and 2) the potentiality of engagement with others. Both constitute encounters with oneself and others, shaping these interactions and the possibilities they hold.

Fundamentally, my sites of analysis are about media's role in claims to the enactment or fulfillment of modernity. Independent media in Morocco attempt to reconcile claims to modernity without simultaneously reifying its power hierarchies, fundamentally displaying an ambivalence toward modernity. This ambivalence is born of independent media's relationship with capital as it to some extent buys into neoliberalism as a way to impose limits on the authoritarian state, but also out of a transnational current in global politics whereby people are increasingly disillusioned by the proffered choices and feel trapped between various abhorrent versions of modernity. In the case of Morocco this manifests in a moment of political possibility associated with the Arab Spring and the inability of the left to respond in a meaningful way, leaving people to choose between the top-down authoritarian modernity of the monarchy and an Islamist modernity rooted in religious dogma. These claims to modernity make clear that "European thought is at once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations, and provincializing Europe becomes the task of exploring how this thought – which is now everyone's heritage and which affects us all – may be renewed from and for the margins" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 16). Modernity's dissemination and the different ways it has been taken up around the world has made it into global heritage rather than a uniquely European endowment. As al-Azmeh (2009) points out, "...the tropes and notions of political and social thought available today form a universal repertoire that is inescapable, a repertoire which, though of Western origin, has in the last century and a half become a universal patrimony beyond which political and social thought is inconceivable. This was the result of a universal acculturation which has filtered through modern state structures, forms of discourse and communication,

educational and legal systems, terms of political life and much more, which have become globalized, native not only to their points of origin, but worldwide” (p. 33).

This global heritage manifests in independent media’s profound ambivalence toward discourses about tradition and modernity, as evident in its lack of hesitation in laying claim to the modern and its relation to a set of principles on which no concessions can be made, as well as its critiques of the notion that these principles are the primary heritage of the West.

### *Cultural Geography*

Within the field of communication studies, the emerging sub-field of global communication seeks to understand shifts in cultural geography accompanying the increased mobility of capital, texts and people, as well as where that mobility breaks down. In an agenda-setting work about the meaning of “global” communication, Wilkins, Straubhaar & Kumar (2014) argue that “the meanings and relationships of the global and the local can only be constituted through their articulation or linking to particular places, cultures, or contexts” (p. 7). In this light Moroccan independent media can be considered as the product of a complex confluence of forces including the spread of media capitalism, growth of transnational civil society, audience access through to a greater variety of cultural products through digital technologies and changes in Morocco’s regulatory landscape. Thinking about *Telquel*, the new Moroccan cinema and *Mamfakinch* as phenomena of “global” communication illuminates their lineage within historical, often transnational, discourses and their interventions in public culture across multiple scales. Within this confluence they can be considered as hybrid texts and articulations of global modernity. According to Shome & Hegde (2002), looking at such hybridities through the critical lens of postcolonial theory “entails geopoliticizing the nation and locating it within larger (and unequal) histories and geographies of global power and culture” (p. 252-253). Moving across scales

allows this analysis to elaborate on orchestrations of power and their relationship with culture in a global era. Sassen (2006) argues that an overlooked dimension of globalization is the way processes and transformations inside the nation participate in its disassembly as the sole order and authority, contending:

“These processes take place deep inside territories and institutional domains that have largely been constructed in national terms in much of the world. What makes these processes part of globalization even though they are localized in national, indeed subnational, settings is that they are oriented toward global agendas and systems” (p. 3).

The interaction of Moroccan independent media with existing circuits of culture and their exploitation of transnational capital and technological affordances lends support to globalization theories’ suggestion that the world’s increasingly interconnected media environments are both participants in and products of messy and complicated interactions across space.

Deterritorialization is often pointed to as one of the primary ways in which modernity has shifted understandings of space and place. Originating in Deleuze & Guattari’s (1983) discussion of the transition from primitive forms of territorial organization to the capitalist state, deterritorialization referred to a prying loose of labor power from the means of production. By introducing capitalism and privatization, agrarian forms of social organization were disrupted. According to Appadurai (1990) “Deterritorialization, in general, is one of the central forces of the modern world, since it brings laboring populations into the lower class sectors and spaces of relatively wealthy societies, while sometimes creating exaggerated and intensified senses of criticism or attachment to politics in the home-state” (p. 301). Morocco’s internal migrations from rural areas to cities were accompanied by recruitment of manual labor to industrializing France, escalating migratory flows and institutionalizing a diasporic experience associated with

*Marocains resident à l'étranger* (MREs, or Moroccans living abroad). Greater circulation of people, products and culture means that the national reputation of Arab nations “whose hitherto established meaning as conformity to Islamic values was now contested by an emerging, perhaps best understood as neoliberal, definition of national reputation as fitness for foreign investment” (Kraidy, 2014, p. 41). At the same time, Yudice (2003) argues that “the very managers of global resources have ‘discovered culture,’ at least paying lip service to notions of cultural maintenance and cultural investment” (p. 2). This expansion of the cultural field and its understanding as a form of capital among others demonstrates that deterritorialization is rarely just a prying loose, but rather depends on a subsequent reterritorialization or restructuring of social power. This reterritorialization has involved a shift away from agrarian forms of social organization toward industrializing cities, and then a move toward engagement with a global neoliberal knowledge economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The uses of culture by various stakeholders throughout these processes clearly contradict the assertions of world economic leaders that “in the face of globalizing market forces there is absolutely nothing that can be done” (Massey, 1999, p. 36). Rather the expansion of the cultural field and its use as a resource for the fulfillment of a variety of complementary and contradictory goals sheds light on the shifting cultural geographies of a global era.

### *Mediated Activism*

Kraidy (2014) argues for consideration of “contentious politics as an important force shaping the development of media industries” (40). Contentious politics emerge out of the convergence between contention, politics and collective action, and involve “interactive, collective making of claims that bear on other people’s interests and involve governments as claimants, objects of claims, or third parties” (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 23). The emergence of independent media as a

social and political force in Moroccan contentious politics has changed the dynamics of contention by publicizing democratic deficits and working with domestic and transnational civil society to challenge the discursive hegemony of the monarchy as the ultimate source of authority. In doing so independent media have created new links and limits, ultimately altering the ways in which Moroccan modernity and cultural geography are constituted.

The unique affordances of media to communicate with mass audiences means they have the potential to play an instrumental role in coordinating and orchestrating collective action, as well as take advantage of technological change to expand the repertoires available to those outside traditionally centralized media systems. While “the nation-state has for many years been the main target for protest” (Della Porta, 2004, p. 1), the boundaries are increasingly blurred between domestic and transnational targets, issues and actors. Keck and Sikkink (1998) look at transnational advocacy networks as discursive actors and arenas for contemporary political contention. Transnational advocacy networks include “those relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services” (p. 2). These networks provide new links between domestic, international and global arenas of advocacy and thus change the structure of the relationships and roles that make up each, as seen in independent media’s engagements with networks oriented toward freedom of expression and human rights more broadly. “By thus blurring the boundaries between a state’s relations with its own nationals and the recourse both citizens and states have to the international system, advocacy networks are helping to transform the practice of national sovereignty” (Keck & Sikkink, p. 1-2). Transnational advocacy networks offer new targets and possibilities for claim making, however differential access means that protesters often still addresses “national governments regarding decisions that originated or were



implemented at a supranational level” (Della Porta, 2004, p. 4). Tarrow (2005) argues that transnational activists are “both constrained and supported by domestic networks; that in making this move they activate transitional processes between states and international politics; and that when they return home, they bring with them new forms of action, new ways of framing domestic issues, and perhaps new identities that may some day fuse domestic with international contention” (p. 2-3). In the case of Morocco, the embedding of independent media in anti-torture and human rights movements oriented toward freedom of expression shape their engagements with publics across multiple scales.

The fundamental and problematic assumption of the contentious politics and social movement literatures is that change is orchestrated exclusively through institutional channels, thus it neglects to look outside the political realm for repertoires and opportunities existing in other areas of social life. For Morocco it would be easy to say that the country has seen very little political and social change since independence due to the continuing power of the *makhzen*, but that would be incredibly reductive and completely dismissive of the agency orchestrated by ordinary people on an everyday basis. This is what Bayat (2013) calls “the quiet encroachment of the ordinary,” or the ways in which the urban dispossessed infringe on the powerful, and constitutes just one way that orchestrations of agency evolve in accordance with constraints. In Morocco independent media act as new spaces for debating and working out the challenges of modernity and making Moroccan society, especially the margins, present to those in power in previously impossible ways. They do this by emphasizing and mobilizing urban youth culture in particular, framing culture as a (more democratic) site of contention and engagement in a society where disillusionment with institutional politics is widespread.

Each site in this dissertation takes a different approach to mediation with corresponding implications for the formation of publics, bringing into relief the varied and uneven ways in which media operate across space and deal with the material realities of their work environments and the publics they call into being. As a result we can see the process of mediation as one that multiplies “the situational interconnections that are possible between places” (Couldry & McCarthy, 2004, p. 8) and expands the range of relevant approaches and actors for any social space. One set of important actors that emerges from these sites is media elites, whose interventions in public culture, particularly through event-making, constitute key attempts to reorganize public culture around the principles of interaction and encounter, with hopes for societal renewal.

#### **A note on method**

This project began as a textual analysis of *Telquel* during a one-year period of time from 2010 to 2011, over the course of the Arab Spring. My interest in *Telquel* began when I arrived in Rabat, Morocco as a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar in 2010. As a journalist by training I quickly began checking out newspapers as a way to learn about Moroccan media and my new surroundings, but was disappointed to find that they were mostly very dry, with the average story depicting a middle age politician and insider political wrangling involving whatever party the paper represented, with little coverage of Moroccan society and cultural life. Moreover, I wanted to practice Darija, but the Arabic papers stuck mostly to Fus’ha, or classical Arabic, and that wasn’t getting me far in my daily interactions with Moroccans. That Darija was relatively new to media in general inspired my interest in language politics, and *Telquel*’s engagement in these debates lead me to follow the magazine closely. A friend suggested the magazine to me because “their journalists are always being thrown in jail or hauled into court, which seems to be the mark of

good journalism in Morocco.” *Telquel*’s daring, even sensationalist, covers and aggressive investigative reporting quickly became a favorite of mine, especially as the magazine seemed truly interested in trying to understand contemporary Moroccan society – with all its complex issues and diversity of interests. The magazine adopts a critical tone towards power and a progressive position on individual rights, placing it more in the liberal camp than most independent daily newspapers, but can also be critiqued for its elitist, even neoliberal ideologies.

All of this painted a picture of the arena of public culture and the spaces available for dissent or alternative voices that was much more complex than what I had previously been led to believe. Compared to other authoritarian countries of the MENA region, Morocco under the new king had relatively large margins for critical speech, even if it was already ebbing when I arrived in 2010 with the closure of *Le Journal Hebdo* early in the year, followed by *Al Jazeera*’s expulsion from the country and *Nichane*’s demise. I began collecting issues of *Telquel* in earnest as the Arab Spring picked up steam, and followed the magazine online in the following years. As part of the research for this chapter I spent several weeks in Morocco’s National Archives, a subdivision of the National Library in Rabat, browsing and reading almost every issue published between 2001 and 2012. I continue to follow *Telquel*, but stop my analysis in 2012 in recognition of the major shift that occurred with the sale of the magazine that year and the departure of the majority of its original team.

I considered it important that my dissertation not be limited to one organization or platform in an age of convergence and transmedia discourses. My two other sites of analysis evolved organically out of my work on *Telquel*, as the magazine closely covered the new Moroccan

cinema and developments associated with M20<sup>13</sup> and Mamfakinch. I began studying cinema in earnest after another friend told me “if you want to tell real stories in Morocco, you go into cinema instead of journalism.” The dynamics of interaction between closely intertwined groups of cultural producers, industry logics and textual forms at a specific societal moment took shape as I expanded my analysis from *Telquel* to the new Moroccan cinema to Mamfakinch. This project is fundamentally a discourse analysis of three different mediated sites, conducted through textual analysis, interviews and participant observation, as well as some critical political economy. All of this draws on my experience living in Rabat for a one-year period between 2010 and 2011, several shorter research trips in subsequent years, and 6 months of fieldwork in 2014 and 2015. Following the tradition of critical cultural studies I embrace the creativity allowed by an interdisciplinary approach that derives systematic inquiry from a locally grounded object of analysis: in this case the emergent independent media of Morocco and its new cultural politics.

This study has two limitations revolving around broadcast media and language. In regard to the first, despite attempts to emphasize transmedia processes and discourses, there are two domains of communication that I could not effectively address in this study. My focus on independent non-governmental media excludes most Moroccan broadcasting, which continues to be highly centralized and government controlled,<sup>14</sup> despite widespread access to satellite. Several studies have analyzed the reception of foreign programs, in particular women watching Latin American telenovelas and Turkish soap operas (Elouardaoui, 2013; Miller, 2012; etc). While attempts to liberalize Morocco’s television sector have only resulted in a de facto state

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<sup>13</sup> M20, an abbreviation for Mouvement du 20 Février, or the February 20<sup>th</sup> Movement, is an umbrella organization that played a key role in organizing protests and became synonymous with the Arab Spring moment in Morocco. It is named for the kingdom’s largest day of protests on February 20, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that there are not many interesting things happening in the audiovisual sector, especially as a result of the close relationship between cinema and television.

monopoly, radio has been much more successful with substantial growth in the number of stations. Yet despite one journalist's comment about radio "holding real potential as an independent medium," she continued by saying that potential is quelled by current regulations (Sefrioui, personal communication, December 5, 2014). Some independent radio stations, such as football-oriented *Radio Mars*, have charted new terrain, however for the most part new entrants in the field have followed the commercial model top-hits model. However, my choice to exclude broadcast media from this study is fundamentally a practical one aimed at limiting the scope of this study and allowing for greater depth of analysis in regard to the media addressed.

The second limitation has to do with language. While I speak functional Darija, it is generally not a written or media language, meaning that most broadcasting and newspapers are produced in classical Arabic, although this is changing. My classical Arabic is a work in progress, meaning I was not confident that I could conduct an effective analysis of Arabic-language texts when starting this study. While this continues to be a goal of mine, especially in regard to independent Arabic-language media, the reality for the moment is that most independent media are in French and as journalist Karim Boukhari acknowledged "there are just some things you can say in French that you can't say in Arabic" (Boukari, personal communication, December 10, 2014). French continues to be the language of business and of the educated elite in Morocco, so my interviews with media professionals were mostly conducted in French and occasionally in English.

I recognize that what I am offering here is a snapshot of a specific group of media within a broader Moroccan media landscape at a particular moment in time. In analyzing a contemporary world full of moving parts and pieces, perhaps capturing a snapshot of intersecting social forces and attempting to situate it historically is the best we can hope for. This study is not

about the Arab Spring, but it is marked by dynamics emerging from that moment, particularly crackdowns on journalists, civil society and activists that were coming into focus particularly clearly while I was conducting my fieldwork. In analyzing these dynamics, I focus on a subset of media associated with a liberal left and with strong ties to human rights associations that is particularly influential in relation to discourses of power, preoccupied with the possibilities of a new dynamism in cultural life and interested in finding ways to challenge interpretive authority of the monarchy.

### **Outline of the dissertation**

The title of this dissertation “No Concessions” is both a direct translation of Mamfakinch, and a reference to the ways in which the independent media I analyze seek to channel communications between citizen-subjects and domains of state power, shifting the balance of authority that facilitates the monarchy’s cooptation of dissent. “No” refers to a rejection of both the limits of what traditionally constitutes authority and knowledge, as well as a left defined by its position vis-à-vis the monarchy, while “concessions” signals a non-negotiable stance taken on certain basic principles of human rights and democratic process plus a separation from previous generations of the left. While Moroccan independent media’s refusal to concede on certain points has alternatively been useful for or a thorn in the side of the powerful, what is certain is that independent media under M6 have used new forms of capital and technological tools/platforms to construct discursive spaces oriented toward a progressive counterpublic and its vision of a Moroccan modernity based on open engagement with the world under the framework of individual rights. These discursive spaces are generative in that they have produced new types of publics and modes of publicness that are both more flexible in nature and open to diverse types of authority and knowledge. This flexibility is evident in the linguistic flexibility that stems from

Darija's lack of codification, in movements across platforms and practices, and in publics that cut across ideological and geographic boundaries. Ultimately the institutional framework of independent media improves the efficacy with which citizen-subjects can create content, call for action or assert claims, amounting to a restructuring of authority away from the state and into a cultural realm increasingly concerned with the practices of everyday life.

In Chapter 1 I examine the way that the francophone news magazine *Telquel* takes up Moroccan Arabic (Darija) and advocates for its inclusion in public life. In a context where culture has long acted as a political battleground, *Telquel* mobilizes a secular Moroccan identity through Darija in order to foster opposition to the monarchy's Islamic cultural hegemony and increasing fundamentalist challenges, highlighting Moroccans who are challenging social norms and bringing the traditionally marginalized into the center of the conversation. Its motivation in doing so is to shift cultural norms of speech in order to create a certain kind of modern citizen-subject who reflects critically on that which is often considered above critical reflection, particularly Islam, the monarchy and discourses about all Morocco's problems originating abroad. *Telquel* argues that modernity for Morocco means an increasingly worldly public culture built around the framework of universal rights and transnational circuits of people, goods and ideas. In advancing this version of modernity, the use of Darija acts as a starting point for encountering Morocco as it is, on its own terms, in all its diversity and contradictions, and in direct conversation with the sacred. This chapter provides an introduction to Moroccan cultural politics, while elaborating on the specifics of how language structures the Moroccan cultural field and *Telquel's* vision of Darija as a mechanism for more democratic culture and citizenry. I do this by tracing the origins of the independent weekly press in the combination of earlier leftist publications and financial reporting born of economic liberalization, while interrogating the way

Moroccan society and culture are taken up by *Telquel* in order to reimagine a more liberal left and everyday urban culture as a path to societal renewal.

Chapter 2 examines new terrain where a different facet of cultural politics is illuminated through the industry logics of the new Moroccan cinema. As seen in *Telquel*, increased openness to and availability of global capital (particularly cultural assistance funds) and new distribution mechanisms dependent on technology and travel (piracy, TV, festivals, etc) have opened up new avenues for alternative storytelling and depictions of Moroccan life and experiences that challenge hegemonic narratives about society and culture through cinema. These circumstances coincided with Morocco's emergence as one of few small countries with the political will to support audiovisual production and assemble industry structures, as well as the rise of a new generation of Moroccan filmmakers deeply embedded in transnational networks of education, funding and storytelling. Through this lens the new Moroccan cinema can be seen as characterized by an emergent space of funding (from France, Euromed, etc) offering alternative (albeit difficult) means of assembling the resources for production. It is important to emphasize that even those filmmakers who receive government funding through the CCM often need to supplement it elsewhere, opening up links to transnational imaginaries about integration into regional if not global cinema circles, as well as wider aspirations about audience and commercial viability. Thus the new Moroccan cinema can be defined by a shift in scale from taking the national as the assumed frame of reference to operating according to a wider regional and global framework, in part due to transnational influences in cultural policy and their interactions with globalization.

Chapter 3 follows up Chapter 2 in examining the new Moroccan cinema as discourse, focusing on the ideological interventions made possible by shifting industry logics in the



Moroccan cinema sector. These industry logics have created the conditions of possibility for certain types of critical interventions through hybrid genres/cosmopolitan cultural forms, but also constrained others as certain types of capital come with particular types of expectations. Many filmmakers of the NMC<sup>15</sup> depend on French funding and according to Moroccan filmmaker Farida Benlyazid “French producers tend to favor socially or politically engaged Moroccan films; they’re not looking to back different kinds of movies from Morocco, and that’s becoming a drawback for some directors” (Keslassy, 2013). The paradox is that at exactly the point that Moroccan cinema starts imagining new markets and publics it becomes truly popular with Moroccan publics, consistently topping the domestic box office and generating local alternatives to global media discourses while using the universal model of Hollywood as a model. In the process, filmmakers moving between translocal priorities and global media imperatives become important mediating forces among multiple modernities. For the most part filmmakers of the new Moroccan cinema are rooted in the diaspora, moving through overlapping francophone and arabophone cultural-linguistic spaces of a the Mediterranean region while also imagining more transnational/international publics. These chapters (2 & 3) continue the project’s focus on Moroccan cultural politics under Mohammed VI through the domain of cinema, while teasing out the ways transnational influences in cultural policy shape the new Moroccan cinema’s industry logics, which in turn encourage and constrain imaginations associated with the discourse of Moroccan cinema. I do this by thinking historically about the social function of cinema in Morocco and the ways in which the industry has been invoked as a generator of

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<sup>15</sup> I use NMC as shorthand for “new Moroccan cinema,” which is a phrase used by the popular and trade press to refer to a new wave in Moroccan cinema that has emerged during the reign of Mohammed VI (1999-present). It is generally characterized by new funding mechanisms, improved technical quality and taking on taboo topics, often in the local language.

investment and jobs while cultivating international audiences by responding to the thematic preoccupations of Western media.

Finally, Chapter 4 uses Mamfakinch as a lens through which to analyze mediated activism in Morocco, focusing on issues of access, flexibility and publics. Following *Telquel* and Moroccan cinema, the collective is yet another manifestation of an emergent independent media in Morocco that is creating new discursive spaces across platforms, this time with a non-commercial and explicitly activist bent. The Moroccan regime's liberal attitude toward the Internet in its early days led to its construction as radically democratic and unregulated space, an understanding that has shifted as high profile crackdowns on individual actors, including some associated with Mamfakinch, have made the Internet the new frontier for Moroccan civil society's longstanding struggles over human rights. Mamfakinch's use of the digital in processes of content creation, campaign coordination and information curation constitutes one node in an alternative information infrastructure constructed around democratic conceptions of culture that are increasingly distant from institutional politics. This chapter grapples with the implications of the digital for cultural politics, illuminating how mediated activism in the digital realm builds on the work of other media platforms while providing new tools for the development of alternative information infrastructures outside the purview of the state, while also lending itself to new avenues for surveillance. I do this by demonstrating how the Moroccan state's fixation on ICT liberalization and development as the keys to participation in a new global knowledge economy participate in the construction of online spaces as an unregulated terrain for freedom of expression, while the prosecution of individual users in the wake of the Arab Spring makes digital rights into a new domain of human rights struggle.

Together these three sites chronicle major industry shifts that are opening up discursive spaces through which people are enacting a new politics. This politics is fundamentally rooted in the cultural realm and invites people into new forms of subjectivity as citizen-subjects forged across and between established institutional boundaries while advancing a form of modernity that lays the groundwork for public debate centered on openness to dissent and difference yet is also troubled by neoliberalism. In many ways it has been anchored in the increasingly mediated practices of urban life, particularly those of youth, in an attempt to construct publics outside of the official realms of politics and culture seen as out of touch with the experiential realities of modernity. The flipside of independent media's structuration of encounters among citizen-subjects for the purposes of political claim-making is the ambivalence with which its associated progressive counterpublic engages with modernity and its paradoxes as it tries to figure out a politics enabled by capital and working within the discursive spaces produced by an emergent independent media.

## Chapter 1

### Debating Darija: *Telquel* and Language Politics in Modern Morocco

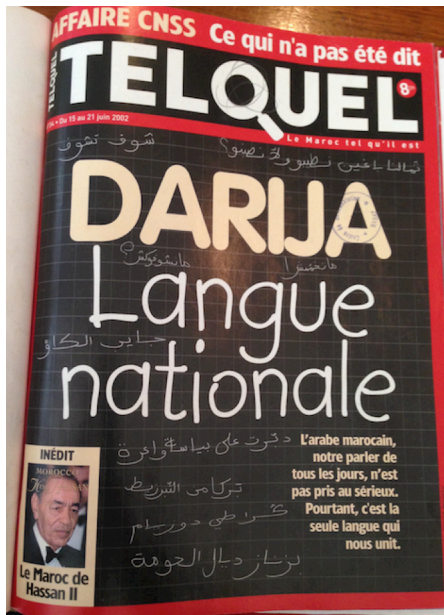


Image 1: *Telquel* cover #34, June 2002

In 2002, less than a year after the magazine's launch, a *Telquel* cover proclaiming in bold letters "DARIJA" and underneath it in a font approximating handwriting in chalk "National language" appeared on newsstands. The text appears to be written on a gridded blackboard, the image of which underlies the entire cover, with handwritten Darija phrases and verb conjugations in Arabic script interspersed among the headlines. Together, all of this suggests a school or educational environment, pointedly referencing the fact that Darija, although the mother tongue of most Moroccans,

is neither taught in schools nor an official language of instruction. Smaller text in the bottom right corner of the cover states "Moroccan Arabic, our language of daily life, isn't taken seriously. Despite being the only language that unites us" (Ksikes, 2002). By suggesting that Darija is not taken seriously, *Telquel* invokes the complex linguistic politics of Moroccan society whereby only speaking Darija, which is traditionally not a written language, is equated with illiteracy. It also positions Darija against Morocco's official language, classical Arabic, taken very seriously as the sacred language of Islam and carrier of a revered literary and scientific tradition. Framing the issue in terms of national unity references Moroccan society's historic

diversity and deeply contentious divisions, often glossed over by the monarchy's hegemonic narrative about Moroccan society subscribing above all to the Arab-Islamic *Umma*,<sup>1</sup> to the exclusion of other identities. However, talking about Darija in the singular also glosses over regional divisions and hierarchies that take center stage in discussions about standardization and the logistics of the language's migration into the official realm. Making Darija a matter of national unity perhaps also attempts to diffuse some of the tension surrounding a very personal and divisive issue by interpellating "us" to think about the larger common good and societal inclusion.

The "Darija: National Language" cover story continues in the centerfold, ultimately encompassing eight interior pages of the magazine. The centerfold background mimics the cover design of a gridded blackboard, but instead of "Darija: National Language" the interior headline reads "Darija: Our *real* national language." All text appears in white against the blackboard background except for the words "Darija" and "real," written in red as part of the headline and made to stand out visually in correspondence with a thick red border surrounding the page. The contrasting color used to emphasize these two words suggests both Darija's rightful place in Moroccan life via the historical significance of the color red for the nation and the existence of a "non-real" official language to which *Telquel* positions itself in opposition. The text of the article occupies the bottom of the page and as the article continues on the following four pages it is broken up by sidebars detailing attempts to codify Darija or expand its presence in the public realm. The longest sidebar comes at the end of the main article under the label "humor." In an article titled "Ma Fhemnach!" or "I don't understand [them]!" journalist Yassine Zizi recounts humorous and frustrating instances of the insistence on using classical Arabic in official settings

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<sup>1</sup> *Umma* is the Arabic word for "community" and refers to a supranational community of common faith in Islam.

such as TV news, with a pull quote pointing to the irony that “Only the advertisers address people in the language they understand” (Zizi, 2002, p. 23). The final two pages of the article appear under a thick red header featuring the words “Debate: Can Darija be standardized?” with the left page devoted to commentary from a linguist and dialectician under the answer “of course,” while the right page takes the perspective of a sociolinguist with the answer “it’s unnecessary” (Ksikes, 2002).

The main article was written by Driss Ksikes, an original member of the *Telquel* team who began his career as a literary critic before becoming cultural editor of *Telquel* and eventually the editor-in-chief of *Nichane*.<sup>2</sup> After hearing Ksikes speak as a member of the cultural advocacy group Racines and organizer of a conference about the general state of culture in Morocco, I had the opportunity to speak with him in December 2014 in his office at the HEM business school where he is director of the Centre for Social, Economic and Management Research (CESEM). Since leaving *Telquel* and *Nichane* following a major court case where the magazine was sued by the state for defaming Islam in 2006, Ksikes has taken on many roles including director of CESEM, cultural advocate with Racines, editor of the academic journal *Economia*, playwright and head of the theater company DABATEATR, as well as investigative journalist and author. A soft-spoken, bespectacled and unassuming man with spiky gray hair, the former *Telquel* and *Nichane* editor described himself as a citizen with an interest in a better life in Morocco, saying “when I decided to stay, it was not a question that I could stay and not be active. It’s not a matter of changing things on your own and maybe not today, but of doing something” (Ksikes, personal communication, 2014). Ksikes describes contemporary Moroccan media as comparable to Southern European media in the 1970s when countries such as Portugal,

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix B, Image 7

Spain and Greece were emerging from dictatorships and still plagued by a clientalist system characterized by too much consensus of opinion, too little diversity of ownership and lack of tolerance for marginal expression. In this non-democratic, industrializing environment, Ksikes said, “the economy and business come first, so there is a belief that we don’t need harassing media, we need soft media selling an image of a soft society” – an image in direct contrast with *Telquel*’s portrayals of a dynamic Moroccan society critically considering its place in the world.

In the “Darija: National Language” cover story, Ksikes emphasizes Darija’s importance for the democratic reforms to which Moroccan society aspires. For him language is an issue of inclusivity “because there are people who don’t understand the official language, classical Arabic”; gender equality “A mother who doesn’t understand what the journalist or the minister on TV is saying is a daily reality”; and, above all, class, as when a woman speaking in a Casablanca court is interrupted by the judge who says “in this place you must leave aside the language of the village and speak correctly” (Ksikes, 2002, p. 19). We see here language become a structuring tension for the overlapping continuums that divide Moroccan society along the lines of education, class, gender, age, geography and ethnicity. Ksikes cites anthropologists, linguists, sociologists and political scientists in talking about Morocco’s difficulties with diglossia<sup>3</sup> (some, like Moroccan linguist Moha Ennaji, say triglossia) that have resulted in two very separate and increasingly in friction worlds within the country: the formal and informal sectors. These sectors are often characterized by their literate and illiterate participants, leading some to argue that Darija is an educational necessity in a country with a notoriously high illiteracy rate<sup>4</sup> and a

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<sup>3</sup> Diglossia refers to a situation where different languages are used under different conditions, particularly as associated with specific linguistic hierarchies.

<sup>4</sup> According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, in 1990 the adult (15+) literacy rate in Morocco was 41.6 percent. By 2015 the literacy rate was projected to increase to 62 percent, although rates remain lower among women, the poor and rural populations. Data retrieved from: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/UIS-literacy-statistics-1990-2015-en.pdf>

dysfunctional public education system where policies regarding language have been hotly debated and laxly enforced since independence. However, in the case of Darija, democratizing access to knowledge also becomes a question of redefining what constitutes knowledge by “valorizing our folk wisdom” (Ksikes, 2002, p. 23), a shift that would legitimize experiential forms of knowledge associated with popular culture as meaningful for societal participation and engagement with the world.

For *Telquel*, media and cultural industries constitute a key component of this linguistic and conceptual shift away from having to use classical Arabic to be taken seriously, which besides education is the other major theme of the cover story. Ksikes describes an “impasse” in the printed press whereby Darija is the domain of informal communications such as market newspapers and tabloids, and in audiovisual media where a “rapprochement” to the level of spoken language is confined to fictional programming. On the fifth page of the article a three-column sidebar occupies the top half of the page under the title “Dialogues that ring hollow,” stating that in cinema, theater and television dialogue has always been an issue because “they are, as a general rule, written (and thought) in French before being retranscribed in classical Arabic or Darija” (Boukhari, 2002, p. 22). As one writer described, when he wants to express love he writes something along the lines of “Je t’aime, je te désire, j’ai envie de toi” in French, which translated into Darija “gives us ‘kan’bghik (I want you),’ a hybrid and banal expression that one can address equally well to his mistress, his mother or his dog” (Boukhari, 2002, p. 22). This statement points to common conceptions that Darija is a vulgar, ugly language (a sense derived from the frequent removal of vowels and mashing together of consonant sounds) lacking poetic qualities and finer shades of meaning or nuance. Additionally, “classical Arabic is often used [in dialogue] because of its morally correct character, but, sadly, is often irrelevant”



(Boukhari, 2002, p. 22). All of this points to the complex nature of translation across considerations of plot, meaning, authenticity, funding, and distribution, yet as Ksikes points out in the article “The fact is undeniable, Moroccan films increasingly speak the local language, vernacular, understandable by all” (Ksikes, 2002, p. 22). This vernacular turn is indicative of a remediation of everyday life taking place through independent media and its participation in the formation of a new cultural politics to which the question of language is seen as central.

We see in this cover story a multitude of interests and issues being articulated through the question of language, most notably those associated with democratic reforms and a certain set of social values that celebrates individuality and the marginal. For *Telquel*, advocacy of Darija as national language is advocacy for the discarding of outdated ideologies – nationalism, pan-Arabism, Islamism – that made classical Arabic Morocco’s official language at independence and ultimately proved divisive for any progressive opposition. Above all, because “Darija continues to be perceived as a corrupt and deviated form of the sacred language” (Ksikes, 2002, p. 19), questioning the status of classical Arabic can be seen as questioning the legitimacy of the monarchy and the religious foundations on which its authority rests. Elevating the status of Darija can thus be seen as an attempt to produce a meaningful opposition to the status quo and establish secular social spaces open to genuine deliberation without taboos and new forms of knowledge. Darija then becomes a means of reconfiguring the relationship between the state and its publics that circumvents the political realm by focusing on the possibilities of public culture as an arena for societal renewal. In many ways this early article sets the tone for *Telquel*’s ongoing interventions in public culture around the question of language in a country of complex linguistic and associated cultural hierarchies.

## **Media, language politics and public culture**

This chapter interrogates the intersection of independent media, language politics and public culture in Morocco under Mohammed VI.<sup>5</sup> I look at *Telquel* as one specific articulation of a postcolonial politics of hybridity in Moroccan media that is the product of a particular political moment in Morocco characterized by an opening in cultural life and civil society, but also an increased openness to the forces of global capital. In the late 1990s/early 2000s, media liberalization and loosening of restrictions on civil society organizations combined with transnational capital and a moment of political transition to produce new platforms and discursive spaces such as *Telquel* that privilege local hybridities while asserting claims based on universal notions about human rights (especially freedom of expression) and democratic norms. Drawing on semiotics, postcolonial and Marxist critiques, I analyze *Telquel*'s production of oppositional discourses by focusing on its re-reading of historical narratives, entanglement with a transnational politics of the left and engagement in social movements and public events.

In doing so I engage with recent work on language politics and the social function of language. Fahmy (2011) examines the role of colloquial Egyptian in building an Egyptian national identity at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and at colloquial popular culture as an alternative or bottom-up history of the nation. Interestingly, in Morocco it was not Darija that participated in the construction of national identity, but more so classical Arabic with its links to a unifying Islamic identity, and anything that can be thought of as a “colloquial turn” was reserved for the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century rather than the 20<sup>th</sup>. In Egypt this turn was related to the perceived inability of classical Arabic to represent the experiential realities of everyday life. According to

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<sup>5</sup> Mohammed VI is the current king of Morocco, who is popularly referred to as “M6.” He took over the throne in 1999 after the death of his totalitarian father, Hassan II, and is widely popular due to his “prince of the people” persona and reformist agenda, although few of those reforms have resulted in any meaningful change to the governing authority of the monarchy.

Fahmy (2011), “because of its lack of use in everyday normal conversation, Fusha alone is incapable of accurately conveying the ordinary nuances and color of daily Egyptian interactions” (p. 6). This need for “linguistic flexibility” was construed differently in the Maghreb, where French was deeply entrenched at independence and seems to have compensated for the limitations of Fus’ha, particularly in relation to media, with Darija occupying this space in everyday life. Haeri (2003) addresses this split between official language and everyday life as a separation between the sacred and the profane because “It has come to pass...that the [Arabic] language and Islam are mutually constitutive” (p. 2). Language ideologies and institutions play a key role in perpetuating this essential connection across Muslim societies, and in Morocco are deeply tied to notions of national and religious identity as well as the nation’s position on the margins of the MENA region. According to Suleiman (2013), one of these ideologies is the taken-for-granted notion that Arabic is “a language in danger and under attack from inside and outside” (p. 6). Ideas about Arabic as an embattled language are tightly interwoven with histories of the rise and fall of Islamic empire, and of colonialism and nationalist movements in the modern era, making language politics and possibilities for reform particularly fraught. However, Haeri (2003) argues that vernacularization is necessary for social transformations regarding where knowledge comes from and who has authority over it. That these discourses are increasingly intertwined with and produced through media necessitates inquiry into new domains of interaction and their function in relation to language and the sacred. In this way we can make sense of Morocco’s constant need to assert its legitimacy as part of the Arabic-Islamic community due to its physical and cultural distance from the Arabic-Islamic “center,” despite strong religious, ethnic and linguistic ties. The geopolitics of the Moroccan nation mean that the

version of modernity advanced by the Moroccan monarchy and the state<sup>6</sup> justifies on-going governance by an authoritarian Alouite monarchy with genealogical links to the Prophet Mohammed. In response, *Telquel* fields an oppositional version of modernity concerned local transformations associated with globalization, civil liberties and democratic process through which it provides a platform for a progressive counterpublic.

Although the role of media and communication technologies in emerging democracies has received much attention in the wake of 2011's Arab Spring, few scholars have sought to historically contextualize and investigate the ways culture, and public culture in particular, becomes a site of social and political engagement in societies where access to the political field is limited. Much emphasis has been placed on the uses of media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, or coverage by powerful transnational media corporations such as Al Jazeera or CNN, but we have thought less often about locally or domestically-based media as playing key roles in networked forms of power and dissent not confined by national boundaries. In the case of Morocco, the emergence of several progressive news weeklies in a short period meant independent media offered a platform for new types of claim-making in the arena of public culture, ultimately reconfiguring the relationship between culture and politics in the country. The key role occupied by language in these claims makes it necessary to ask what role language takes on in the pages of *Telquel* and what are its political implications? Further, how does language and *Telquel*'s engagements with the politics surrounding it feed into the magazine's particular version of modernity, and what gets glossed over in the process? In order to address these

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<sup>6</sup> In Morocco the terms monarchy and state are often used interchangeably due to the monarchy's continued extensive governing authority. Alternatively the term *makhzen*, literally meaning "storehouse" has come to stand in for the extensive system of royal privilege and clientelism surrounding the monarchy that constitutes the real power center of the Moroccan state.

questions this chapter combines textual analysis of *Telquel* from 2001-2012,<sup>7</sup> interviews with journalists and participant observation at public events in which they were active to analyze the news magazine's discourse about language and culture as part of an emergent independent media.

I argue that *Telquel*, through its advocacy of Darija, struggles for the desacralization of Moroccan public culture in order to advance a certain version of modernity that embraces individual liberties, marginality, and the secular. The magazine challenges hypocrisy at all levels of society, claiming taboos and a discourse of the *non-dit*, or “unsaid,” are holding Moroccan society back from overcoming its complexes and truly addressing major social problems. In doing so the magazine endorses a modernist project of normative democracy and acts as a space of intervention aimed at pulling together multiple cultural and political spheres, or what Rajogopal (2010) has called “split publics” or parallel discursive arenas “wherein political discourse occurs through a set of structured misunderstandings” (p. 16). In a context where culture has long acted as a political battleground, *Telquel* mobilizes a secular Moroccan identity through Darija in order to foster opposition to the monarchy's cultural hegemony and increasing fundamentalist challenges, highlighting Moroccans who are challenging social norms and bringing the traditionally marginalized into the center of the conversation. Its motivation in doing so is to shift cultural norms of speech in order to create a certain kind of modern citizen-subject who reflects critically on that which is often considered above critical reflection, particularly Islam, the monarchy and discourses about all Morocco's problems originating abroad. *Telquel* claims that modernity for Morocco means an increasingly worldly public culture built around the framework of universal rights and transnational circuits of people, goods and

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<sup>7</sup> I continue to follow *Telquel*, but stop my analysis in 2012 in recognition of the major shift that occurred with the sale of the magazine that year and the departure of the majority of its original team.

ideas. In advancing this version of modernity, the use of Darija acts as a starting point for encountering Morocco as it is, on its own terms, in all its diversity and difficulties, and in direct conversation with the sacred.

The production of a new generation of independent weekly news magazines at the beginning of the 21st century needs to be considered in the context of earlier leftist opposition in the Moroccan press, its intersection with language politics, and the establishment of culture as a field of contention for publicly engaged intellectuals. This chapter will first outline the specifics of Moroccan context as they relate to theoretical conversations involving the role of language in modern nation building, the emergence of split publics in postcolonial states and debates over a politics of hybridity. Next I historically contextualize *Telquel's* dissenting discourse around language, examining its roots in the Moroccan press' tradition of politically oriented papers and a transnational politics of the left. The following section tells the story of *Telquel* and its sister publication *Nichane*, focusing on their interventions around language. Lastly I examine how this discourse gets taken up and intersects with public culture through *Telquel's* interventions in event-making, looking closely at the magazine's engagement in *Nayda*, an urban music movement of the early 2000s.

#### *Language politics and Moroccan nationalism*

On a sunny morning in December 2014, Karim Boukhari sat next to me outside a cafe in the Gauthier neighborhood of central Casablanca, sipping coffee and chain-smoking.<sup>8</sup> Boukhari, a medical doctor by training with close-cropped hair and an easy smile, began his journalism career in 1999 at *Al Bayane*, the newspaper of the communist Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS), before integrating into the independent press where he served as head of the cultural

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<sup>8</sup> Appendix B, Image 7

division at *La Vie Eco* and news editor of *Le Journal*. Part of the *Telquel* team since its debut, Boukhari's face had become familiar from the picture accompanying his editorials during his 2-year stint as the magazine's editor-in-chief following Benchemsi's departure for the United States on the eve of the Arab Spring. Since his tenure at *Telquel* Boukhari has written several books of poetry, co-founded a Paris-Casablanca based publishing project dedicated to youth voices (Casa Express Editions) and directed his first short film, subsequently selected for Cannes in 2015. Boukhari described *Telquel* as "first of all a space of social progressivism, but also political" that occupied a difficult position between the state and society defined by a paradox where "if you delve deeply into political issues concerning power, people applaud you, but the authorities react; while if you go far into society and religion you will have no problems with the authorities, however you become a target for the people" (Boukhari, personal communication, 2014). Thus we see the interest of the Moroccan monarchy in maintaining its position as the country's foremost religious authority and counteracting the rising influence of Islamists who emerged out of the lack of opposition left by the monarchy's repression of the left during the Years of Lead.<sup>9</sup> According to Boukhari Moroccans have traditionally defined the right and the left in relation to support, or lack thereof, for the monarchy, but are in the process of "redefining the left in reference to universal considerations irrespective of culture, such as human rights, while the right is becoming more aligned with the defense of traditional values" (Boukhari, personal communication, 2014). The reorientation of the left around a system of values rather than fixed institutional frameworks or ideologies has made culture a key site for the production and proliferation of those values, with language acting as a structuring mechanism for debates about Moroccan modernity and its future. "If you want to understand Moroccan society, interest

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<sup>9</sup> The Years of Lead refers to a period between 1965-1990 when an increasingly totalitarian Hassan II violently repressed opposition, particularly by leftist dissidents. The period was characterized by disappearances, torture, secret prisons and arbitrary judicial proceedings, leading to widespread paranoia and distrust of authorities.

yourself in language” said Boukhari, pausing to light another cigarette, “language symbolizes social fractures in this country and constitutes a source of conflict and debates that interest all people, who are really polarized” (Boukhari, personal communication, 2014).

Historically Morocco’s cultural and linguistic diversity stems from cross-cultural encounters, trade and imperial projects stemming from its particular geographical position at the intersection of Africa, Europe, and the Mediterranean basin. Today Morocco’s population of 32.3 million is classified as 99 percent Arab-Amazigh with the majority Darija-speaking in daily life. However, issues of indigenous autonomy and rights are still contested as Tamazight<sup>10</sup> only became an official language in the 2011 post-Arab Spring constitution and many remain unsatisfied with the lip-service they feel Tamazight is receiving from the regime while most debates about Darija blatantly ignore indigenous language issues. French continues to occupy a privileged place due to continuing close ties with the former colonizer in business, politics and culture, often making French a functional necessity for employment. That francophone elites have spoken up most loudly for Darija in *Telquel* and elsewhere, for many signifies an attempt to limit the influence of Arabic, and thus Islam, in the Morocco while perpetuating relationships rooted in colonial (and neocolonial) domination.

Anderson (1983) argues the rise of national consciousness has historically been dependent on an expanding vernacular print market created by capitalism, a phenomenon he calls “print-capitalism” (p. 40). In the Moroccan case, national consciousness arose without the accompaniment of a vernacular print market, however a hierarchy of “languages of power” still emerged so that proximity with printed language defined the legitimacy of various dialects (ibid.). In a 2010 editorial titled “Darija, God willing” Benchemsi quotes linguist Louis-Jean

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<sup>10</sup> Tamazight is the language of Morocco’s indigenous Amazigh people, although it is only one of three major dialects spoken in different regions of Morocco and several other dialects are present in smaller pockets.



Calvet in making a similar point that “a language is never more than a dialect that has succeeded politically,” and concludes “for now, our Darija is in a political battle” (Benchemsi, 2010b). To some extent we are seeing the rise of the vernacular in association with print-capitalism a century after the emergence of nationalist impulses and the institutionalization of an Arabic-French hybrid media system where Darija remained a largely unwritten<sup>11</sup> language far outside the “languages of power.” Ennaji (2011) argues that Darija lacks the prestige of the long literary tradition in Fus’ha, which links Morocco to a historical narrative of Islamic civilization and is sometimes perceived as a defense mechanism against the influence of Western cultural products. Despite this prestige, studies (Bentahila, 1983; Boukous, 1995; Ennaji, 2011; Ruiter, 2006) have shown Moroccans, and youth in particular, prefer French cultural products to those in classical Arabic.

Embedded in Morocco’s hybrid linguistic environment is a set of social relations whereby everyday communicative acts and their remediation in independent media become instrumental in establishing, reiterating or challenging hierarchies. In this context disputes over language are synonymous with disputes over collective memory, cultural norms and political visions. While the role of language in modern nation-building has been widely discussed (Anderson, 1983; Bourdieu, 1991; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1983; Smith, 1989; etc) the emergence of independent media as a new platform and discursive space where language is being used to invoke everyday cultural practices and construct public culture as a domain outside the authority of the monarchy, and ultimately an alternative modernity, means that the relationship between nationalism and language needs to be reconsidered in the light of both local transformations associated with globalization and the increasing intermingling of media in the

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<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, cell phones played a role in codifying Darija in that the phones originally available in Morocco only had Latin characters, so a system of transliteration was developed whereby numbers and punctuation replaced sounds not present in the Latin alphabet.

discursive terrain of everyday life. When Giddens (1990) says modernity can be defined by the question “How shall I live?” as the realm of possibilities expands, Bourdieu in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991) might say the question should be “How shall I speak?” For *Telquel* the answer is Darija, a language rooted in the history and lived realities of Moroccan society.

*Split publics and a politics of hybridity*

The importance of *Telquel*'s language politics stems from its interventions in a postcolonial politics of hybridity whereby disjunctures exist between the language of everyday life and official domains of business, politics and culture. Fundamentally these disjunctures empower the monarchy in its attempt to be all things to all people and the ultimate mediator while alienating large portions of the population from symbolic systems advanced by the state and the political process altogether. Sadana (2012) describes a similar disjuncture between language on the ground and that of literary representation in *English heart, Hindi heartland*, arguing that “this disjuncture is indicative of a larger schism in Indian society that has to do with not only language as it is spoken but with the disparate thought-worlds and hierarchies of language that saturate everyday life” (p. 4). What is significant in the case of *Telquel* is that in attempting to negotiate these disparate thought-worlds and hierarchies of language in order to establish a set of shared values for claim-making, the magazine finds itself engaged in the negotiation of cultural repertoires both increasingly extreme and increasingly at odds with each other in a post-9/11 world.

*Telquel* largely eschews Orientalist imagery prevalent in Western media with roots in what Parameswaran (2002) describes as “colorful images of Turkish, Arab, Indian and Moroccan women performing and serving food and wine in elaborate clothing and jewelry [that] appeared on European tradecards and postcards” (p. 295). Many of these types of exoticized images still

circulate in Moroccan society via posters and postcards primarily present in highly trafficked tourist areas, yet are often far from the lived realities of most Moroccans, especially the urban youth cultures privileged by *Telquel*. For *Telquel* modernity is inherently outward looking and built on the production of hybrid cultural forms associated with transnational circuits of capital and culture and their encounters with Moroccan specificity. However, in articulating this modernity *Telquel* also sets many aspects of Islam in opposition to it, ignoring the fact that in Moroccan society Islam is often approached as an antidote to the problems of modernity, particularly U.S. imperialism and materialist consumption. In addition to positioning themselves in opposition to Islamists, *Telquel* frequently features ads for upscale real estate developments around Casablanca, luxury cars and the latest cell phones, while its journalists largely issue from a segment of society described as the “francophone elite.” Together these elements could characterize *Telquel* as a carrier of neoliberal ideologies, so that in its ambivalence toward the monarchy, religion and nationalism, the magazine has opted into the order of global capital, in accordance with which it often paints a picture of fluid mobility. While this may be true to some extent, global capital has also facilitated *Telquel*'s existence and its ability to practice a particular brand of critical journalism.

### **The Moroccan press and histories of dissent**

Prior to Spanish and French incursions into the territory, Morocco was a primarily oral culture, complete with its own systems of information including public criers, religious sermons, couriers and travelling merchants (Baida, 1996). Following the Spanish declaration of war on Morocco in 1859 and occupation of Tetouan, the first Latin-character press arrived and produced the weekly *El Eco de Tetouan* in 1860 (Baida, 1996; Aouchar, 1990).<sup>12</sup> By the 1880s several newspapers

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<sup>12</sup> Several earlier publications appeared briefly in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.

appeared in Tangier to serve the foreign communities there, each producing a publication to advance its own interests in regard to “the Moroccan question” and thus caught up in the politics between various legations (Aouchar, 1990; Baida, 1996). As an international zone, Tangier became an informal center of the press in pre-Protectorate (1912) Morocco, producing 14 French-language publications (Baida, 1996).

All of these early papers were produced by and for the European communities in Morocco and were often hostile to the *makhzen*,<sup>13</sup> denigrating it under the pretense of development (Baida, 1996). One publication, *Le Reveil du Maroc*, responded to armed resistance by locals and protests from the Sultan about French encroachment into Moroccan territory by stating “As for Morocco, since we must take it as it is and judge it leniently according to the intellectual level of their rulers, we believe it is useless to blame, with the severity this behavior deserves anywhere else, this intemperate approach” (Pimienta, 1900 cited in Baida, 1996, p. 65-66). Thus the Makhzen developed an early hostility to the press even as it recognized its importance and attempted to establish a voice of its own. Although the first Arabic-character printing press was brought back from Egypt by a Moroccan judge returning from the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1867, it wasn’t until 1907 that the first Makhzen publication appeared in Tangier, *Lissan ul-Maghreb* (The Voice of Morocco) (Baida, 1996). As European powers, especially the French, institutionalized their presence in Morocco through the Act of Algeciras (1906) and the Treaty of Fes (1912), opposition began to appear in the press. The first attempt to regulate the press came shortly after the establishment of the Protectorate with

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<sup>13</sup> *Makhzen* is a Moroccan Arabic word meaning “storehouse,” that was used to refer to the state in the form of a governing establishment revolving around the sultan and associated notables in various sectors. More recently it has come to stand in for an extensive system of royal privilege and clientelism associated with the contemporary Moroccan state. This “deep state” surrounding the monarchy is understood to be the real center of power in Moroccan political life despite the existence of parliament and other ostensibly democratic institutions.

“the Dahir (decree) of April 27, 1914, inaugurating a politics of segregation in regard to the Moroccan press, especially the Arabic press. That explains, in part, why nationalists created periodicals in French, although authorities tried to limit this practice by requiring that the language of publication correspond to the nationality of the newspaper’s owner” (Aouchar, 1990, p. 18).

Moroccan newspapers learned early to strategically maneuver around these rules in a complex back and forth game between colonial authorities and the papers.

Above all, the history of the Moroccan press – and here I mean publications produced by Moroccans – is the history of Moroccan political parties under the French (and to a lesser extent, Spanish) colonial administration, particularly their prohibition and repression. Until 1937 Moroccans were legally forbidden from forming political parties or producing periodicals, and even after this time legislation constantly changed in conjunction with the political whims of French and Spanish authorities (Aouchar, 1990). Following the French model of a partisan press, early Moroccan newspapers took on a militant orientation toward advancing the rights and interests of Moroccans and later the nationalist movement. Aouchar (1990) argues that this militant orientation was so central that the Moroccan press during the colonial era was primarily an “opinion press” rather than an “information press” aimed at making a case for Morocco’s existence as an independent nation (p. 127).

In many ways this history is intertwined with that of a transnational left, as leftist French and Spanish intellectuals and Moroccans studying in Europe collaborated on projects such as the revue *Maghreb*, which was founded in Paris in 1933 and banned in Morocco the following year (Aouchar, 1990; Baida, 1996). The influence of this leftist branch of the nationalist movement only increased after WWII when workers’ and union issues became a preoccupation for

Moroccan papers, especially those of an industrializing Casablanca (Aouchar, 1990). An early split emerges between French and Arab language newspapers, as political parties often produced each, with the Arabic papers emphasizing culture and religion, while the French ones were in dialogue with colonial authorities about issues of rights and governance (Aouchar, 1990). Thus French became a language of opposition for the Moroccan press and we see many of these characteristics of the early Moroccan press – its constant negotiations with authority, militant orientation, and transnational ties – continue in its postcolonial manifestations.

### *Radical (feminist) revues*

After independence, Morocco's partisan press continued to act as political tools for their respective parties, albeit with opposition re-oriented toward the Makhzen's renewed authority. Nationalist party Istiqlal's partnership with the monarchy in the struggle for independence became competition as the monarchy appointed a coalition government composed of Istiqlal and several other parties, and began building a support system of rural notables rather than among Istiqlal's urban base (Willis, 2012). Mohammed V supported and became the figurehead for Moroccan nationalism, adopting the role of arbiter among competing interests, including Istiqlal, and unifying figure for a diverse population, ensuring the monarchy's centrality in postcolonial Moroccan political life.

Both *Lamalif* and *Souffles* were radical revues born out of a tumultuous 1965 for Moroccan politics that included widespread student protests and violent repression, Hassan II's dismissal of parliament and declaration of a state of exception, and the disappearance/assassination of leftist icon Mehdi Ben Barka in Paris. Press seizures and suspensions were frequent, as was harassment and intimidation of journalists, to the extent that the leftist press had been effectively eliminated. In this environment Mohamed Loghlam and

Zakya Daoud<sup>14</sup> started the monthly revue *Lamalif* in March 1966, with Daoud serving as editor-in-chief until the publication was banned in 1988. For them Lam-alif, the two letters forming the word “no” in Arabic,

“It was taking a stand, a ‘No’ openly declared to everything that didn’t answer to the expectations of the people and didn’t solve the difficulties of the country, a putting up for debate and proposal... We wanted to remain optimists... Because the original idea for *Lamalif* was that everything was not lost, that enthusiasm didn’t have to die, that the left didn’t have to admit defeat” (Daoud, 2007, p. 154-155).

Daoud had long been a labor advocate, working for the USFP-associated Moroccan Workers’ Union (UMT) publication *L’Avant-Garde*, writing a women’s page that Skalli (2006) claims was the organizational basis for the Progressive Union of Moroccan Women (in which Daoud also participated), which “might be considered the first Moroccan feminist organization with proletarian roots” (p. 60).

The literary and cultural revue *Souffles* was also born out of this political climate, however it positioned itself as part of the radical left, to the extent that it “became the platform for a nascent Marxist-Leninist movement” (Sefrioui, 2014, p. 13). First published in March 1966, writers and militants Abellatif Laâbi and Mostafa Nissabouri co-founded the review, which brought together politically engaged cultural producers before being banned in 1972 following the arrest of key organizers, including Laâbi.<sup>15</sup> With national culture as its key concern, *Souffles* intervened in debates about its decolonization and the political potential of creativity born out of a “common discontent toward the parties of the traditional left” (Sefrioui, 2014, p. 17). *Souffles*

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<sup>14</sup> Pen name of Jaqueline Loghnam née David, a French journalist and labor advocate who met Mohamed Loghnam at journalism school in Paris, later marrying him and becoming a naturalized Moroccan citizen.

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, both Daoud and Laâbi were part of what were referred to at the time as “mixed marriages”: Laâbi and his wife Jocelyne, a French woman from Lyon whose family moved to Meknes when she was a child, met at university in Rabat and both became French teachers.

sought to broaden the horizons of struggle outside the realm of an institutional politics dominated by a regime increasingly populist and anti-intellectual in its attempts to undermine leftist opposition.<sup>16</sup>

Both *Lamalif* and *Souffles* engaged in a certain militancy despite their different positions on the leftist spectrum. Daoud's feminist orientation carried over to *Lamalif*, which often took anti-patriarchal positions in advocating for what Daoud (2007) called "...a socialism that was no longer in fashion, but above all for universalism, humanism, support for the Third World and autonomous development..." (p. 165). *Souffles*, on the other hand, increasingly saw "Marxism-Leninism, marked by Maoism, as necessary in contesting ancient structures" (Sefrioui, 2014, p. 52), as indicated by *Souffles* contributors' founding of two revolutionary student groups in 1970, *Ila Amam* and *23 mars*. Their ideological advocacy immersed both reviews in international intellectual currents, while maintaining claims to Moroccan specificity. As part of socialist circles Daoud traveled to the USSR and Cuba, participating in conferences and reporting on her experiences. For her, "[Lamalif] was a space open to the world and the flow of ideas connecting Morocco to what was happening elsewhere" (Daoud, 2007, p. 216). Meanwhile *Souffles* debated international issues such as decolonization, Marxism-Leninism, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and American civil rights, leading Sefrioui (2014) to conclude "there are few publications that have given so much importance to international news and or have sought to hear in it a Moroccan voice" (p. 18). The choice of French as language of publication, both facilitated dialogue with the French state about decolonization and links to other socialist movements in the francophone Global South, in addition to providing a distance from tradition as inscribed in the order the publications sought to challenge.

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<sup>16</sup> *La revue Souffles 1966-1973: espoirs de révolution culturelle au Maroc* is a 2013 book published by Kenza Sefrioui, who is also a journalist and cultural critic for *Telquel*. Another *Telquel* contributor, Omar Radi, commented in an interview that he sees *Telquel* as a less radical, more populist version of *Souffles*.



These reviews paved the way for feminist publications of the 1980s, when a burgeoning Moroccan women's movement produced *Thamania Mars* ("March 8," after International Women's Day, 1983),<sup>17</sup> *Nissa' al Maghreb* ("Moroccan women," 1986), and *Kalima* ("word" or act of speaking, 1986-1989) (Skalli, 2006, p. 62-64). All three were monthlies produced by activists or organizations with a history of engagement with leftist politics and sought to privilege women's experiences while acting as vehicles for education and mobilization. While *Thamania Mars* and *Nissa' al Maghreb* depended on sales and subscriptions for revenue, *Kalima* accepted advertising, a choice that partially explains why the former were arabophone and the latter francophone (Skalli, 2006).

Above all this era is indicative of a new type of journalism emerging in opposition to the dominant partisan press, but no less politically-engaged. Its opposition to the re-traditionalization of Moroccan society taking place under Hassan II and his regime's increasingly authoritarian tendencies established these leftist publications as targets of harassment, censorship and seizures spanning the Years of Lead.<sup>18</sup> The majority – *Lamalif*, *Souffles*, *Kalima* – were forced out of operation, but they nevertheless established culture as a field of contention and media as the domain of publicly engaged intellectuals. Their legacy of daring opposition established a precedent for the political consciousness of a new generation of journalists coming of age during economic liberalization and the end of Hassan II's reign.

#### *Rise of the progressive weeklies*

Only three days after the 1997 legislative elections from which the socialists emerged victorious, journalists Ali Amar and Aboubakr Jamaï started *Le Journal* with several of the young

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<sup>17</sup> *Thamania Mars* was the first feminist Arab-language monthly, independent financially as well as editorially.

<sup>18</sup> The Years of Lead refers to a period between 1965-1990 when an increasingly totalitarian Hassan II used violence against dissidents, particularly the left. The period was characterized by disappearances, torture, secret prisons and arbitrary judicial proceedings, eventually leading to a genre in Moroccan literature known as *la littérature carcerale*, or incarceration literature.

journalists and intellectuals that Jean-Louis Servan-Schreiber had assembled at the finance-oriented *La Vie Économique*, including Amar, Ali Lmrabet, and Ahmed Réda Benchemsi. Vermeren (2001) argues that *Le Journal* “rapidly became the symbol of regime liberalization and political alternance”<sup>19</sup> due to its investigative reporting and an editorial policy endorsing economic liberalism and democracy (p. 137). Even if *Le Journal* endured censorship and bans – notably in December 2000 after suggesting then-prime minister Abderrahmane Youssoufi participated in the attempted coup d’état at Hassan II’s Skhirat palace in 1972, after which it reappeared under the name *Le Journal hebdomadaire* – it operated with remarkable freedom and paradoxically participated in improving the regime’s international image. *Le Journal* began a new era in Moroccan journalism and was followed by several other weekly news magazines, notably Lmrabet’s *Demain* in 2000 and Benchemsi’s *Telquel* in 2001.

Above all these progressive weekly news magazines were characterized by a new generation of elite male journalists and intellectuals largely educated abroad who came to journalism through finance or financial journalism at a time when Morocco was in the throes of economic liberalization, opening journalism to commercialization as well as deeper social analysis through an economic lens. For the most part these journalists practice what is widely referred to as “engaged journalism,” which one later *Journal* employee described as a commitment to discussing “what everyone else doesn’t want to publish and what public opinion needs to know. In a more democratic country this might just be called journalism, but in Morocco it’s ‘*le journalisme engagé*’” (Radi, personal communication, 2014). Orlando (2009)

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<sup>19</sup> *L’Alternance*, literally “alternating” or a change in power, refers to a period at the end of Hassan II’s reign when he integrated opposition parties, notably those of the left, into the government. In 1996 Hassan II amended the constitution to expand the power of the prime minister and parliament, after which opposition parties agreed to participate in the November 14, 1997 legislative elections, from which the socialists emerged victorious amid widespread decline of nationalist party Istiqlal. For more on *l’alternance* see Amri (2002) “L’Alternance au Maroc expliquée à mon fils.” For more information on the partisan daily press during the alternance era, see Appendix C.

points out that this engagement is specifically linked to France and the French language as “The word *engagé*’s true meaning was cultivated during the first half of the twentieth century, during a time in French history when public intellectuals in particular were held responsible for commenting on and contextualizing the sociopolitical and historical events taking place in France” (p. 22). Thus this new generation of journalists returning to Morocco from largely French universities in the late 1990s built on the legacy of Morocco’s earlier politically-engaged press and used their transnational support networks to push for a political opening in parallel to the economic one and transforming Morocco’s media landscape in the process.

### **A magnifying glass on Moroccan society**

On October 29, 2001 a new francophone weekly news magazine appeared on Moroccan newsstands. “TELQUEL IS BORN!” proclaimed its inside cover, outlining a vision for a news magazine that took Moroccan society as its object, claiming “...what interests us above all is society, Moroccans. You who, like us, live in a complex country, full of contradictions, changing, in search of itself...but also a country that creates, innovates, invents, outdoes itself” (*Telquel est né!*, 2001, p. 4). *Telquel* presents a vision of Moroccan society that goes beyond Islam, the makhzen and football - that is energetically dynamic and catholic in its tastes. In covering this society *Telquel* adopted the motto “don’t judge, understand,” making the letter “q” in its name resemble a magnifying glass signifying the magazine’s close scrutiny of society and investigative reporting (*Telquel est né!*, 2001, p. 4). According to founder Ahmed Réda Benchemsi, “before I started *Telquel* there were two Moroccos according to press coverage: the first was the Morocco of the party papers and the second was the Morocco of the more recent independent weeklies such as *Le Journal Hebdo* and *Demain*. Those independent weeklies were in permanent protest against Morocco not being Sweden, constantly shouting questions about

why things weren't perfect. There was a need for showing reality, even if we took a position for democracy, human rights, etc." (Benchemsi, personal communication, 2015). That reality involved a leftist opposition increasingly in disarray, rising Islamists and a young monarch managing a society rife with inequalities born of uneven development. In an environment of optimism about newfound freedoms of association and the press, Benchemsi assembled 15 shareholders with capital of 2.5 million dirhams (app. \$250,000), printing their names in the first issue and describing them as mostly "businessmen active in civil society, all practicing a citizen-oriented entrepreneurship" (Qui paye?, 2001, p. 5). The group eventually consolidated into 3 major shareholders – Servan-Schreiber, Mernissi and Benchemsi – under the name Presse Direct. At the end of 2010 Benchemsi sold his 20 percent stake in the company for 6 million dirhams and left for the US, leaving Karim Boukhari as editor-in-chief. According to Boukhari, "the strength of *Telquel* was that it was directed by strong independent investors" (Boukhari, 2014). Boukhari left the magazine in 2013, several months prior to Presse Direct's purchase by two major sympathizers and supporters of the Arab Spring M20 movement, Karim Tazi and Khalid El Hariry. Several months later Tazi bowed out, citing different visions for *Telquel*'s future, and the company's current incarnation, Telquel Média SA, was born.<sup>20</sup>

The recent tumultuous period for *Telquel*'s ownership coincided with increasing financial pressure and frequent changes in editorial leadership. Under Benchemsi and Boukhari, both part of the original *Telquel* team, *Telquel* maintained a relatively cohesive editorial line. Following Boukhari's departure, however, the magazine had two directors in two years (Fahd Iraqi and Abdellah Tourabi) who oversaw a marked change in direction described by Boukhari as "less importance to the people, more emphasis on macro-economy and less decoding of the

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<sup>20</sup> Appendix B, Image 8

relationship of Moroccans to family, religion, society, power” (Boukhari, personal communication, 2014). Despite these difficulties *Telquel* remains the most-read francophone magazine in Morocco with a circulation of 32,332 in 2011, although the actual audience is impossible to estimate because the high cost of printed materials in Morocco means most publications are widely shared and have a high rate of “pass-on” readership. Over time *Telquel*’s price has risen from the original 8 dirhams to 20 dirhams today, or about \$2 USD, while most newspapers cost between 2-5 dirhams. The Casablanca-based publication appears on newsstands and by subscription every Friday, yet makes its content available for free online a week after publication in print and is available in print in France. As an expensive French-language magazine focusing on society and political, it is obviously oriented toward and accessible mostly to elites, although the popularity of French mission schools in the Rabat-Casablanca corridor means French is a language accessible to the rising urban middle-class and the decision to make content available for free online indicates aspirations to a broader audience.

As part of Morocco’s francophone elite, it made sense that Benchemsi’s magazine would be francophone because this elite is frequently bi-national and French opens the magazine to the diaspora, plus facilitates advertising from major Western corporations, allowing more economic autonomy to do boundary-pushing journalism. It also participates in the tradition of French as a language of dissent that is more suitable for taking on taboo issues. Frustrated by the level of censorship from his previous editors Benchemsi “wanted to make strategic calculation for pushing the envelope, but in reality I censored myself very little” (Benchemsi, personal communication, 2015). *Telquel* quickly distinguished itself via its irreverent exposés on Islamists, Moroccans’ sex lives and the hashish industry, just a few cover stories from the magazine’s first year. In many ways *Telquel* constitutes a difficult balancing act between a

religious conservatism in society reinforced by events such as 9/11, the war in Iraq and policy toward Palestine among other issues, and a makhzen seeking to moderate this religious influence while maintaining its position as the sole legitimate religious (and political) authority of the country. The Moroccan regime's contradictory and highly varied relationship with *Telquel* and other progressive weeklies stemmed from the fact that this new media environment served government interests in providing a vocal opposition to Islamists and improving the regime's human rights reputation, presenting an image of a society that values individual liberties and is open to critique.

### *The Nichane Affair*

*Telquel* announced the appearance of *Nichane* in September 2006, asking "Why should we be free in French and less free in Arabic?" (Ksikes, 2006). Taking for a starting point the preconception that Arabic could not be a language of dissent and challenger of taboos due to classical Arabic's affiliations with religion and power, for *Nichane* "The principle is simple: nothing is sacred except liberty... Because an Arabic reader, regardless of his social status, deserves to have his intelligence respected as much as a member of the francophone elite" (Ksikes, 2006). For Benchemsi "*Nichane* shows that we could do what we did with *Telquel*, but not for an elite. It was much more popular than *Telquel* ever was, but because it was in Arabic the backlash was immediate" (Benchemsi, personal communication, 2015). Within months *Nichane* was banned and its director Driss Ksikes on trial for a issue dedicated to popular jokes (*noukat*) titled "Jokes: How Moroccans laugh at religion, sex and politics" (*Nichane*, December 2006). *Telquel* immediately launched a campaign in defense of *Nichane*, publishing explanatory statements, updates on the trial and letters of support from journalists, human rights organizations and individual readers from Casablanca, Paris and Quebec among others over

several weeks. Morocco's public minister charged Ksikes and his co-author with "undermining Islam, the respect due to his Majesty the King and morality" (Benchemsi, 2007a), with the prosecution demanding what Benchemsi described as the equivalent of the "journalistic death penalty" (Benchemsi, 2007b). *Telquel* argued repeatedly that *Nichane*'s intent was only to "report on popular humor in circulation in the country – without endorsing it and with only the intention to do a journalistic analysis of social types" (Benchemsi,



Image 2: *Nichane* cover, December 2006

2007a). On January 15, 2007 the court sentenced Ksikes and journalist Sanaa El Aji to three years in prison on reprieve and a fine of 80,000 dirhams each, while *Nichane* received a 2-month ban beginning with the verdict (Benchemsi, 2007). *Telquel* decided not to appeal the verdict, citing fear of rekindling public hysteria, but vowing that "Many social practices that are 'Islamically incorrect' exist...And we will continue to report on them because this is our job. Like it or not" (Benchemsi, 2007c). Although the verdict led to the departure of a founding member of the *Telquel* team and *Nichane*'s director, Driss Ksikes, the group continued to defend its right to public dissent as a fundamental element of any society with a pretense toward democracy.

Several years later *Telquel* and *Nichane* were both involved in another high-profile conflict with Moroccan authorities regarding an opinion poll assessing the first ten years of Mohammed VI's reign. *Telquel* published a series of four provocative cover

stories about the multiple roles occupied by the king in the weeks leading up to poll results assessing his first ten years on the throne: “Le roi cool” (#380), “Le chef absolue” (#381), “Le businessman” (#382) and “Le premier imam” (#383). The final installment in the series “The people judge their king” (#384-5) never made it onto newsstands because 100,000 copies of *Telquel* and *Nichane* were seized at the printer and ordered destroyed by the minister of the interior. As part of taking Moroccan society as its object, *Telquel* participated in numerous polls aimed at attempting to understand said society. However, opinion polls about the monarchy took this a step too far reported French newspaper *Le Monde*, *Telquel*’s partner in conducting the poll. For Benchemsi, collaboration with partners such as *Le Monde* and the development of international networks offered an important insurance policy in an authoritarian political context so that “...in the survey conducted with *Le Monde*, you have someone to mobilize and publicize the case for you in the case of a government crackdown” (Benchemsi, personal communication, 2015). On August 4, three days after the seizure of *Telquel* and *Nichane*, *Le Monde*’s front page carried a picture of the banned *Telquel* issue and the headline “Morocco: The Forbidden Poll” (Beaugé, 2009), publishing the poll’s results and leading Moroccan authorities to ban the edition. Support for *Telquel* and *Nichane* poured in from media and press organizations around the world, with Reporters Without Borders calling the seizures “archaic and illegal” (#386).<sup>21</sup> The poll also inspired a campaign by early Moroccan internet users, including one of Mamfakinch’s founders, who labeled themselves as “the 9 percent” in response to the king’s 91 percent approval rating.

In the following weeks *Telquel* published a replacement issue (#386) without the poll results and with a daring banner across the cover declaring “Number after censure,” claiming the

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<sup>21</sup> Appendix B, Image 9



poll provided a plebiscite for M6 and, if anything, revealed a profound confidence imbued in the body of the king by the people, and conversely, a complete lack of confidence in other institutions. Half of Moroccans described the monarchy's governing as "democratic," leading *Le Monde* to ask "Was the fear so great under Hassan II that it's enough for his son to loosen the vice a little on freedom of expression, for the people to consider him, even prematurely, democratic?" (Beaugé, 2009). According to Morocco's minister of the interior "it is the very concept of a poll on the monarchy that is totally unacceptable in Morocco," with the government spokesman echoing discourse from the Years of Lead with the statement "the monarchy cannot be put into the equation" (Les raisons de la censure, 2009, p. 9). This led *Telquel* to call for the reconciliation of law with lived reality stating "If this is the case, it is necessary to pass a law forbidding polls to regulate what the people have the right to say or not – and in this case, to stop claiming that we are in a democracy or in the process of democratizing. And above all, we should own that" (Les raisons de la censure, 2009, p. 9). Calls for Moroccans to "*s'assumer*" – to own their reality, to some extent take responsibility for it, and above all to see the humor in its paradoxes – are frequent in *Telquel* and usually accompanied by suggestions that acknowledging these realities will allow Moroccans as a society to both celebrate strengths and acknowledge weaknesses while using them as a starting point for building an alternative modernity.

2009 and 2010 constituted the culmination of a state strategy of judicial harassment and fines against the press that began in 2003. In a year-end summary of major stories *Telquel* named 2009 as "the year where defamation cases have been used to punish newspapers," citing fines levied against newspapers *Al Ahdath*, *Al Jarida Al Oula*, and *Al Massae*, the seizures of *Telquel* and *Nichane*, interrogation of journalists for reporting on the king's health, the interdiction of arabophone daily *Akhbar al Youm*, the incarceration of *Al Michaâl's* director, and multiple other

prison sentences (often under reprieve) and fines levied against journalists, including a 5.9 million dirham fine against monthly *Economie & Entreprises* that led its property to be auctioned off (Journalistes taisez-vous!, 2009). For journalist and *Telquel* contributor Omar Radi this marked the height of economic censorship of the Moroccan press, which depends heavily on advertising in an environment where the reading public remains small, with approximately 300,000 copies sold on any given day (Radi, personal communication, 2014). Downward trends in the press continued in 2010, with the progenitor of Morocco's independent press, *Le Journal*, forcibly shut down by authorities due to its debts, *Nichane* succumbing to an advertising boycott, and *Al Jazeera's* Moroccan office closed under political pressure for its coverage of the Western Sahara. *Telquel* featured *Le Journal's* demise on its cover, with an editorial from Benchemsi claiming "there is no doubt that what precipitated the end of *Le Journal* was its editorial line – especially the editorials of its founder Aboubakr Jamaï...that never departed from their fierce opposition to Morocco's current slide toward autocracy and/or oligarchy" (Benchemsi, 2010a). Accompanying this opposition was an advertising boycott by public and private companies, which Jamaï claimed led to an 80 percent loss in advertising revenue, putting the magazine in dire financial straits that led to its demise (Hamdani, 2010). *Nichane* was subjected to a similar boycott in 2010, led by royal holding company ONA<sup>22</sup> and its affiliates. According to Benchemsi, *Telquel* was able to endure the boycott because its large proportion of foreign advertisers made it less susceptible to local political pressure, while *Nichane* was completely reliant on local advertisers" (Benchemsi, personal communication, 2015).

For *Telquel Nichane's* demise constituted the height of this dark period for the independent press in Morocco. "Adieu Nichane" announced an October 2010 *Telquel* cover with

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<sup>22</sup> Omnium Nord Africain, or ONA, was a private Moroccan holding company controlled by the royal family. In 2010 it merged with Société Nationale d'Investissement (SNI) and dropped the ONA title, although it is still controlled by the royal family.



*Nayda, event-making and public culture*

*Telquel* founder Ahmed Réda Benchemsi and I exchanged emails several times in my years studying *Telquel*. Ironically, I was finally able to chat with him via Skype in April 2015 when I was in Morocco doing fieldwork, as he now lives in the Maryland suburbs of Washington D.C. In our conversation he described *Telquel* as born out of his frustrations with self-censorship at *Le Journal Hebdo*, which he left in search of more autonomy. His inspiration for *Telquel* dates back to reading *Kalima* during high school in the 1980s and admiring “that they developed a progressive group of writers and published daring cover stories about social trends and women’s rights...of course there were no politics because there weren’t politics at that time under Hassan II” (Benchemsi, personal communication, 2015). By taking society as its object *Telquel* explored the divides between the francophone elite reading the magazine and the rest of the population often living in abysmal conditions. When questioned about *Telquel*’s populist and sometimes sensationalist reputation, Benchemsi shot back “Do you only want to read about things that pertain to you?” Even if *Telquel*’s core audience is the francophone elite, it is important to consider the ways that *Telquel* intervened in conversations both by addressing the highest echelons of power and the mere presence of its daring covers on corner news stands for all to see. As Benchemsi explained “It became clear from the sales that people were interested in reading these things and it went beyond elites to become a real *phénomène de société*. In the process *Telquel* went from ‘Morocco as it is’ to something more – an aggressive stance on political issues addressing social hypocrisy (alcohol consumption, middle and lower classes in bars, sex outside marriage, etc), which is definitely not just an elite thing” (Benchemsi, personal communication, 2015). Talking freely, however, is a relatively recent phenomenon in a Morocco still marked by paranoia born from years of political repression, making civil society a very

small world. “We drink in the same bars, smoke the same pot” said Benchemsi, “and these incestuous circles lead to cross collaboration” (Benchemsi, personal communication, 2015). This is clear from the list of contributors to *Free Arabs*, Benchemsi’s new project, which includes many current and former *Telquel* staffers as well as other well-known journalists and activists. Even if Benchemsi is no longer at *Telquel*, he doesn’t seem to be done with it as a project just yet, as he described *Free Arabs* as “*Telquel*’s editorial line and ambitions at the scale of the Arab World” (Benchemsi, personal communication, 2015).

*Telquel*’s interventions are not confined to the pages of the magazine, but rather constitute an ongoing interaction with public life. From its early days the magazine took a particularly keen interest in the Moroccan urban music scene, especially a new generation of young musicians challenging social norms. In 2002 *Telquel* published an 8-page spread about the Moroccan music industry (or lack thereof) entitled “Piracy: The Music Mafia” and in 2003 the magazine took up the cause of heavy metal rockers accused of Satanism, calling it “Our Cultural 9/11” and “The Inquisition at Home” (Ksikes, 2003), while publishing court proceedings, a petition and urging the public to act in defense of the young musicians. These issues are only the beginning of *Telquel*’s extensive engagement with Morocco’s underground music scene and support for young musicians. Above all *Telquel*’s coverage of musicians, musical subcultures and industry issues indicates enormous barriers to entry for young musicians that include lack of infrastructure, sponsorship, distribution networks, and, ultimately, an industry out of touch with Morocco’s music scene and [young] publics (Bensalmia, 2005; Maréchaud, 2005). In many ways *Telquel* embraces urban youth culture as key to shifting mentalities toward authority and challenging taboos, but also because the magazine is able to intervene much more directly in the

field of culture than in politics, while creating platforms for claim-making by a new type of citizen-subject.

*Telquel* participated in attempts to construct an alternative infrastructure and alternative politics around a festival named “The Boulevard of Young Musicians,” or *L’Boulevard*, a volunteer event founded in 1999 by Mohammed Merhari (also known as Momo) and Hicham Bahou. Originally located at the Foire des Oeuvres Laïque (managed by Merhari and also where the “satanic” rockers played) under the name Trampoline of Young Musicians, the festival moved to a major stadium (COC) in 2003 as it exploded in popularity (Zaïdi, 2005). The festival was built on the backs of non-profit and secular associations and staffed entirely by volunteers. The organizers insist on the festival’s non-commercial nature, emphasizing that they are able to pay groups only a small portion of their normal fees (often funded by international sponsors), instead relying on bands’ commitment to “artistic engagement and cultural activism” (Zaïdi, 2005). As part of their appearance in the festival headliners’ contracts also require them to host workshops and meet with young musicians in order to foster skills development, networking and exchanges. *Telquel* covered the urban music scene involved with the festival closely and in the lead-up to the 2005 edition of the festival published a series of profiles of “leading bands of the new Moroccan scene” (Hamdani, 2005). Among the groups was Hoba Hoba Spirit, an unapologetically political band fusing rock, reggae and gnawa music with lyrics largely in Darija, who that summer produced an album and hit song titled “Blad Schizo”<sup>23</sup> which became a society-wide refrain standing in for the paradoxes of Moroccan modernity and later its own section in *Telquel*. Lead singer Réda Allali subsequently became a columnist for *Telquel*,

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<sup>23</sup> *Blad schizo*, or “schizophrenic country” is a reference to widespread perceptions of and discourse about Morocco having a split personality, often associated with separate linguistic realms, postcolonial hybridities and uneven development associated with globalization. In *Telquel*, schizophrenia is interpreted as both rooted in social hypocrisy and a source of local specificity and humor, and “blad schizo” has since become its own section in the magazine. For an early *Telquel* cover on this phenomenon see Appendix B, Image 10.

publishing under the fictitious and particularly schizophrenic persona of Zakaria Boualem, described as a “Moroccan with paranoid tendencies” who offers cheeky but insightful commentary on everything from football to current affairs from *Telquel*'s pages.<sup>24</sup>

The emergence of groups such as Hoba Hoba Spirit is closely tied to increased artistic freedoms, technological change and new forms of public culture in the era of Mohammed VI, particularly for globally circulating genres such as rock and rap. Events such as L’Boulevard gave these hybrid musical subcultures the opportunity to engage with publics while highlighting youth perspectives and voices on a changing Morocco. In the wake of the 2006 edition of L’Boulevard *Telquel* printed a cover photo of five animated young men in mid-jump against a background of crowded metal risers and a blue sky. In the sky above their heads hangs the word “NAYDA!” in large orange letters, over which several Darija phrases appear in colorful blocks.

Veritably bursting with energy, the five figures wear giant grins along with T-shirts, jeans and athletic shoes. The closest figure to the camera is a black man wearing tribal print pants with a striped t-shirt. In mid-jump his long dreads fly above his head and he has both fists extended between his bent knees in a kind of acrobatic leap. Grouped around him are several other men of what appear to be varying ethnicities and directly underneath him a text box with the words “L’Boulevard Syndrome: Portrait of a Hypercreative Youth” (Maréchaud, 2006). This creativity and its generative

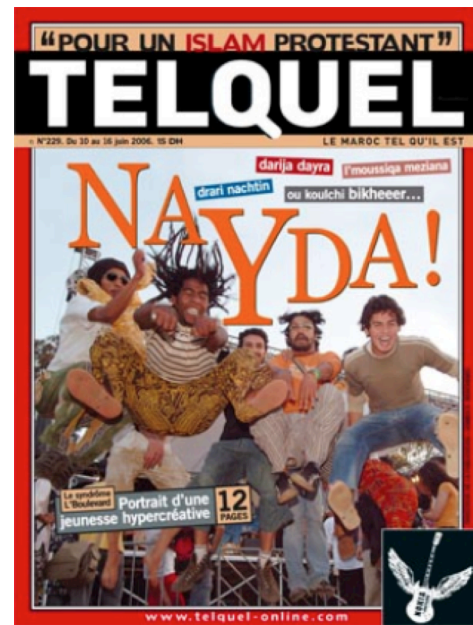


Image 4: *Telquel* cover #229, June 2006

<sup>24</sup> For the illustration accompanying Boualem’s *Telquel* column, see Appendix B, Image 11.

possibilities emerges at the nexus of cosmopolitan forms and local culture, rooted in the everyday language and life experiences of an urban youth increasingly entrenched in global flows (and frictions) of capital and culture.

*Telquel* used the word *Nayda*, meaning “let’s go” in Darija, to name a youth movement associated with L’Boulevard emphasizing an energetic urban culture, engagement with contemporary realities and Darija as a generative space. In the introduction to an extensive and multi-part cover story titled “Darija Generation!” *Nayda* is described as “the magic word of a generation that draws on its maternal language, but also on its penchant for creating mechanisms to regenerate another Morocco. Less stuffy, more real” (Maréchaud, 2006). The simultaneous emergence of a younger generation and Moroccan Arabic into public culture suggests official languages and cultures advanced by those in power failed to resonate with the realities of urban youth intent on creating their own platforms for pleasure and participation. Dominique Caubet, a French linguist and Darija scholar, penned part of the cover article in which she disputes the characterization of Darija as “street language” and argues that like every language it has a literary level and that the young musicians of L’Boulevard are just the latest in a long line of poets in Darija, well-known as ‘the language of *zajal*, of the *melhoun*, d’El Mejdoub, the proverbs, the stories, the enigmas, and more recently the *Ghiwane*” (Caubet, 2006). Referencing this long creative tradition in the local dialect informs *Telquel*’s constructions an alternative Moroccan modernity rooted in histories of the popular and not confined to the official accounts of authorities.

The main cover story follows Caubet’s commentary and is accompanied by an inset photo of a crowded concert audience with their hands raised in horns, a sign of rebellion associated with rock culture. The photo centers on a young woman raised above everyone else,



apparently on someone's shoulders, wearing a low-cut black tank top with multiple necklaces and black bracelets. She has her mouth open in mid-scream while her arm is raised along with the other concert-goers, saluting the stage. The story describes how the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of L'Boulevard in 2006 hosted a roundtable titled "Darija, contemporary creative language" that included musicians (Don Bigg), filmmakers (Ali Essafi) and authors (Youssouff Amine Elalamy) and emphasized a creative ecosystem whereby creative energy and inspiration flows across mediums and networks. At the roundtable filmmaker Essafi, a participant in the L'Boulevard's musical documentary festival, described L'Boulevard as "the only event that has opened up a path between the old Arabicized intellectual majority and the wealthy and Westernized class rife with identity complexes" (Maréchaud & Bensalmia, 2006). *Telquel*, as indicated by this extensive cover story, plus editorials and other coverage, is deeply invested in this path as a rebuttal to those who would dismiss the magazine as merely an expression of the nation's francophone elite. In addition to supporting the L'Boulevard, *Telquel* participated in music production by co-producing an album by Moroccan rappers H-Kayne that was released in parallel with the festival. Other Moroccan media, notably state television stations RTM and 2M, maintained a "flagrant silence" on the festival, while some younger independent radio stations sought collaborations with the L'Boulevard leading *Telquel* to argue for "the need for a radio to mirror the Moroccan youth, stop Lebanon-ization and promote new music...motivations consistent with and promising for a small revolution for these new artists until now largely snubbed by the media" (Maréchaud & Bensalmia, 2006). In invoking Darija, *Telquel* participates in and advocates for a coming together of symbolic systems and everyday life as part of a new cultural dynamism that sets aside the sacred in favor of questioning and critique.

Throughout this article *parler vrai*, or “real talk” appears as a refrain to describe the musicians of L’Boulevard, Nayda and a generation more direct in its dissent from Moroccan public culture and politics. The realities of everyday life are framed as a key source of creativity for “a curious generation, open to infinite musical genres where individual influences and personal tastes go from one extreme to the other, from raï to heavy metal, from ragga to jazz” (Maréchaud & Bensalmia, 2006). For this generation *parler vrai* involves speaking to the experiences of urban youth in a liberalizing authoritarian society marked by the paranoia of the past and uneven development, and a response to the divorce of classical Arabic from contemporary social concerns. Largely ignored by international music labels and commercial interests, musicians face production and distribution problems, but also the artistic freedom to experiment, address contemporary issues in the local language and launch creative attempts (such as L’Boulevard) toward an alternative cultural infrastructure. Several films such as *Boulevard Generation* document this musical counterculture “where music is embedded with associative life, politics and generational concerns. In short, the transcript of a reality that we don’t see on any screen today” (Maréchaud & Bensalmia, 2006). Through *Telquel*’s participation in, sponsorship and coverage of Morocco’s young musicians, L’Boulevard and Nayda the magazine worked to generate conversations about and through language, as a way to access the experiential realities of everyday life largely absent from a media confined to official narratives and fixed ideological frameworks. In providing a platform for marginal perspectives *Telquel* produces new types of publics previously excluded from official domains of politics, culture and even employment, and a cultural politics based on a set of values associated with human rights and orchestrated in conjunction with transnational civil society.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> For more detailed analysis of the specific politics of Nayda and Morocco’s festival culture under Mohammed VI, see Appendix D.

## Conclusion

In the case of *Telquel* we see processes of economic liberalization and the reterritorialization of the nation in accordance with capital produce the conditions of possibility for independent media to challenge societal taboos and traditional forms of authority, fundamentally shifting the relationship between culture and politics while simultaneously blurring the lines between them. The exclusion of publics from politics in an authoritarian political context means that new forms of capital and consumption, as well as access to the tools of cultural production, have made public culture a dynamic site of contention over political visions and societal projects.

Against this backdrop, *Telquel's* move to reclaim Darija can be seen as a move toward the desacralization of public culture, although it is far from clear what form that desacralization will take. What is getting worked out in *Telquel* is not the setting aside of religion, the monarchy and tradition for something else (i.e. French articulations of Enlightenment values – although the inalienable rights of the individual do play a key role in *Telquel's* interventions), rather my analysis suggests that language and hybridity are forming a “structuring tension” between the modernity of the monarchy that sets itself aside as sacred and a rather ambivalent notion of modernity that wants to draw on both indigenous and external influences, yet is not necessarily trying to upset the established order. Although not necessarily aiming to change the social hierarchy, by taking Moroccan society as its object my analysis suggests that *Telquel* does want to construct a narrative of Morocco where creativity, candor and non-conformity are valued – effectively making that hierarchy more open and less dependent on clientelism and nepotism while increasing transparency and the rule of law. In advancing Darija and a version of hybridity that privileges a progressive counterpublic often ambivalent about the role of religion and capital in their lives, *Telquel* engages public culture as an ongoing site of struggle over Morocco's

relationship with global modernity, trying to understand Moroccan society and in the process bringing alternative voices into the arena of public culture, where they become part of an increasingly dynamic conversation about the nature of Moroccan modernity.

*Telquel* does this by re-reading history and challenging official narratives, often in provocative and inflammatory ways. Covers such as “And if we re-read the Coran?” (2005, #158) and “The unsuspected history of eroticism in the land of Islam” (2010, #445) demonstrate the extent to which *Telquel* challenges conventional understandings of the relationship between the sacred and authority, and culture and politics more generally. While the monarchy’s version of modernity involves policies adapted from the colonial administration whereby the sultan remained the cultural authority of the country alongside a modern bureaucratic administration, in effect embracing advances in science, infrastructure and the economy while setting aside forms of authority rooted in religion and culture. Meanwhile *Telquel*’s version of modernity takes the acceptance of scientific tools for granted while using society as an entry point to think about culture as it exists in and emanates from everyday life – a type of culture with which a monarchy concerned with presenting itself as primordial is perpetually out of step – as an avenue to address the challenges of a specifically Moroccan modernity outside the domain of an institutional politics dominated by the monarchy. Darija constitutes a key mechanism around which *Telquel* organizes its advocacy for an alternative cultural politics and perhaps the most unequivocal demonstration of the real difficulties posed by the monarchy’s version of modernity for Moroccan publics.

Ultimately *Telquel* offers a progressive space willing to try new and daring things and open debates even if the outcomes are not guaranteed in a society still often defined by conservative social mores. This is seen in efforts such as *Telquel*’s consent to carry a fact-

checking column called *L'Arbitre*, or “the referee,” on its website in 2014, a column developed after the U.S. State Department brought *Washington Post* fact-checking columnist Glen Kessler as part of its speaker series. Kessler conducted a workshop with the pro-democracy NGO Capdema, which afterwards shopped around the idea of a fact-checking column to various media outlets with *Telquel* being the only taker. By taking Moroccan society and youth in particular seriously, the magazine becomes the voice for a secular counterculture challenging the role of religion in public life and its use by the powerful as a force for repression and stagnation. This divorce between political power and cultural life – underway since economic liberalization – has brought renewed dynamism to cultural life and produces public culture as a site of struggle over increasing openness and availability of a variety of ideas, commodities and lifestyle. *Telquel's* participation in this struggle and attempts to desacralize public culture through Darija are not necessarily about eradicating religion, but rather opening up frank discussions about its function in society. By re-mediating culture as rooted in everyday life and the practices of urban youth *Telquel* reshapes Moroccan publics in relation to capital and invites readers into a particular relationship with events of the world. In an authoritarian political context known for the exclusion of the general population from the political field, *Telquel* uses Darija to intervene in public culture and stand in for a set of social values associated with human rights and democratic norms. In doing so the magazine opens up discursive space outside the domains of established authority for the articulation of an alternative modernity to act as a platform for a new cultural politics based on the communicative practices of everyday life.

## Chapter 2

### **Producing Public Intellectuals: Shifting Scales and Social Critique in the New Moroccan Cinema**

On a sunny morning in October 2014 I entered the newly renovated Cinéma Renaissance on Rabat’s Avenue Mohammed V for the Café du Film, or “Film Cafe”. Framed as a meeting space for aid funds and Moroccan filmmakers, the program described it as an exchange among “24 foreign experts, filmmakers and audiovisual professionals from countries of the South Mediterranean and Europe” around themes of financing, co-production and platforms for professionalization “whose training programs are open to professionals and young Moroccan talent.” Director Nadine Müseler of the Goethe-Institut organized the event in cooperation with Fondation HIBA<sup>1</sup> and the Institut français, as well as many other cultural institutes and several Moroccan film schools. Paul Sinéty, deputy advisor of cooperation and cultural action for the French embassy, talked as part of the introduction about cinema as a “generator of employment,” emphasizing that “all the embassies – France, the Netherlands, Britain, Germany, Switzerland, Tunisia, Egypt, etc – are associated with this initiative.” Arnaud Simons, the press and cultural affairs officer for the Netherlands embassy, also spoke briefly about cinema as “an important encounter between citizens and the youth” and lauded the dynamism of the Moroccan cinema sector.

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<sup>1</sup> Fondation HIBA, or the HIBA Foundation, is a non-profit association for the promotion of the arts created in 2006 by royal decree. For more information see: <http://www.fondationhiba.ma/content/presentation>

One major component of this Café du Film was the discussion of the first data-driven report about the Moroccan audiovisual market published the previous year (2013) by Euromed Audiovisual III in cooperation with the European Audiovisual Observatory. Euromed Audiovisual III constituted the third phase of an EU project conducted between 2000-2014 to increase the availability of data, transparency and cooperation among audiovisual sectors of the south Mediterranean, largely with Europe. Ioana Frédérique Westhoff, Euromed’s expert for institutional development and capacity building, discussed “Morocco’s statistical reality” as shown in the first report on the Moroccan industry. According to the report, Morocco is in a unique and difficult situation in that it is seeing a significant increase in production, yet still struggles with distribution, profitability and lack of funding from the private sector (Ali, 2012). Despite these difficulties, Westhoff acknowledged that “there is a political will to have a cinema industry in Morocco” and that Euromed’s role is to “supply the means to access certain funds, in addition to acting as a source of funding itself.” Euromed also offers tools for cinema professionals such as country-specific summaries of audiovisual legislation and examples of contracts oriented toward international co-productions on their website, and Westhoff encouraged Moroccan filmmakers to know their rights and familiarize themselves with the practical side of film production. From her perspective “...Morocco is the only country in the MENA region that has started putting in place the tools worthy of an international cinema industry.”

Those tools have largely been put in place over the last two decades as a “new Moroccan cinema” has emerged.<sup>2</sup> During this time a new generation of filmmakers whose work is

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<sup>2</sup> “New Moroccan cinema,” is a phrase used by popular and trade press to refer to a new wave in Moroccan cinema that has emerged during the reign of Mohammed VI (1999-present). It is generally characterized by new funding mechanisms, improved technical quality and taking on taboo topics, often in the local language.

characterized by a confluence of transnational networks, new funding models and boundary-pushing content has provoked debates that go to the heart of sharp divides in Moroccan publics and distinct visions of Moroccan modernity. Coming of age in an era of economic liberalization and political transition, these filmmakers are less marked by the political repression of the Years of Lead<sup>3</sup> and often operate between Morocco and Europe, defying national classifications and expanding aspirations about the audience for Moroccan cinema and its role in an increasingly transnational cinema landscape. Their increased autonomy, coupled with reduced censorship, has allowed them the flexibility to challenge traditional approaches and understandings of “Third World cinema” while shedding light on the dynamics of a highly stratified society, including lives lived on the margins of global capitalism. These filmmakers are largely associated with a progressive counterpublic and their emergence in the wake of a particular political moment defined by the rise of Islamism has led to open battles with Islamists and social conservatives more broadly over who and what cinema is for, as well as the difficulties of openly addressing controversial social realities in a global era.

I open this chapter by recounting the Café du Film because this event highlights exceptionally well several key dynamics at play in Moroccan cinema, specifically: “culture” as an international development priority and object of EU policy in particular, the tension in Morocco between global Hollywood and Moroccan cinema, the extensive interventions of the Moroccan government dedicated to establishing a cinema sector, and last but not least, the transnational trajectories of Moroccan filmmakers, who are increasingly embedded in networks of education, financing and storytelling not confined by national borders. All of this adds up to a dynamic discourse around Moroccan cinema across multiple scales, making cinema a site of

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<sup>3</sup> The Years of Lead refers to a period between 1965-1990 when an increasingly totalitarian Hassan II used violence against dissidents, particularly the left. The period was characterized by disappearances, torture, secret prisons and



contestation over flows of capital, frictions associated with cultural influence, and Moroccan modernity writ large. Together, the institutional developments that have shaped the new Moroccan cinema as an industry and the discourse of Moroccan cinema that takes art as a space of social critique are indicative of the ways in which cultural elites, nation-states, regional politics and global markets intersect in competition for currency on the world stage.

### **Shifting scales**

This chapter maps the contours of the new Moroccan cinema, focusing on transnational influences in cultural policy and their impact on industry logics, while the subsequent chapter will examine the ideological interventions made possible by these logics. As in the case of *Telquel*, increased openness to and availability of global capital (particularly cultural assistance funds) and new distribution mechanisms dependent on technology and travel (piracy, TV, festivals, etc) have opened up new avenues for alternative storytelling and depictions of Moroccan life and experiences that challenge hegemonic narratives about society and culture through cinema. These circumstances coincided with Morocco's emergence as one of few small countries with the political will to support audiovisual production and assemble industry structures, as well as the rise of a new generation of Moroccan filmmakers. The political will to have cinema in Morocco accompanies an increased emphasis on culture as a mechanism of development and discourses about the value of diversity as part of the international agenda, the institutions associated with which seem increasingly aware that money and military force only go so far in the aftermath of the Iraq War, ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and the rise of ISIL. Morocco's efforts to set itself apart as much as possible from conflicts and instability in the MENA region are the product of its economic overture and a new king widely reported to be a

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arbitrary judicial proceedings, leading to widespread paranoia and distrust of authorities.

cinophile who seems intent on fostering both economic development and a more favorable reputation regarding dissent through the cinema industry.

While cinema has traditionally been studied within the framework of the nation-state, the consolidation of cultural production accompanying globalization and the transnational networks within which Moroccan cinema is embedded demand that we interrogate how industry logics have changed and what sort of discourses and ideologies they are producing. The nation-state is still clearly an important player in the Moroccan context, yet it also seems to increasingly be just one among a myriad of stakeholders and potential sets of resources associated with the new Moroccan cinema. Govil (2009) suggests that cinema is a means of legitimizing the state in that it functions to strengthen symbolic attachments while simultaneously attempting to attract capitalist economic development, and therefore strengthening the state's role in the economy (p. 136). While this is certainly the case in Morocco, these dynamics now exist in parallel with alternative means of financing and distribution that have given filmmakers more freedom from the political imperatives of the state. The Moroccan government has shown a certain willingness to open up the cinema sector to more modernist visions of a society acknowledging its problems and notably hasn't withheld filming permits or (usually) censored films despite heated debate. In fact, increased resources for the CCM have been a source of legitimacy for the Moroccan state at a time when authoritarian forms of government and Islamic states in particular have been under close scrutiny by the global community.

But in addition to the Moroccan state we can also talk about an emergent space of funding, training and circulation that sits alongside statist structures and uses the "universal" model of Hollywood as a reference. The establishment of the first film studio in Morocco in 1983 allowed foreign studios to take advantage of lower labor and living costs and over time

made Morocco a site of Hollywood outsourcing as well as a regional cinema center with the tools and technical expertise to construct an emerging industry of its own. Thus Moroccan cinema can be seen as part of what Sassen (2006) argues is an overlooked dimension of globalization, namely the way processes and transformations inside the nation participate in its disassembly as the sole order and authority. Through this lens the new Moroccan cinema can be seen as characterized by an emergent space of funding from other audiovisual sectors like television, cultural aid funds, diasporic capital and festivals offering alternative (albeit difficult) means of assembling the resources for production. It is important to emphasize that even those filmmakers who receive government funding through the CCM often need to supplement it elsewhere, opening up links to transnational imaginaries about integration into regional if not global cinema circles, as well as wider aspirations about audience and commercial viability.

The new Moroccan cinema is defined by a shift in scale from taking the national as the assumed frame of reference to operating according to a wider regional and global framework, in part due to transnational influences in cultural policy and their interactions with globalization. Morocco's colonial history with France and France's tradition of subsidizing cinema have contributed to the development of Moroccan filmmakers, as well as their visions about markets and messages. Significantly, the growth in Moroccan cinema has come at a time when Morocco is opening up economically and seeking to integrate more fully into the EU community. The Euromed Partnership, also known as the Barcelona Procedure, is a 1995 agreement between EU countries and those bordering the Mediterranean (including Morocco) to create a free trade zone in exchange for development aid from the EU Investment Bank. The agreement emphasizes peace and stability as part of a "European politics of neighbors," and also contains a cultural component. Euromed Audiovisual is one manifestation of this politics in the form of a three-

phase project, of which the third phase was an 11 million euro effort dedicated to the development of cinema sectors of South Mediterranean countries over four years (2011-2014), notably focusing on the encouragement of co-productions. These agreements and initiatives are fundamental components for the construction of what Kraidy (2014) has called a “deterritorialized industry whose production, distribution and consumption operate across cultural, national and sub-regional boundaries” (p. 37). Because many cultural assistance funds such as France’s Aid to World Cinemas include co-production requirements and specifications about where the money can be spent, they are specifically structured toward forging relationships that support the development of cinema industries in the global South, but also the integration of their well-being with that of audiovisual industries in Europe.

While these collaborations are growing, few Moroccan producers are benefitting from new Gulf funds, despite the increased presence of their films at festivals such as the Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF). Arab media developers have traditionally viewed the Maghreb as an undesirable market due to lack of buying power and low education rates (Kraidy, 2013). These connections and disjunctures are examples of what Punathembekar (2013) calls looking at media as “scale-making projects” that allow mapping of “the complex connections across multiple spatial scales that define the imaginations and practices of media professionals” (p. 67). Indications abound that filmmakers of the new Moroccan cinema are both living their lives and imagining their audience transnationally, taking advantage of what Curtin (2009) calls “trajectories of creative migration” to intervene in issues across borders (p. 113). These trajectories result in a clustering of creative talent by a workforce that is self-consciously motivated by aesthetic innovation as well as market considerations and attempts to take advantage of “mutual learning effects” and “the largest pool of employment opportunities” (ibid.,

p. 113). These trajectories are one mechanism through which filmmakers have become more tightly interconnected with industry structures across the Mediterranean, and today it is important to note that rather than a singular “migration,” these migrations are multiple and constitute a frequent back and forth as filmmakers attempt to take advantage of opportunities in Morocco and transnationally.

Working at the intersections of industry studies, critical political economy and discourse analysis, I look at the “new Moroccan cinema” as a social phenomenon composed of shifting organizational logics and genre conventions with ideological implications. In doing so I draw on industry and production studies coming out of the US and other contexts over the last couple years from scholars such as John Caldwell (2008), Michael Curtin (2009), Nitlin Govil (2009), Aswin Punathambekar (2013), Joseph Straubhaar (2015) and others. In doing so I employ elements of what Caldwell (2008) calls “an integrated cultural-industrial analysis,” which emphasizes different registers or modes of analysis within a critical cultural framework (p. 4). I employ textual analysis of media discourse surrounding filmmakers and films of the new Moroccan cinema, interviews with filmmakers and institutional actors, reports produced by government and civil society and participant observation at funding workshops, cultural symposia and film festivals, in order to analyze discourse across various registers. The lens of cultural-industrial analysis and its emphasis on multiple registers brings into focus how the new Moroccan cinema is constructed in the nexus of transnational cultural industries, national interests, individual filmmaker priorities and audience tastes. I want to make it clear that I am not doing cinema studies, but rather looking at cinema as another site of cultural production and an increasingly transnational “independent”<sup>4</sup> media landscape in post-economic liberalization

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<sup>4</sup> I consider films of the new Moroccan cinema as independent because they are both made outside the major film studio system and because they are increasingly made without Moroccan state intervention.

Morocco. Much has been written about the texts of the new Moroccan cinema from a more literary studies approach that emphasizes their internal narratives, and while I will conduct close readings of a few films in the subsequent chapter, it is with an eye on their relationship to organizational aspects and the public conversations they ignite.

I focus on a specific strand of Moroccan cinema associated with 5 filmmakers – Nabil Ayouch, Laïla Marrakchi, Leïla Kilani, Nour-Eddine Lakhmari and Narjiss Nejjar – who have been discussed in conjunction with a new Moroccan cinema and to a greater or lesser extent challenged the status quo, achieved a certain success at the box office and with critics on the festival circuit, and taken part in various cultural initiatives and/or activist projects. In analyzing this new space within the broader field of Moroccan cinema, I look at the production practices and specific film culture of this small group of filmmakers in asking “what defines the new Moroccan cinema in terms of industry logics and as a discursive formation? What work are these logics and discourses doing and for whom?” Ultimately I work to make sense of the paradox by which Moroccan cinema achieve popularity in local markets at precisely the moment it starts imagining itself as an industry and in terms of audiences, transnationally.

In order to answer these questions I begin by introducing the new Moroccan cinema as a phenomenon then situate it in historical perspective, considering what sets Moroccan cinema of the new millennium apart from its earlier colonial and postcolonial manifestations. Next I consider the Moroccan Cinema Center (CCM) as an institution and its ongoing role in the Moroccan cinema industry before exploring the shifting industry logics of the new Moroccan cinema move beyond the nation-state. In order to do this I conduct a discourse analysis of debates around the NMC in the popular and trade press from 2004-2014, a period that roughly aligns with Nouredine Saïl’s tenure as head of the CCM. Looking at the new Moroccan cinema

through the lens of its industry logics and, in the subsequent chapter, ideological implications illuminates several trends in regard to how Moroccan cinema is produced and used by various stakeholders.

Morocco's film industry makes an important case study of the role of media and culture in transitional societies in the process of debating different versions of modernity and encounters with globalization. Morocco has long hosted international shoots and more recently emerged as one of a few small countries with the political will to restructure its film industry in the midst of increased consolidation of film production and distribution at the global level. The rise of a new generation of Moroccan filmmakers ensconced in transnational networks of policy, funding and storytelling highlights some of the powerful tensions at play in a world of global media flows, transnational policy imperatives, and technological change. By interrogating the industry logics of this cinema and its subsequent discursive interventions, this analysis contributes to understandings of how the increasing penetration of capital is shaping production structures locally as well the processes through which alternative storytelling and depictions of Moroccan life challenge hegemonic narratives about society and culture.

### **A “New” Moroccan Cinema**

In the summer of 2010 the francophone Moroccan news magazine *Telquel* published a cover article about the “new Moroccan cinema” which discusses how this cinema reproduces the everyday reality of Morocco in the Moroccan language (Boukhari, 2010, n/a). Described as “do-it-yourself” these films include many major hits such as *Casanegra*, *Marock*, and *Sur la planche* that reject “dialogues sanitized into pure classical Arabic,” and embrace the idea of “film as a mirror of society” (ibid., n/a). Although representations are never mere reflections, the inclusion of Darija, or Moroccan Arabic, and more candid portrayals of taboo themes such as sexuality are

noteworthy in a media environment dominated by classical Arabic and conservative social mores. The article talks specifically about films made without CCM funding and based on “a new economic model” described as a “DIY” and “bricolage,” but also about policy decisions to expand CCM support for productions (including more some that would previously have never received state funding) and a hands-off approach to censorship. Ultimately Telquel lauds the new Moroccan cinema for being “Freer, better equipped, cinema is breaking taboos and engaging all of society’s debates...[it is] a nascent but already fascinating phenomenon at the intersection of culture and politics” (Boukhari, 2010, #427). Despite, or more likely because of its more daring tone, Moroccan cinema has been a cause célèbre for Mohammed VI,<sup>5</sup> who has made resources for production a priority and championed cinema as both a tool for economic development and proof of Morocco’s newfound openness.

This *Telquel* article is but one example of many discussions about changes in Moroccan cinema that have taken place in recent years. Armes (2005) talks about Nabil Ayouch as the beginning of a new generation of Moroccan filmmakers, and on the advent of Casanegra’s release in France, *Jeune Afrique* published an article titled “Taboo Breakers” that qualifies the new Moroccan cinema as a “trend/societal phenomenon” based on excavating the realities and issues of everyday life (Slimani, 2009). It describes films such as *Casanegra* and *Marock* by saying “Surrounded by a hint of scandal, these films are the work of a new generation of directors, more uninhibited and modern than their predecessors, which has earned them the reputation of ‘taboo breakers’” (ibid.). Remarkable for its box office success despite tackling issues often considered off limits, the new cinema involves a new proximity to the realities of

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<sup>5</sup> Mohammed VI is the current king of Morocco, who is popularly referred to as “M6.” He took over the throne in 1999 after the death of his totalitarian father, Hassan II, and is widely popular due to his “prince of the people” persona and reformist agenda, although few of those reforms have resulted in any meaningful change to the governing authority of the monarchy.



everyday life. Another article in *RFI* titled “The new breath of Moroccan cinema” described the influx of young filmmakers in Morocco by saying, “This generation says things in a more direct manner, less symbolically, with an energy and a new touch of subversion” (Maréchaud, 2007). These tendencies reach new heights in the Arab Spring moment, when an article in *Jeune Afrique* discusses the first film of Nabil Ayouch’s journalist-turned-filmmaker brother, Hicham, as “an ode to liberty and the right to live as one understands, at the risk of offending, and what it can cost you” (Rochebrune, 2011). Above all this cinema is characterized by tensions between individuals and the collective in Moroccan society, emphasizing stories about defying social norms and their place within universal themes such as adolescence, tradition, inequality, and love.

While celebrated in *Telquel*, *Jeune Afrique*, and circles concerned with artistic liberty and freedom of speech, the new cinema has been a source of tension for social conservatives and the Islamic Justice and Development Party (PJD) in particular. In 2013 *Au Fait Maroc* published an article titled “The New Moroccan Cinema and the Justice and Development Party (PJD),” describing the disapproval of the now-ruling Islamist party in regard to recent developments in Moroccan cinema:

For several years, Moroccan cinema has technically and artistically improved a great deal, all while addressing social subjects that disturb religious conservatives... In the eyes of Mohammed Laghrouss, journalist and PJD member, all the modern Moroccan filmmakers such as Nour-Eddine Lakhmari, Nabil Ayouch, Lahcen Zinoun or Abdelkader Lagtaâ are only westernized Moroccans who have forgotten their own civilization and hide the nonsense of their films behind risqué scenes. (Sedatri, 2013, n/a)

In a culture that emphasizes family viewing, the new Moroccan cinema's frank portrayals of sex and other taboo topics are considered by many to be highly offensive. It is no accident that most of these films come from Casablanca and that many of the realities they purport to address relate to an urban modernity in many ways divorced from the realities of rural and semi-rural Morocco. While some films such as Narjiss Nejjar's *L'Amante du Rif* (2011) do take on particularly what it means to be a woman in rural Morocco, it does so from the perspective of daring women and the risks they face in defying community codes. In the new Moroccan cinema's concern not to further folkloric representations it perhaps stops short of acknowledging the full complexity of Moroccan society across diverse geographic and social spaces. Yet through highly mediatized debates, this cinema does intervene in Moroccan public culture across these spaces, provoking debate and pushing publics across borders to reimagine a more cosmopolitan Morocco embedded in universal issues, while not losing sight of the political.

### **Moroccan cinema in historical perspective**

Any discussions of a "new" Moroccan cinema must be situated within the larger historical context of cinema in the country. As part of France's "civilizing mission," cinema in Morocco began as colonial propaganda aimed at promoting patriotism (Jaïdi, 2001). The desire to increase film production and combat pan-Arab nationalism emanating from Egypt resulted in French colonists building up cinema infrastructure and creating the CCM in 1944 as a government-run entity charged with producing, regulating and promoting cinema in Morocco (Armes, 2005; Carter, 2008; Dwyer, 2004). These developments were largely oriented toward and financed by the colonial administration. According to Armes (2005), "all North African film production activity in the period before independence was financed by foreign capital, used foreign players, and was destined for foreign audience" (p. 6). The creation of this cinematic sphere separate

from Moroccan society evolved into an industry oriented toward well-financed foreign productions with domestic filmmakers often struggling alongside, and, to some extent, explains the sensitivity to perceptions of outside influence in the cinema sector.

The development of infrastructure and connections with foreign studios that make Morocco a popular filming location for many major Hollywood films even today (think *Gladiator*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Babel*, etc.) leads Moroccan filmmaker Muhammed Abderrahman Tazi to draw a sharp distinction between “making films in Morocco” and “Moroccan filmmaking,” often seen as a manifestation of the complex relationship between the global and the local (Dwyer, 2004, p. 18). The first Moroccan feature films appeared in the early 1970s and with them visions of a contested society eclipsed earlier. Jaïdi (1994) asserts “Hamid Bennani’s *Wechma* (1970) and Souheil ben Barka’s *A Thousand and One Hands* (1972) presented themselves as works of fiction that developed a muted questioning of Moroccan society” (p. 107). Thus a historical precedent exists in Morocco for couching social and political critique in cinema, but these critiques were often limited in scope or shut down entirely during the Years of Lead when persecution of the left and public fear were the norm. While earlier cohorts of Moroccan filmmakers such as that of Bennani, Tazi, Ahmed Bouanani, Mohamed Sekkat, Latif Lahlou, and Moumen Smihi, who studied in Paris at IDHEC<sup>6</sup> in the 1960s, were perhaps more revolutionary from an ideological standpoint, their work met a myriad of obstacles including surveillance and censorship. For example, Bouanani’s first feature film *Mémoire 14* (1971) became a short after it was cut by censors (Khalfallah, 2011) and he was forbidden from working as a director for several years after being branded a communist (Akalay, 2010). Overall,

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<sup>6</sup> IDHEC stands for the *Institut des hautes études cinématographique*, which is the French state film school in Paris. It is now known as La Femis, an acronym for *Fondation Européenne pour les Métiers de l’Image et du Son*.

Morocco in the 1970s was not an encouraging environment for this politically engaged and enterprising group of filmmakers.

The 1980s saw the introduction of state aid as a form of film financing, which Dwyer (2004) describes as “the core of each film’s budget” (p. 155). Lack of commercial distribution for Moroccan films and buying power on the part the public led to the establishment of a Support Fund in 1981, which after restructuring into the Aid Fund in 1988 to include changes in selectivity, amounts awarded and the timing of their disbursement, remained largely in place until 2006. During this time some filmmakers started to look at co-production as an additional funding mechanism for expenses not covered by the state, especially from foreign TV stations willing to put money up for production in return for distribution rights (Dwyer, 2004). However, co-production remained a rarity and production rates low, averaging only 5 feature films a year from 1990-1999 (Ali, 2012), even if some of those films, such as Tazi’s *Looking for my Wife’s Husband* (1993), are now considered Moroccan cinema classics.

While funding for Moroccan cinema generally increased throughout the 1980s and 1990s, it was not until the early 2000s that major shifts in the resources dedicated to culture built on an upswing in production accompanying economic liberalization and a new generation of filmmakers coming of age post-Years of Lead. From 2001 to 2011 feature film production increased from 4 to 25 per year (Ali, 2012; Dale, 2012), production aid multiplied six fold between 2001 and 2012, and in 2006 the CCM adopted a system of “advance on receipts” based on the French model requiring repayment to the fund out of the film’s earnings (Ali, 2012). Co-producing films also became part of public television mandates in 2005-2006 (ibid.). Within this time Moroccan films also began consistently topping the box office with one or two Moroccan films out-selling the next best by almost double – this despite having significantly smaller

budgets than most foreign productions (CCM, 2008-2012). Together, these changes are indicative of significant shifts in Moroccan cinema, both from the standpoint of production and its place in society.

### **State-sponsored cinema**

After hearing all the praise for the CCM at the Café du Film, I was excited to visit the institution that by most accounts sets the Moroccan cinema industry apart from other countries of the region. Established in 1944 by the colonial administration, the CCM acts as the arm of the state in Morocco's cinema sector. Located on the outskirts of Rabat in an industrial district between the upscale Souissi and Hay Riad neighborhoods, the dated-looking complex appeared fairly deserted when I arrived except for the security guard who pointed me in the direction of Mohamed Sabiri, head of the CCM's technical division. A thin and politely reticent middle-aged technician, Sabiri had a lot to say about the strong points of Moroccan cinema, pointing out that "the presence of a film processing laboratory is key, the digitization of theaters, a treasure trove of archived films, a dynamic festival scene and an increase in the production of Moroccan films to about 25 a year." The CCM's laboratory is equipped for 35mm and digital films, and there's also a sound studio authorized for Dolby stereo. As a technician Sabiri views Morocco as an anomaly in Africa because it has a laboratory and an industry, which he says only South Africa and Morocco have. In terms of the industry, "over the last decade Moroccan cinema has seen the level of films improve, with more films produced and support for foreign filming in the country," all of which Sabiri said are encouraging for the prospects of the industry and make him proud of Morocco's position in the region.

As indicated by the support for foreign filming, the CCM works with both domestic and foreign productions and issues the authorizations required to shoot in Morocco. For Moroccan

filmmakers, there are specific formulas put in place by Nouredine Saïl<sup>7</sup> that they have to follow to get their “Professional Identity Card” so they can work legally in the cinema sector in Morocco. Directors have to make at least three shorts and complete a dossier, while technicians have to submit proof of internships or work experience to certify that they have proper on-the-job training. Funding for the CCM comes from the state through the Minister of Communication, but Sabiri described the institution as “having an autonomous budget, which is how it maintains the equilibrium between being an organization of the state and preserving artistic integrity.” He estimated about 150 employees, but noted that those working for the CCM don’t make the decisions about who gets financing for their films. Those decisions are made at the ministry level by three commissions in charge of distributing production aid, aid to events and aid for digitizing theaters, and filmmakers can apply for two types of aid: pre-production and post-production. Sabiri assured me that the commissions are composed of “ten autonomous men, so that no one can influence their decisions,” however, the comments made at the Café du Film about the “hyper-bureaucratic” nature of the cinema industry in Morocco and funding decisions made by panels with no filmmakers on them started to make a lot of sense.<sup>8</sup>

If the CCM didn’t exist Sabiri seemed convinced that there wouldn’t be cinema in Morocco, saying “without aid funds, people wouldn’t produce films because there aren’t really private investors in the cinema sector because of the high risks and low returns.” At the level of the public, he sees quality as the real issue “because the public won’t just accept anything, it demands quality,” while at the cultural level cinema is important for collective identity and

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<sup>7</sup> At the time of my visit the CCM was between directors, as Saïl had retired amid rumors about being forced out and his replacement hadn’t yet been named. Saïl played a key role in shaping Moroccan cinema and the audiovisual sector more broadly, having served as head of 2M before taking over the CCM. Saïl has since been replaced by Sarim Fassi Fihri.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the work of funding committees, see Omar Akalay (2003) *Au Service du Cinéma Marocain*.

“without cinema and other cultural sectors there wouldn’t be identity.” Sabiri cited the CCM’s support for film festivals and Moroccan film weeks as key to public engagement with Moroccan cinema in that they offer spaces of encounter for professionals and publics.

After our meeting, Sabiri took me to see Abdellatif Laassadi, the assistant to the director general (formerly Noureddine Saïl). In contrast to Sabiri’s neat and sparse office, Laassadi’s office featured stacks of papers piled high on practically every surface. The rotund bureaucrat spoke demonstratively from behind his desk, expounding on a much more pessimistic perspective of Moroccan cinema than that recounted by Sabiri. Laassadi’s main point was that cinema in Morocco is subsidized by the state, which he sees as a weakness of the industry when coupled with lack of other investors. Even the CCM, he said, has a limited budget of \$700,000 per year. According to Laassadi, Moroccan cinema doesn’t work on the international market because it’s concerned with 1) local themes, 2) in local dialogue and 3) relates to local society. Thus he considers it a cinema “for internal consumption” except for some films distributed to former colonizer countries that have large communities of immigrants such as France. Laassadi was convinced that Moroccan films are “interested in small issues and a reflection of society, rather than fiction in any universal sense.” This allegation that Moroccan films aren’t fiction in a universal sense was interesting because it directly contradicts the filmmaker discourse coming out of the new Moroccan cinema that makes universality one of its key objectives and contends that it is telling universal stories through a local lens. Yet distribution abroad does still constitute a major obstacle for Moroccan cinema, and even if a film finds distributors Laassadi said it is often still plagued by issues of language and themes associated with auteur cinema that make it unprofitable. Throughout our discussion Laassadi consistently compared Moroccan cinema to Hollywood, and in this case he drew a distinction between the screenwriters’ guild in America

and the fact that in Morocco the director is also the scriptwriter because these are mostly auteur films where the directors write their own screenplays.

Laassadi backed up his negative assessment of Moroccan cinema with the fact that Moroccan films have never entered into the official competition at Cannes or other major film festivals. Films such as *Marock* and *Sur la planche* have only been in small parallel competitions and those are specifically films that are French co-productions, which he said do a lot better comparatively. Laassadi had many more positive things to say about co-productions, which he described as “beneficial for all production because co-producers bring 1) resources/money, 2) expertise and good technicians and 3) these films are automatically distributed and released abroad.” Ultimately, however, he said “we can’t talk about an industry in the infrastructural sense of the word, this is a small output,” and drew a distinction between culture and a commercial industry, with Moroccan cinema falling in the former. He said piracy is one of the major challenges for such an industry because you can walk into the medina and buy any film you want, even the new ones. The push to renovate the few remaining Moroccan theaters has been an effort to reconstruct cinema-going as an event, which Laassadi said depends on “cafés, restaurants and, above all, parking” in order to be successful. In terms of what goes in the theaters, for him “movies are money” and Moroccan cinema simply can’t compete against the budgets of Hollywood blockbusters.

### *CCM Initiatives*

Each year the CCM releases a “bilan” or annual report on the state of Morocco’s cinema industry. In general the reports give details about what films received support of various kinds, how they did at the box office and in festivals, distribution and theater numbers, licenses issued to cinema professionals, allocations of funding for festivals in Morocco, what foreign films



received shooting permits and overall box office numbers and revenues for the country. The reports are a major move toward systematic data collection and transparency in terms of what is going on in the industry, if not in how decisions are made, and allow for some assessment of industry trends over time. Looking at CCM reports for 2004 through 2015, six significant trends stand out: 1) the exponential increases in production, 2) Moroccan films' improved performance at the box office, 3) Hollywood's consistent domination of box office revenues, 4) the dire situation of distribution in the country, 5) the increasing visibility of Moroccan cinema at home and abroad and 6) the ongoing drive to make Morocco a premier destination for foreign shoots.<sup>9</sup>

Widely lauded in cinema circles as the architect of the new Moroccan cinema, Saïl's major accomplishment during his tenure at the CCM was taking feature film production from 4 in 2001 to 20 in 2014 by exponentially increasing production aid from 10,380,000 MAD in 2001 to 62,580,000 MAD in 2015, moving to a French-modeled system of "advance on receipts" and making development of original programming part of the public television mandate. Within this time Moroccan films also began consistently topping the box office, despite having significantly smaller budgets than most foreign productions. In 2004 the average budget was \$250,000; by 2015 it increased to \$325,000, but overall budgets vary highly by production (CCM, 2015; Cinéma marocain, 2005). For example, Ayouch's second feature film *Whatever Lola Wants* had a budget of \$12 million USD and his *Horses of God* cost \$3.8 million USD, both incredibly well funded by Moroccan standards.

Given that precarious financing is part and parcel of the new Moroccan cinema, it is difficult to overstate the major accomplishment that is Moroccan films consistently topping the box office against Hollywood blockbusters. Generally one or two Moroccan films out-sell the

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<sup>9</sup> All statistics taken from CCM annual reports unless otherwise noted.

next best by 2-3 times, as in the case of 2012's top two films *Road to Kaboul* and *Un Marocain à Paris*, which sold 230,519 and 90,901 tickets respectively (2.5x) while earning 7,759,659 MAD to 2,589,354 MAD (3x). As a result Morocco has been able to claim second place at the box office by nationality since 2008, consistently hovering between 20-30 percent of box office revenues. This improvement occurred primarily at the expense of France, Egypt and India, whose shares of the Moroccan market declined while the USA hovered steadily around 50 percent. The USA consistently accounts for half of cinema revenues in Morocco – even if Moroccan films have consistently topped the box office, the USA still earns more in total because of the sheer number of films produced and generally higher ticket prices. In recent years about 9 of the 30 top films are Moroccan and 15 are American; in terms of percentage of ticket revenues Morocco had revenue from 45 films while the USA had revenue from 118, leaving the USA with 47 percent of revenues.

Even with improvements in production, actually getting the films to audiences continues to be a (if not THE) major obstacle for the new Moroccan cinema. As CCM director Saïl was unable to stem the tide of theater closures so that in a country that had 151 theaters in 2004, only 59 remained for a population of 31 million in 2014. Megarama, Morocco's major distributor and first multiplex, opened in Casablanca in 2002 and today owns 14 screens in Casablanca, 9 in Marrakech and 3 in Fes that accounted for 47-69 percent of the exhibition market between 2008 and 2015. Owned by French theater mogul Jean-Pierre Lemoine, Megarama provided an alternative to “les cinémas du quartier,” or local neighborhood cinemas, largely in disrepair, lagging in digitization and relying on cheap Bollywood or local films and frequented mostly by male audiences. Despite Megarama's dominance, ticket sales have been in free fall for years, declining from 6,794,345 in 2004 to 1,643,647 in 2014.

## **Globalization, transnational influences in cultural policy and Moroccan cinema**

Many scholars have shown that cinema cannot be considered exclusively within the confines of the nation, in the Moroccan case and more generally (Curtin, 2009; Dwyer, 2008; Edwards, 2008; Galt, 2010; Higbee & Lim, 2010; Khalil, 2008; Naficy, 1999). In deploying this framework, my research indicates that escalations in trajectories of creative migration (Curtin, 2009) have expanded transnational industry logics to emphasize a politics of co-production and engagement with multiple publics, which in turn has changed the ideological composition of the cinema itself. I argue that a key dimension of the new Moroccan cinema is its situation within transnational flows of people, capital, and media that have shifted from a nation-centric space to something more regional in terms of distribution and global in terms of financing. While these dynamics have always characterized Moroccan cinema to some extent, their conjunction with a transnational cultural politics emanating from the EU, media liberalization in Morocco, and new opportunities to engage with publics (revolving primarily around audience access to technology) has constructed cinema as a site of contestation over distinct political projects – raising questions about the intersections of culture and politics in an increasingly mediated global era. Additionally, Mohammed VI's ascent to the throne, the opening up of civil society, and appointment of Nouredine Saïl as head of the CCM ushered in a new era of dynamic debates around cinema, characterized by increased resources, reduced censorship, and recognition of cinema as a political priority.

Yudice (2003) argues that the dominant framework for understanding culture in the contemporary world is expediency, which has led to the interpenetration of culture and economy and produced cultural economy as the new frontier for economic development. As a result of globalization and the evisceration of the social from the state, difference has transformed into a

resource to be deployed by myriad of actors including communities, civil society, states and supranational organizations as part of a new international division of cultural labor. Yudice goes beyond mere instrumentalization or commodification of culture in using the term “expedient,” which carries connotations of being ethically or morally problematic, suggesting that the hegemony of the maquiladora model in film, festivals and other cultural production constitutes “an expropriation of cultural and mental labor” (p. 19) for consumption, often resulting in further neoliberal penetration and exploitation of the communities they purport to empower. Through this lens, the interest of European producers in Moroccan cinema can be viewed as the extraction of cheap content for exploitation in more profitable markets (low budget films that may be sleeper hits), so we see films like Ayouch’s *Much Loved* become the fourth most profitable film of 2015 in France because it had a small, self-financed budget and received enormous (free) publicity due to being banned in Morocco (*Much Loved*, 2016). But it’s not just the content of the film (in this case a story about prostitution) that yields such results, but also the position of the filmmakers (and filmmakers of the new Moroccan cinema more broadly) as French/Moroccan citizens operating across fields and their ability to align their interests and those of others to advance agendas and shift discourse. As Yudice (2003) argues “...

“...cultural expression by itself is not enough. It helps to engage in a struggle when you have a good knowledge of the complex machinations involved in seeing an agenda through a rang of multiscale, intermediary instances populated with the others’ similar, overlapping, or differing agendas” (p. 2-3)

In other words, it is precisely the familiarity of Moroccan filmmakers with the media narratives/discourse emanating from both the West and Morocco and their interstitial positioning that allows them to negotiate interests and work across the nexus of transnational policy agendas,

national reputations, industry infrastructures and local stories. These factors, combined with Morocco's movement toward further integration into the E.U. economic community, plus relatively small domestic publics numerically, mean that there are both political and economic imperatives for filmmakers to move across scales.

Hesmondhalgh and Pratt (2005) also focus on the shifting boundaries between culture and economics, a shift they attribute to the commercialization of media and communication industries beginning in the 1980s. For them, the increasing interest of policy makers in cultural industries centers on culture as a new and corrective form of capital capable of mitigating rising inequality and regenerating post-industrial economies in an era of globalization. Accompanying the recognition that military intervention alone can't solve American problems abroad, the wide reach of (especially commercial) culture becomes newly functional. Hesmondhalgh and Pratt (2005) point to a core assumption underpinning cultural policy that "culture is 'good for the soul,' and that exposure to 'culture' has a 'civilising effect'" (10). Similarly, Yudice reminds us that "...it is argued – if not really believed – that (gender- and race-sensitive) investment in culture will strengthen the fiber of civil society, which in turn serves as the ideal host for political and economic development" (p. 2). Arguments that culture in the form of creative industries provides space for expression and valorizes local ways of life leading to stability, improvement in quality of life, and greater empathy or social understanding, provide instrumental rationales for cultural investment, making culture like any other resource.

More recently, Schlesinger (2016) specifies "creative economy" as a distinctive and dominant form of discourse that approaches culture (practice and industries) as an object for the exploitation of intellectual property domestically and internationally. He locates this discourse's point of origin in the cultural politics of the UK's New Labour in the late 1990s and their global

circulation “through policy spaces and institutions, and moreover, [this discourse has] become increasingly embedded in academic research and teaching internationally” (ibid., p. 4). This discourse approaches culture as a competitive marketplace with opportunities for exploitation and export. In theorizing the shift from “an established arts-based policy model” to a creative industries model, Volkerling (2001) points out the lack of corrective to cultural imperialism in the creative industries approach. Basically, under the creative industries model, cultural policy, which was conceived as a defense mechanism for Europe, Canada and others against American cultural domination, becomes another tool for fostering a competitive marketplace for culture wherein as the sports adage says, the best defense is a good offense. In 2004, Nabil Ayouch led advocacy efforts by the Coalition for Moroccan Cultural Diversity to have “culture” exempted from a free trade agreement being negotiated between Morocco and the United States (L’exception culturelle marocaine en danger, 2004; Michel, 2004). According to Ayouch “There is a grave danger in being inactive when the American philosophy is to consider culture like any good or service...” (Michel, 2004). Indeed, the word “industry” suggests a primarily economic valuation and the replacement of “culture” with “creative” replaces connotations of history and heritage that connect to identity, way of life and local production with connotations of spatial marketing or branding. This has been accompanied by an emphasis on “measuring” the effects of creative industries through indicators like contribution to GDP and potential for employment growth, as well as their contribution to the growth of flexible skills necessary for participation in the information economy (Volkerling, 2001, p. 444-445). This can be seen across multiple levels: in Euromed’s reports and initiatives, the Moroccan government’s support for cinema, the CCM’s annual bilan, in NGOs such as Racines using economic logic to push the Moroccan government to enact a comprehensive cultural policy (EGC, 2014), and in the opening of the

prestigious ESAV film school in Marrakech in 2006. Often we see state agendas around culture in tension with the oppositional impulses of individual artists or communities, although the points at which these agendas intersect and overlap is of particular interest to this project.

Ultimately transnational influences in cultural policy, and the creative industries model in particular, can be traced back to debates about high versus low culture, questions about popular culture's commercial nature and what cultural forms should be privileged in public life. The Frankfurt School articulated such concerns about cultural homogenization associated with the proliferation of "low culture" and the rise of mechanical reproduction that continue to be resonate today. Appadurai & Breckenridge (1988) propose the rubric of public culture as a way out of these debates and into more meaningful and nuanced analysis of culture in an era of globalization. In doing so they look at both "cosmopolitan cultural forms" and what specific societies bring to them, as well as how various forms shape each other as part of a public culture (p. 6). The key idea here is that expansion of the cultural domain to makes it a site of contestation among a diversity of interests and ideologies. While globalization and transnational influences in cultural policy might make Moroccan cinema more susceptible to the forces of capital, it also opens up global resources that allow for challenges to the cultural hegemony of the state, even as the state seeks to cement its role as the primary economic force in the country and support cinema for its own purposes. In many ways the new Moroccan cinema has made room for alternative imaginaries and logics that don't strictly conform to commercial mandates. That said, the precarious nature of film as "passion projects" amidst the decline of the public service model that often funds institutional aid for film is not to be underestimated.

## **The Logic of Co-production**

That Moroccan cinema has been able to secure the resources that it has (in the midst of a global recession and regional upheaval) and produced the types of films it has (locally popular, prized at international festivals) even with those limited resources, makes the formal and informal mechanisms by which the industry operates worthy of further examination. The relative success of cinema in a national context devoid of a comprehensive cultural politics has been the subject of much discussion in the press with articles such as *Telquel's* "The miracle (or nearly) of Moroccan cinema" (Boukhari, 2006).

The extent to which the agendas of various parties intersect and overlap is perhaps best indicated by co-production, which is the defining logic of the new Moroccan cinema. Co-production involves collaboration, generally between parties rooted in different national contexts, that allows the cost of production to be shared through a variety of means. At the Café du Film, Catherine Buresi, head of Euromed's working group on funding, emphasized the importance of information and transparency for industry development and the lack of both in regard to co-productions. In the case of Morocco co-production mostly means projects bringing together Moroccan and European producers – of the 309 coproductions in the region between 2006-2013, only 20 were South-South collaborations. France and then Germany are the most frequent partners for Moroccan filmmakers, yet according to Buresi "it is clear that the European market is not open to Moroccan films because for the moment Moroccan projects have very little presence [there]." Accessing markets/audiences abroad continues to be a struggle for Moroccan cinema, although as the CCM's Laassadi pointed out, co-productions do much better on this front than strictly Moroccan productions.



Taylor (1995) argues that “the tension inherent in the cultural industries is exacerbated by international co-productions” (p. 412) like those supported by Aid to World Cinemas. The idea of producing culture for capital gain becomes especially fraught when in order to support local production money is accepted from industries rooted elsewhere and the product has to conform to some extent with the norms of that industry. Co-productions are especially attractive for producers from small countries that lack the resources for cultural production and have difficulty competing with a deluge of foreign (usually American) cultural products, but according to Taylor (1995) that also means “Commercial co-productions involving peripheral countries (Canada, Israel, Mexico, Spain, Italy) tend to follow the same formulae as the centre (U.S.), whose market they seek to enter” (p. 411). This allegation is premised on the idea that specificity doesn’t travel and that coproductions constitute a form of cultural homogenization whereby filmmakers are forced to conform to [or want to be a part of] a globally dominant Hollywood industry. Yet it is also important to consider that cosmopolitan cultural forms can and inevitably will be adapted according to context and if filmmakers of the new Moroccan cinema have to some extent adopted the universal model of Hollywood, they have often done so with the objective of positioning themselves as an alternative to Hollywood based on creative funding for small budgets and stories deeply rooted in local realities. The hybrid, translocal and deeply specific industry logics and texts of Moroccan filmmakers suggest that universality cannot be considered outside of material realities and that the way to the universal is through the specific. Additionally, it is important to consider that Moroccan cinema has generally not been seen as a commercially-profitable venture for investors and has for the most part been exempt from harsh commercial pressures to the extent that we see filmmakers making their living in television or commercials rather than in film. Additionally, because the Moroccan case is so closely tied to

France and its policy of cultural exceptionalism, commercial imperatives are mitigated somewhat by understandings of “la septième art” as a high cultural form.

Similar to Taylor (1995), Strover (1994) argues that transnational corporations (TNCs) do not represent particular national interests and that their very transnational nature constitutes a flattening of cultural specificity, especially as part of commercial media systems. In one way, Strover’s argument about national interests resonates with the Moroccan case because there are fierce debates about what constitutes “Moroccan cinema” and especially whether members of the diaspora or Moroccans living abroad (MREs) should be included in that category. But as previously discussed, for the most part Moroccan cinema has always been transnational and that informs understandings of Moroccan cinema such as that articulated by Tazi that Moroccan cinema is films made by Moroccans, especially those that engage with Moroccan society and its issues. On the other hand, Strover’s argument that TNCs and co-productions constitute a flattening of cultural specificity does not take into consideration the uneven nature of globalization and negotiation of stakeholders and interests involved in the production process. Yudice’s argument about the maquiladora model is particularly relevant here in that we see co-production acting a mechanism for the extraction of cheap content based on local, auteur cinemas, especially those coming out of former colonies that can further linguistic, cultural and industry affiliations, but at the same time we also see other agendas at play than that of capital. Technological advances have led to greater cinematic quality, accessibility of subtitling, and alternative distribution mechanisms, all of which make local content [more] globally accessible than in the early days of Moroccan co-productions in the 1980s and 90s. So when a Moroccan producer like Marrakchi collaborates with a French multinational such as Pathé, the company gets the rights to distribute and air a largely-francophone production, the French government

caters to a minority audience and gets to count the film toward domestic production numbers, the Moroccan government gets a more liberal vision of society that paints it as tolerant and fit for investment, the production team gets work and Marrakchi gets funding, access to the European audiences, and freedom to represent controversial realities while replicating certain genre conventions.

Both Taylor (1995) and Strover (1994) contend that co-production constitutes a kind of flattening, or loss of cultural specificity, yet the new Moroccan cinema indicates co-production more closely resembles a process of hybridization [or perhaps glocalization] in which diverse interests are negotiated and aligned in any particular project. According to Baltruschat (2002) this convergence of interests in international coproductions “reflects the continuing integration of cultural and economic activities on a global scale” (p. 1). The increasing penetration of global capital and neoliberal ideologies born of post-1980s processes of economic liberalization more recently involve cultural industries as a result of media liberalization under Mohammed VI. As Morocco seeks to integrate more fully into the European economic community, filmmakers of the new Moroccan cinema have increasingly turned to Europe as an emergent space of funding, and France in particular as one of the most prolific co-producers in the world. The continuing cultural influence of France in Morocco is both taken for granted and a point of contention, the irony being that for all France’s cultural nationalism and defense against foreign cultural influence it does not hesitate to impose its culture on others. Shared (voluntary/involuntary) history and migration are key to what Baltruschat (2002) calls “natural coproductions” - although I find this terminology slightly problematic in that it masks the convergence of interests and power dynamics involved in the co-production process. Because of their roots in the movement of people and texts, Baltruschat (2002) contends that “Co-productions have the potential to

explore globalization processes such as the diversification and hybridization of cultures” (p. 5) while producing culturally specific programming for local markets, although she argues that the co-productions’ critical potential is limited by their commercial orientation. While the suggestion that co-productions create culturally specific programming for local markets while advancing some degree of content convergence through format transfers and genre conventions resonates with the new Moroccan cinema, the suggestion they lack critical edge deserves a more nuanced discussion about how critiques are strategically negotiated. The difficult balance between cultural and commercial aspirations in the new Moroccan cinema is indicated by the diverse mechanisms through which filmmakers assemble funding and production structures oriented toward co-production: television, cultural aid funds, diasporic capital and festivals.

### *Television*

In addition to the CCM’s increases in aid funds in the form of advance on receipts, Moroccan television has played a key role in financing the cinema sector, fostering a certain co-evolution and creative ecosystem. Despite audiovisual liberalization state broadcaster SNRT and the more commercial 2M operate under a sort of de facto state monopoly in the absence of private investors (footnote about 2M initially being private and state holding majority stake from 1996, its connections to royal holdings, and emergence of Médi1). The 2005 and 2006 mandates for the two major channels require them to get 30 percent of their programming from external actors (Allali, 2007) and to co-produce a certain number of films each year (20 for SNRT, 10-15 for 2M) (Boukhari, 2006; Hopewell, 2006), effectively upping their investment in local production companies and content. One of the architects of the new Moroccan television and its relationship to cinema is the joint CEO of SNRT and 2M, Fayçal Laraïchi, who was appointed to the position several months after Mohammed VI came to power and charged with revitalizing a domestic

broadcasting sector long subordinate to foreign offerings. He is since credited with emphasizing homegrown fiction, outsourcing production to independent producers and preserving the major channels' audience share at 45-50 percent in the face of satellite competition (Dale, 2011). The partnership between TV and cinema is modeled on the French, British and Italian systems where "television has for a long time been the largest producer of cinema/films (check)" (Boukhari, 2006). CCM head Saïl actually got his start in TV as programming director of TVM (predecessor of SNRT) and worked for France's Canal + before returning to Morocco in 2000 as director of 2M and then being appointed to the CCM in 2003. Like Laraïchi, Saïl is credited with positive change in Moroccan broadcasting, changes oriented toward local production and an emphasis on téléfilms that effectively made TV and cinema part of an interdependent media system and represents a significant restructuring of the audiovisual landscape (Dale, 2012). Unfortunately, post-Arab Spring television became a point of tension between the palace and Morocco's new Islamic government, a situation that brought SNRT and 2M's investment in cinema almost to a standstill over the last several years (Alami, 2013).

One major early example of this collaboration between cinema and television is Nabil Ayouch's Film Industry - Made in Morocco project whereby his production company, Ali'N'Productions, signed a contract with SNRT/Al Oula with financial support from the Ministry of Communication to produce 30 genre films destined for the small screen. Although limited in scope (each film had a budget of \$160,000 USD and 12-18 days for filming), the project represented a branching out of Moroccan cinema from its auteur tradition to more commercial offerings meant to "prime the pump for a true film industry modeled on Indian and Egyptian cinemas" (Hubinet, 2007). In the end Film Industry produced 42 films between 2006-2010, jump-starting production and offering opportunities for new talent – among them Hicham

Lasri, Talal Selhami and Ayouch's brother, Hicham. According to Ayouch "This project allowed us to train 200 technicians in all domains, cinematographers, prop masters, choreographers and other trades where skills are scarce in Morocco" (Ziraoui, 2011). Only four films produced by Film Industry were released in theaters, but Ali'N'Prod was able to send 5 million MAD in initial profits to SNRT from "sponsorships, brand partnerships, video on demand services and DVD/VCD sales", while also selling the rights to their catalog to four satellite packages (ibid.). When *Marock* appeared at Cannes in 2005 it was accompanied by discussion about Morocco's representation at the festival being "the logical consequence of a particularly coherent complementary organization of film and television, and especially policy implementation of effective measures that other countries in the region have yet to take" (Tebib, 2005).

#### *Cultural aid funds*

The emergence of state broadcasters as co-producers implicated in a broader audiovisual landscape and the cinema industry in particular, only serves to highlight the extent to which a politics of co-production has been adopted as the organizing principle of the new Moroccan cinema. For feature films, however, it's generally not TV, but European producers that are sought to forge North-South partnerships. This is because postwar European countries, particularly France, have long subsidized culture and more recently adopted an EU cultural politics emphasizing culture as a key axis for development and security. Euromed Audiovisuel is one manifestation of this politics in the form of a three-phase project, of which the third phase was an 11 million euro effort dedicated to the development of cinema sectors of South Mediterranean countries over four years (2011-2014), notably focusing on the encouragement of co-productions. According to Euromed's Valerio Caruso, "The fundamental idea of [of Euromed Audiovisuel] is the fact that the audiovisual is not only a cultural vector, but also an important

economic sector likely to create revenue and jobs” (Caruso, personal communication, 2014). Given Morocco’s relatively low per capita incomes and high unemployment, as well as its authoritarian government and the increasing influence of Islamism, European nations have many incentives for improving the situation in Morocco, through culture and otherwise.

One Moroccan filmmaker to have benefited from these funds is Leila Kilani, whose roundabout path to filmmaking started with diplomas in economics and history and passed through journalism and before arriving at documentary filmmaking. After her second documentary, the CCM officially barred documentaries from funding, as Kilani said “They closed the door. They said: ‘Documentary is not cinema’” (Quilty, 2009). Kilani’s next film was her first foray into fiction, and received CCM funding. With a 1 million euro budget, the Moroccan-French-German co-production *Sur la planche* reported no fewer than sixteen investors from seven countries in the Euromed Coproduction Census (Rosant, 2012). The largest percentage of funding (25 percent) came from the CCM, and apart from 4 percent and 1 percent coming from film initiatives in UAE and the U.S. respectively, the remainder was financed by European capital. Notably the film received a 130,000 euro grant from the French South Cinema Fund<sup>10</sup> (12 percent of the total budget), a good example of the types of major film funds that have become central to not just the funding of the new Moroccan cinema, but their publicity and access to distribution mechanisms. South Cinema Fund was an initiative of the French government’s CNC to support filmmakers from the Global South making films in those regions, which was replaced in 2011 by Aid to World Cinema, a program that emphasizes co-production as a way to foster cultural diversity. France is by far the largest source of aid funds for Moroccan filmmakers and Aid to World Cinemas is co-managed by the French National Cinema Center

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<sup>10</sup> Transl: Fonds sud cinéma

(CNC) and the Institut français, the cultural diplomacy arm of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development. CNC describes the program as “aid given to a production company in France as part of a co-production with a foreign production company” and requires that a minimum of 50 percent of the aid given is spent in France and a minimum of 25 percent in the country of the other production company (Aide aux cinémas du monde, 2015). Thus the funds benefit both the French audiovisual sector and, to a lesser extent, industry development in other countries. Even with aid from the South Cinema Fund, Kilani’s precarious hodgepodge of funding for *Sur la planche* meant that at one point she was forced to stop filming due to food poisoning and lack of funds, with expensive scenes still to come, but according to Kilani “during these times you just have to say that there are Chinese people making great films in their kitchens!” (Péron, 2012). That great films can be made with few resources is a refrain repeated frequently by Moroccan filmmakers.

#### *Private investors and diasporic capital*

By far the smallest category of support for Moroccan cinema is that of private investors, which for the most part means diasporic capital. Investors have been so few that filmmaker Nouredine Lakhmari’s collaboration with tech entrepreneur Redouane Bayed on Timlif Productions was particularly noteworthy for the Moroccan press. “Who says that culture and business don’t go together?” asked *Telquel* about Timlif, while an article from *Jeune Afrique* affirms “Good news: in Morocco culture has become profitable” (Bennani, 2011; Slimani, 2010). Timlif’s first feature film was Lakhmari’s *Zero*, a follow-up to his 2008 blockbuster *Casanegra*. Lakhmari told *Variety* “This is the first time there’s major private sector investment in Moroccan cinema, which has enabled us to focus on scripts” (Dale, 2010). What seems particularly novel about Timlif is that contrary to most injections of funds received by Moroccan cinema, this non-



governmental variety has a different type of ideology attached. According to Bayed “There is no logic of patronage or of cultural activism in this project... This is a great economic project around cinema, which to develop, needs this industrial dimension” (Bennani, 2011). Given that capitalist economics is dependent on the existence of a market, and given the small size of Morocco’s domestic market plus declining number of theaters, it is no surprise that private investments are generally limited to a specific subset of Moroccan filmmakers operating and imagining their publics transnationally. Even if Moroccan filmmakers want their films to do well in Morocco, there is a general sense that Moroccan publics alone are not enough.

In fact, the creation of Timlif Productions is the result of collaborations between Lakhmari and another private investor, Ali Kettani. Kettani made his fortune as a trader for Société Générale in France and then in New York before returning to Morocco, starting a consulting firm and purchasing Laraïchi’s shares in Sigma Production. That all of these players are so interconnected demonstrates just how small the world of audiovisual production is in Morocco (and how much smaller still the realm of private investing) and more broadly the extent of diaspora return upon Mohammed VI’s rise to power, including Saïl, Kettani, Ayouch, Lakhmari, etc. Kettani worked with Lakhmari on his first téléfilm (El Kadia, for 2M) and went on to invest 13 MDH in Casanegra (Le trader devenu producteur de cinema, 2009). Kettani was also able to bring in new investors by entering into partnership with Atcom in 2008, a division of the holding company owned by Morocco’s wealthiest businessman, Othman Benjelloun, which bought 51 percent of Sigma. According to Kettani “This alliance is timely because we intend to finalize many projects including an animated film for 30 million euros. We are in a very capital intensive industry... True, for *Casa Negra*, we had a co-producer and the participation of the

Moroccan Cinematographic Centre (CCM) and 2M, but the funds to be mobilized for production can be phenomenal” (ibid.).

### *Film festivals*

The rapid decline of theaters in particular is frequently named as the number one challenge facing Moroccan cinema, a dynamic that is seemingly due to a perfect storm of technological change (more access to internet, ease of piracy, competition from satellite), poor business practices and shifting urban geographies associated with leisure. One avenue that provides a platform for films and increases public engagement with cinema amid closing theaters is the film festival, which is part of a broader festival culture that has erupted in Morocco under M6. In 2008, 36 film festivals took place around Morocco, and the CCM devoted 23 million MAD of its budget to funding these festivals (Midech, 2008); by 2014 there were 54 festivals and the CCM had formed a commission devoted entirely to supporting festivals to the tune of 27 MDH (CCM, 2014). According to the CCM “These events allow the public to view films that might not necessarily appear in theaters, they give media an opportunity to talk about them, and create a meeting between cinema professionals” (Tagemouti, 2010, p. 114). Although often receiving at least some support from the CCM, Moroccan film festivals are put on by a variety of municipalities, civil society associations and educational institutions. In 2005 Zagora, a rural town in southeast Morocco, decided to organize its own Trans Saharan Film Festival in order to benefit from the industry that made its neighbor Ouarzazate famous. “With this festival, we want to give a boost to tourism. Cinema is becoming a separate industry, a mechanism for the cultural, social and economic development of a city. Why should we not also profit from it?” asked the director of the festival, who is also the head of the provincial tourism council (Midech, 2006). Film festivals also serve to draw attention to the lack of theaters in towns like Zagora, where the

screenings take place outside, and offer forums for the public to engage with cinema and with the issues and themes they highlight, such as “Moroccan cinema, memory and citizenship” in the case of *Zagora* in 2006 – a theme chosen to coincide with the release of the government IER report on, among other things, the penal colonies *Zagora* was known for during the Years of Lead (Midech, 2006). In any case, film festivals are one part of “what industry professionals refer to as ‘an ecosystem’ favorable to cinema” (Midech, 2008) and are indicative of industry shifts accompanying the new Moroccan cinema as it attempts to find sustainable methods of distribution and exhibition.

Aside from domestic festivals, the international circuit also has a role to play. One characteristic of the new Moroccan cinema is its increasing visibility transnationally, and all the films discussed here made extensive rounds on the film festival circuit. Nabil Ayouch is probably the most internationally well-known filmmaker of the new Moroccan cinema, due in large part to the success of his films at major cinema events around the world. International festivals in particular have emerged as key sites for workshops, publicity and especially networking that are central to the new Moroccan cinema’s (and many cinemas of the Global South) ambitions to access global markets. In 2006 Ayouch was chosen to participate in the Rome Film Festival’s New Cinema Network’s co-production meeting involving “40 invited international producers, buyers, sellers and funders and will be designed so that to encourage the 24 selected filmmakers' work and to facilitate the launching, the budgeting and the marketing of their projects,” in addition being one of three African filmmakers selected to receive a \$35,000 USD award from the Unidea-Unicredit Foundation (*Trois films africains*, 2006). As film festivals seek ways capitalize on their gatherings to foster creative community and new work, structured networking, knowledge-transfer and funding opportunities seem to be a growing

phenomenon. According to co-curator of the Rome Film Festival, Giorgio Gosetti "...a project such as New Cinema Network is not only useful but a necessary part of a film festival in the modern era" (New Cinema Network, 2007). Indeed the Rome event adds to a long list of such events already in existence at festivals such as Cannes, Rotterdam, Berlin, Hong Kong, Toronto, etc. Of course film festivals also offer publicity and awards, plus an opportunity for audiences that might not normally see a particular film. That was the case for Ayouch when his *Horses of God* played at Marrakech, where American filmmaker Jonathan Demme became a fan and ended up presenting the film in America, which the Hollywood Reporter pointed out is a rather new phenomenon whereby known members of the film community effectively endorse a documentary or foreign language film from a filmmaker with little name recognition in the American market (Dale, 2015; Feinberg, 2013). Moroccan cinema is in a moment of emergence on the international market, but it lacks both distributors and marketing clout so international film festivals have become increasingly important venues for finding co-production partners and showcasing current projects, while many filmmakers are looking at video-on-demand (VOD) services as the future of film distribution.

### **From industry logics to politics**

For all intensive purposes Moroccan filmmaking has pretty much always passed by France over the course of its 50+ year history, but the logic of co-production instituted as policy with accompanying industry structures built around it that attempt to match capital and creativity while managing risk, this is relatively new. The scope and scale of these efforts by both institutions and private entities has grown enormously in recent years, as indicated by the fact that most co-production markets began in the first decade of the 21st century. In 2003, prior to Saïl's arrival at the CCM, Screen International reported "With an historical lack of state support,

and a disinterested local financial community, Moroccan producers are increasingly looking to attract international co-production partners - particularly from France” (Forde, 2003). Attempts to attract capital and co-production partners are just one manifestation of the increasingly transnational nature of film production and the precarious state of independent cinema. For Moroccan filmmakers, however, this logic of co-production builds on already existing dynamics, including trajectories of creative migration and Paris’ status as a francophone media capital, while also affording a greater degree of autonomy to push boundaries through cinema. It is also part of an emerging alternative business model based on finding a balance between auteur and popular cinemas as technology and VOD platforms allow audiences around the world to seek out more varied content. According to *Variety* “While Hollywood centers its business model around blockbusters at the expense of mid-budget adult-skewing films, Europe’s biggest movie companies have been taking up the slack, with hefty rewards” (Keslassy, 2012). The production company Stone Angels, which took on Ayouch’s *Horses of God*, as one of its first projects, was founded on and shows Moroccan cinema’s compatibility with, this growing sector. However, critical voices have raised concerns about the types of films that work in this new model and their implications for representation of Moroccans and Islam at a particularly difficult geopolitical moment. Nadir Bouhmouch, a young San Diego-trained Moroccan filmmaker associated with the Guerrilla Cinema collective posted on Facebook “10 steps to success for filmmakers from the Muslim world: 1. Get money from France 2. Make a film about terrorism 3. Get money from France 4. Make a film about oppressed Muslim women 5. Get money from France 6. Make a film about terrorism 7. Get money from France 8. Make a film about oppressed Muslim women 9. Get money from France 10. Make a film about terrorism” (Bouhmouch, 2014). Bouhmouch’s insinuation (facetious or not) serves as a reminder that this set of co-

production mechanisms is not just an alternate set of funding structures sitting alongside the state, but also a set of ideological projects, sometimes competing, sometimes in sync, but always with implications for the types of films that constitute the new Moroccan cinema.

Back at the Café du Film, Ananda Scepka, head of the Open Doors Co-production Lab operated in conjunction with the Locarno International Film Festival in Switzerland, presented the program as an opportunity for networking and funding dedicated to a different region each year, with 2015 focused on countries of the Maghreb. According to Scepka the co-production lab and associated funds are key to supporting independent filmmaking because, “Films are nowadays rarely funded by one sole source of financing, as funds diminish globally, at least for independent films. Co-production remains the most viable way of financing films, and it raises the potential for distribution of the film once finished in the various countries implicated in the coproduction” (Scepka, personal communication, 2014). Open Doors participants are eligible to have their projects funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation’s (SDC)<sup>11</sup> Visions Sud Est, open to filmmakers from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe. Alice Thomann, head of the SDC’s Culture and Development team, explained via email that culture is a development priority for the Swiss government because the

“SDC recognizes the crucial role that arts and culture play in any society namely for social participation, inclusion and cohesion, as well as for nurturing creativity and innovation. It observes the particular driving force that the cultural sector and artists, as part of civil society, can represent to advance objectives and processes such as democratization, good governance and the respect for human rights” (Thomann, personal communication, 2014).

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<sup>11</sup> The SDC is a Swiss fund for production aid that is part of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, or FDFA.

In many ways, the small group of filmmakers who constitute the new Moroccan cinema sees themselves and their films as advancing these objectives. As cultural elites and part of a progressive counterpublic, filmmakers like Ayouch, Marrakchi, Lakhmari, Kilani and Nejjar are shifting industry logics in accordance with the increasing penetration of capital while trying to make use of that capital in advancing their own interests and goals. To the extent that they have negotiated successfully among an increasing array of stakeholders and interests involved in local production and global market imperatives they have been able to establish an alternative industry infrastructure oriented toward processes of hybridization and increased possibilities for social critique.

## Chapter 3

### Hybrid Genres, Discursive Interventions and Film Cultures of the New Moroccan Cinema

Laïla Marrakchi's 2013 feature *Rock the Casbah* is a comedic family drama about an industrial magnate who dies suddenly, leaving behind simmering tensions that boil over when his family reunites for the traditional 3-day Moroccan *gnaza* (funeral) at their villa in Tangiers. One of the most telling scenes from the film is also the most banal, when the three sisters make a supermarket run on the second day of the funeral. As they meander the aisles their conversation jumps from the injustice of patriarchal inheritance laws to pedophilia to sexual assault to sexual pleasure to their dead sister's pregnancy by the maid's son to alcohol and drugs to one sister's desire to sleep with her plastic surgeon before it's finally shut down by a cashier scolding that "this is a supermarket, not the hammam!" Whether the sisters have always talked this way or their father's death has caused the women to shed a sort of veil of propriety, their irreverent and often profane banter accompanied by repeated admonishments throughout the film that these are not things we talk about, paints a picture of a society at odds with itself.

"I like subversion, shocking, evolving," said Marrakchi in an interview from Paris, describing the controversy over her first film *Marock* as "one of the best experiences of my life" (Marrakchi, personal communication, 2016). In many ways it seems as if *Marock* constituted a turning point in terms of what was possible in and for Moroccan cinema; the film set records at the domestic box office, made an appearance at Cannes, was debated in parliament and received



a stamp of approval from the censorship board despite its controversial nature. Like *Marock*, *Rock the Casbah* is a deeply personal film and includes provocative scenes such as the one previously described. For Marrakchi these constitute a “*prise de parole*” against a system where the forbidden is lived clandestinely, in which a father’s affair with the maid could produce an illegitimate son who later becomes the lover of his legitimate daughter who becomes pregnant with an incestuous child, is sent away to Europe and commits suicide when she discovers the truth, all as a result of patriarchal impunity and silence for the sake of propriety. Marrakchi’s major frustration with the discourse around Moroccan cinema is the expectation that it should always shine a positive light on the country. From her perspective there is “a certain form of hypocrisy to not say everything, to not show everything, as if we are as artists the minister of tourism...we are not there for that. Artists are there for dreaming, for showing different things, for showing all the different faces of Moroccan society” (Marrakchi, personal communication, 2016). In Marrakchi’s first two films this has involved putting the realities of class divisions and cultural complexities on full display.

The new Moroccan cinema<sup>1</sup> with which Marrakchi is associated has been hotly debated and evoked many critiques from its detractors: that neither the films nor the filmmakers are Moroccan, that Zionists have funded the films to denigrate Morocco and Islam, and that the taboo behaviors represented are only Western imports being impressed upon a society ultimately interested in morality. Yet among supporters they are lauded as victories for freedom of speech, celebrations of Morocco in all its diversity, and markers of newfound openness to political and

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<sup>1</sup> “New Moroccan cinema” is a phrase used by the popular and trade press to refer to a new wave in Moroccan cinema that has emerged during the reign of Mohammed VI. It is the product of a generation of filmmakers who are largely part of a bi-national elite and came of age in a post-Years of Lead Morocco in the process of economic and political opening. Their films are generally characterized by new funding mechanisms, improved technical quality and taking on taboo topics, often in the local language.

social critique. What is interesting is not just the shifting industry logics outlined in the previous chapter, but also the fact that they seem to have produced a certain genre of text. These films tend to be described as “docu-fiction” or a hybrid genre between documentary and fiction that has many characteristics similar to neo-realist cinema, they try to tell universal stories through a local lens and above all they engage with taboo topics and comment on controversial social issues. As a result these films have incited debate not just among the arts community, but also among publics and in politics. One of the key considerations of this genre is that it is often oriented toward transnational discourses about issues such as terrorism, migration and inequality, so that in the wake of the November 2015 Paris bombings we see Nabil Ayouch making public declarations about his dedication to exploring the roots of terrorism through film (Dale, 2015a). In offering an alternative to Western media accounts and portrayals, the new Moroccan cinema often takes on the status quo both locally and transnationally, shifting the scale of not just its industrial logics, but also its social interventions.

### **Hybrid genres and ideological interventions**

This chapter analyzes the new Moroccan cinema as discourse, focusing on the ideological interventions made possible by the shifting industry logics discussed in the previous chapter. These industry logics have created the conditions of possibility for certain types of critical interventions through the production of hybrid texts, but also constrained others, as certain types of capital come with particular types of expectations. Many filmmakers of the NMC depend on French funding and according to Moroccan filmmaker Farida Benlyazid “French producers tend to favor socially or politically engaged Moroccan films; they’re not looking to back different kinds of movies from Morocco, and that’s becoming a drawback for some directors” (Keslassy, 2013). As previously mentioned, the paradox is that at exactly the point that Moroccan cinema

starts imagining new markets and publics it becomes truly popular with Moroccan publics, consistently topping the domestic box office and generating local alternatives to global media discourses while using the universal model of Hollywood as a model. In the process, filmmakers moving between translocal priorities and global media imperatives become important mediating forces among multiple modernities while articulating claims across multiple scales.

This chapter analyzes the role of cultural elites in media production, the ideological interventions of texts as they circulate and a specific film culture's engagements in the arena of public culture. The global circulation of texts and Hollywood films in particular is perhaps the quintessential cosmopolitan cultural form as outlined by Appadurai & Breckenridge (1988) – imbued with local specificities and in competition with other cultural forms. For the most part filmmakers of the new Moroccan cinema are rooted in the diaspora, moving through overlapping francophone and arabophone cultural-linguistic spaces of a the Mediterranean region while also imagining publics transnationally. The irony is that as texts and elites move increasingly fluidly across borders, people are often subject to increasing frictions and restrictions associated with the militarization of the Mediterranean and “fortress Europe.” Thus we see texts butting up against disjunctures and uneven experiences of globalization in often unpredictable ways. This is especially the case for Moroccan filmmakers, for whom the numeric limitations of the Moroccan market as a small, geographically and cultural dispersed nation with high illiteracy rates, fewer and fewer theaters and poor buying power mean that in order to achieve a certain degree of independence from state capital, the imagining of transnational publics becomes imperative. However, the cultural geographies associated with these imaginings are especially fraught for a small nation whose audiovisual industries have a distinct colonial past, and to some extent, present. That said, the process of film production in a small nation like Morocco is perhaps a

much more representative experience of cultural production in a global era than anomalous industries like Hollywood or Bollywood. As there are fewer and fewer spaces available outside the logics of neoliberal capital, it becomes important to consider how cultural producers like filmmakers of the NMC creatively appropriate or work within capital in pursuit of personal and professional goals. In the process we see the intersection of an authoritarian neoliberal state and a specific counterculture committed to individual artistic liberty and open engagement with the world that is supported to the extent that its goals intersect with state priorities, particularly in challenging Islamists and social conservatives.

While I do use two films – Laïla Marrakchi’s *Rock the Casbah* and Nabil Ayouch’s *Horses of God* - as empirical entry points and examples of the ideological interventions being discussed in this chapter, my analytical intention is to focus less on the texts themselves than the ways these texts get taken up in discourse, their relation to publics and interventions in public culture. Here I am looking at a specific segment of Moroccan cinema [NMC] as another form of independent media that has served as a site of contestation over societal projects and the nature of Moroccan modernity under Mohammed VI. With this in mind I focus on how the new Moroccan cinema operates discursively at the nexus of international political agendas, state authority, cultural elites/intellectuals and public culture, as well as its relationship to everyday life and shifting urban geographies associated with leisure. In order to do this, I ask not “who is going” in the sociological sense, but how are films and publics being imagined and mobilized by filmmakers, and in what ways are these imaginations constrained? Additionally, how do filmmakers of the NMC position themselves and their films ideologically in terms of interventions in public culture? Through these questions I attempt to link the material realities of cultural production and their discursive construction as part of public culture.

I contend that NMC constitutes a new discursive space within a broader Moroccan cinema and a specific film culture associated with a small group of filmmakers that aims to open up debates about Moroccan modernity through cinema. The subject positions of these filmmakers between states have increased their autonomy, opening up possibilities for social critique and commentary on issues previously off limits that are closely related to the transnational ethos of this cinema. In the process cinema has become a transnational space for a sort of mediated activism, driven in large measure by filmmakers acting as public intellectuals and seeking to challenge Morocco's traditionally state-centric media discourses as well as the rise of political Islam, while also trying to integrate social and political norms with those of global civil society in a way that is inclusive of, yet not specific to, Morocco. The profound ambivalence displayed by the NMC is one way in which it challenges hegemonic discourses about modernity coming from both Morocco and the West. Debates over the new Moroccan cinema are positioned squarely at the center of popular culture and politics in Morocco. In advocating for an outward-looking understanding of culture that is engaged with the world and rooted in the precepts of liberalism, these filmmakers envision cinema as a space of engagement, dialogue and debate that is constructed in opposition to Islamist and broader populist tendencies toward cultural enclosure and isolationism from the corrupting influences of external (Western) cultural norms and capital. It is unclear whether pushing the boundaries of socially acceptable storytelling might lead to more progressive politics or just be seen as patronizing, however, it is indicative of tensions between local public culture and global media imperatives becoming one of the structuring dynamics of cultural production in small nations. As global products increasingly want to be seen as local, so the profound locality of speaking "from" somewhere in Moroccan cinema comes to be seen as an asset transnationally.

I begin this chapter by thinking about the historical relationship between global politics and textual publics, and the role of elite cultural producers in relation to publics. I then conduct close readings of industry-created paratexts like film covers and trailers not because marketing materials are so heavily invested in, as Gray (2010) points out is the case with Hollywood blockbusters, but because in Moroccan cinema where marketing budgets are often small, covers and trailers constitute some of the few opportunities for filmmakers to frame their films for publics [through processes of selection and editing], cuing them on “what to watch, what not to watch, and how to watch” (Gray, 2010, p. 3), as well as giving some sense of how filmmakers see their own films fitting into larger discourses. In many ways paratexts are often more mainstream and widely accessible than the films they represent, and occupy public space in ways a 2-hour feature film cannot. Thus we can think of paratexts as “as generative of meanings and engagement, as are the films and television shows that they orbit and establish” (p. 22), which is reinforced in the Moroccan context by refrains about people critiquing films without actually having seen them. In choosing *Rock the Casbah* and *Horses of God* as the focal points for this chapter, I opted for filmmakers who have achieved a certain level of success with local and transnational publics, as well as on the festival circuit. Marrakchi and Ayouch are among the Moroccan filmmakers most embedded in transnational circuits of capital and capable of securing co-production partners. They are also filmmakers who have been both held up as examples for Moroccan cinema and denied funding from state agencies at various points in their careers. After the close readings, I move on to the discourse surrounding the NMC, which I analyze through Moroccan, foreign and trade press publications surrounding NMC as a phenomenon as well as *Rock the Casbah* and *Horses of God* specifically.

## Global politics and textual publics

Cinema in Morocco has long been embroiled in geopolitical conflicts over spheres of influence and ideological affiliations. As Martin (2011) points out, cinema in all three countries of the Maghreb originated as a political battleground (p. 4). While most films made in Morocco during the colonial era were foreign productions for foreigners, the French did try to establish Maghrebi cinema in the years before independence to counteract the influence of Egyptian cinema and its pan-Arab ethos (Benali, 1998). From the 1940s-1960s, Egyptian film dominated Moroccan cinemas and as one study of Casablanca stated:

“Cinema for the majority of urban spectators is Egyptian film. Its success is based on several factors. There is, first of all, the prestige of the Orient, which, under the Protectorate, had a political character: applauding its products, this was an act of opposition” (Adam, 1968, p. 519).

Yet a diplomatic rupture between Morocco and Egypt over Egypt’s support for Algeria in the 1963 *Guerre des Sables*<sup>2</sup> reduced the relationship of Moroccan publics with Egyptian cinema. Jaïdi (1992) recounts how “in October 1963, police went to movie theaters to notify owners about a provisional suspension of Egyptian films” (p. 58). Indian cinema (*films hindous* or *films indo-pakistanaïis*), for which the screening rights were relatively cheap, and karate films from China and America became increasingly popular, while European films, particularly those from France, continued to be widely available. Eventually Egyptian dramas, which were considered a more feminized cultural form, became the property of television with the rise of satellite and (limited) liberalization of the TV market in Morocco. This conformed to gendered norms of cultural consumption as Egyptian films came to be preferred by women, who were widely

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<sup>2</sup> *La Guerre des Sables*, or the War of the Sands, was a 1963 border conflict between Morocco and Algeria. A ceasefire was negotiated after a year, but the border between the two countries remains closed.

discouraged from going to the cinema in the first place and more likely to be solely Arabic speakers, while Indian and Chinese films reinforced cinemas as largely homosocial masculine spaces. Increasingly, the growth in availability of American cinema reflected the rise of Hollywood blockbusters, but also Moroccan political alliances during the Cold War era. I consider these texts in studying Moroccan cinema because in an era of meager Moroccan production where even those Moroccan films that were produced reached few publics, these were the texts that populated the lives of Moroccan cinema publics.

The master narrative of Moroccan nationalism post-independence came ready-made with the monarchy solidly at its center. Thus the monarchy had a vested interest in discouraging oppositional culture such as the highly politicized postcolonial literary scene detailed in Khatibi's (1968) *Le Roman maghrebin*. The leftist intellectual current of the 1960s and 70s that produced such publications as *Souffles* and *Lamalif* was considered subversive and associated with the banning of philosophy at universities and discouragement of literary culture more broadly during the Years of Lead.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, former CCM head Saïl began his career as a philosophy professor in Tangier, where he taught his successor Sarim Fassi Fihri. He has also written novels that have been turned into films, so to some extent literary and cinematic producers are an intertwined group of cultural elites, but at the level of their publics there are stark differences.

The accessibility of print culture in Morocco has been hampered by lack of investment in education, persistently high illiteracy rates, the cost of printing and books, and the linguistic and social stratification associated with split publics, among other factors. Theoretically, cinema

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<sup>3</sup> The Years of Lead refers to a period between 1965-1990 when an increasingly totalitarian Hassan II used violence against dissidents, particularly the left. The period was characterized by disappearances, torture, secret prisons and arbitrary judicial proceedings, leading to widespread paranoia and distrust of authorities.



being an audiovisual medium means that a major barrier to engagement (literacy) has been eliminated and that we are automatically talking about more expansive publics than could ever be imagined by any Moroccan publication. According to Marrakchi, the popularity of cinema contributes to its controversial nature: "...cinema is complicated because in literature one sees Abdellah Taïa, who is gay, write incredible books about homosexuality, etcetera. The relationship with the image is much more difficult, this is to say books, those are ok because very few people read, but images, those unsettle people. The cinema remains something very popular" (Marrakchi, personal communication, 2016). This popularity, however, is constrained by location and resources. Those in rural Morocco relied primarily on cinema caravans organized by the state, while urban publics had access to a greater variety of commercial offerings (Carter, 2009, p. 79). Jaïdi's (1992) study of cinema-going in Casablanca, identified average spectators as "young male students from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds" (p. 5). Even if the number of cinemas has declined dramatically, technological change means that different, often cheaper, ways of watching are on the rise, among them pirated DVDs, streaming/downloading and VOD services. Ultimately the intersections of these changes with economic liberalization and a rising middle class, increasing urbanization and the growth of leisure mean that cinema has taken on a new salience and a particularly privileged (if controversial) place in public life.

### **The public sphere and public intellectuals**

In her study of early American silent film, Hansen (1991) argues that cinema itself constitutes a public sphere and is responsible for shifting the boundaries of private and public, particularly "the standards by which certain realms of experience could be articulated in public while others remained private" (p. 2-3). Part of the novelty of the new Moroccan cinema is its representations of the everyday life experiences of urban modernity, and the taking up of ways of being and

living that had largely belonged to the pervasive discourse of the *non-dit*, or the unsaid, basically that which is unacceptable for articulation but tolerated in certain social circles. In increasingly transnational media landscapes the possibility of cinema as public sphere allowing for this type of alternative organization of experience begs the question: “Alternative for whom and at which historical juncture, in relation to which configurations of experience?” (Hansen, 1991, p. 91). In the case of Morocco, the new Moroccan cinema is one piece of an emergent independent media that makes public culture a platform for the circulation of new modes of publicness and specific values by a progressive counterpublic. This could perhaps be thought of as a liberal left attempting to bring private conversations into new public discursive spaces and capitalize on the possibility of a secular counterculture, particularly urban youth, becoming part of a counterpublic. In many ways this is the product of a historical juncture at which widespread disillusionment with the left based on global tolerance for authoritarianism and infringement on individual rights and liberties born out of the war on terror, and domestically disenfranchised by the major competing forces of Islamism and monarchical authoritarianism. By asserting claims in public and provocative ways through, and in conjunction with, public culture, filmmakers of the new Moroccan cinema produce new discursive possibilities at the intersection of popular culture and public life.

Saying cinema is more accessible or provides opportunities for the alternative organization of experience is not to suggest that the discourses emanating from the new Moroccan cinema are at all egalitarian. “As Geoff Ely has suggested, “it makes more sense to see the public sphere plurally, as an arena of contested meanings, where different and opposing publics manoeuvred for space, and from which certain ‘publics’ might be excluded altogether” (Dass, 2016, p. 15). The discourse emanating from the new Moroccan cinema is concerned with

challenging essentialist and Orientalist depictions of Arab and Muslim societies transnationally and conservative Islamist culture locally. Its success has been in striking a balance between art house cinema and truly popular cinema, while its irony has been that in aspiring to address international publics it has raised its status and seen unprecedented appeal to a growing middle class of urban Moroccans for whom cinema and cinema-going are accessible and with whom more modernist visions of everyday life resonate. In *Outside the Lettered City*, Dass (2016) argues that cinema transformed Indian public culture in the colonial era by creating new mass publics that challenged the status of an elite and exclusive literary culture as arbiter of taste. Instead of approaching cinema as “an alternative, oppositional, and purely subaltern public sphere,” Dass conceptualizes Indian cinema as “a contact zone between some of the elite spaces of the lettered city and the realm of the popular” (p. 8-9). In the Moroccan case cinema can similarly be seen as a point where cosmopolitan cultural forms shaped by local specificities come into contact with split publics and diverse tastes shaped by characteristics such as class, gender and ethnic identity.

Dass’s conception of cinema as a “contact zone” is reminiscent of Appadurai & Breckenridge’s (1988) formulation of public culture, conceived as an arena where various cultural forms encounter and contest each other. Thus we can see NMC as a new space within broader Moroccan cinema whereby a specific film culture emerges in conjunction with a small group of filmmakers. Pinney (2001) argues that “public culture occupies a new social space, one partially created by specific forms of media” (p. 5) and fundamentally characteristic of modernity. Significantly, the new Moroccan cinema and its film culture enters in the arena of public culture and circulates through leaked videos online, to blogs and social media, across newspapers and news magazines, to talk radio and in theaters and cafes, encountering other

cultural forms and domains and structuring interactions across media platforms as it moves. For Srinivas (2000) the Indian cinema hall provided for a sort of social proximity, but in the Moroccan case NMC is more about discursive proximity to a certain set of social realities and what that means for a highly stratified Moroccan society. While many people do not have access to the actual films, they do increasingly have access to media coverage and promotional materials, leading filmmakers to frequently voice frustrations about critiques of their films coming from those who haven't actually seen them. For films often at odds with religious discourse about societal values and morality, their more reflexive forms of critique and globally engaged questioning of society represent a different type of film culture than educational or escapist films. If we think of public culture surrounding cinema as multiple and contested, then we begin to see how NMC positions itself between popular comedies (i.e. Said Naciri or les frères Noury) and more experimental or art cinema (i.e. Bensaïdi or Lasri). At the same time it adopts the universal model of Hollywood with the goal of doing it differently, especially in regard to representations of Muslims and the MENA region. These cultural forms evolve in conversation with each other, and in the struggle to assert systems of value, NMC operates within an ideological framework that displays a profound ambivalence toward modernity – particularly regarding the role of the state, religion and the workings of capital. The film culture surrounding NMC provides “cultural strategies and idioms which necessarily imply the apportionment of power” (Pinney, 2001, p. 18), and in doing so provides space for articulating alternative visions of modernity in conjunction with new understandings of publics and modes of publicness.

Filmmakers of the NMC are by and large part of a cosmopolitan class of cultural producers their commitment to exploring certain controversial realities associated with urban

modernity have often put them in tension with both conservatives and a rural or semirural society divorced from these realities. In India Tamil elites “privileged realism as the governing principle of good cinema” in order to break with traditions of popular drama/theater and separate themselves from lower class public (Pandian, 2014, p. 7). If filmmakers of the NMC, like Tamil elites, prefer “contemporary themes with realist orientations” (ibid.), that preference has particular historical roots. In Moroccan cinema there is a long history of Moroccan publics eschewing Moroccan films in favor of foreign ones, often related to a lack of realism. In the first several decades of post-independence filmmaking, Moroccan films were frequently disparaged for their poor technical quality and “excessive intellectualism (Carter, 2009, p. 95). Additionally, there were just not that many of them. In the 1980s, at a time when there were about 250 cinemas in the country, no Moroccan film sold more than 50,000 tickets while some foreign films sold 800,000 (Carter, 2009, p. 213).<sup>4</sup> By way of comparison, Marrakchi’s *Marock* sold 136,889 tickets in 2006, *Casanegra* 214,473 in 2009, and *Horses of God* 93,718 in 2013, by which time the number of Moroccan cinemas had declined to 31 (CCM). So while the realism of NMC does set it apart from popular comedies in some ways, it does not necessarily separate it from working and middle class publics, especially those of urban youth. Realism also takes on added value in a society where audiovisual media have a long history of blatantly denying many factual realities. These denials extend to the cinema, as Carter (2009) recounts

“[Mostapha] Derkaoui’s first feature film *Events without Meaning* (1974/1975) was never given a permit for exhibition supposedly because Derkaoui had told one official, in passing, that it dealt with unemployment. The official replied that unemployment was not

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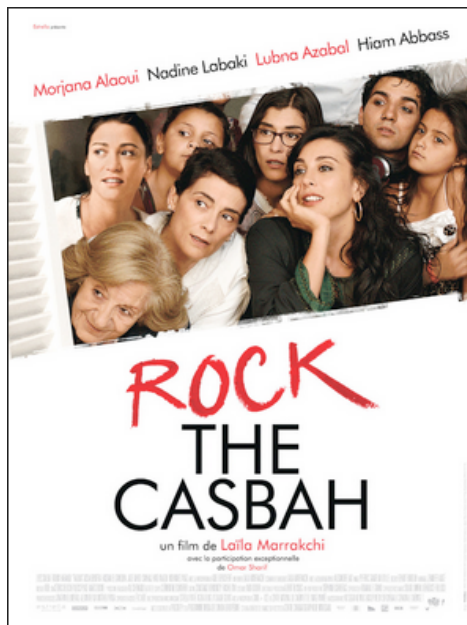
<sup>4</sup> Films during this period were rarely distributed at more than a few theaters, as only a few copies could be made. For more specifics about distribution processes, see Dwyer, 2004.

a problem in Morocco, and for an unspecified reason the film was denied the film exhibition license for more than fifteen years (p. 97).

Filmmakers of the NMC often describe a sense of loyalty to a story, as Marrakchi did in discussing *Marock*, saying “I wanted first of all to tell a story, knowing well that there were sensitive subjects” (Gauch & Lindsey, 2006). The emphasis of storytelling can be understood as a sort of intellectual honesty whereby there are no easy answers to the questions posed by NMC films. This includes questions about religion, as realism can also be related to “many secular intellectuals’ apprehension of a popular religiosity” (Pinney, 2001, p. 4), but also the erosion of social justice and human rights associated with capital (Bharucha, 1998). In engaging with these tensions, there is ultimately a sense that the Moroccan experience and stories grounded in it, have something to contribute to processes of meaning-making around modernity.

### **Marketing the new Moroccan cinema**

#### *Rock the Casbah*



*Rock the Casbah*'s cover is a stark white with a rectangular window frame occupying the top half. Crowded in the window is an entire extended family peering curiously as something out of the frame. Above the frame are the names of the actresses playing the film's main characters alternating in red and black – three adult daughters and their mother – and below it the title of the film with “Rock” appearing in an irregular red font

Image 5: *Rock the Casbah* cover and “the Casbah” below it in black uniform uppercase type.

A plain cover by most standards, it is effective in suggesting that this film is about interior lives

and relationships, the things that happen behind the facades of houses or the fronts people show the world. In fact, a Norwegian poster for the film featured the same photo with the title translated as “A house in Morocco.” The crowding and peering of characters in the window invoke a sense of physical and emotional closeness, of an extended family that is in each other’s way and in each other’s business. Those who have seen the film will know the image is from one of the film’s final scenes when one sister’s estranged American husband follows her home to Morocco and the entire family watches as they are reunited on the front porch, so there is the connotation of coming together, of a resolving of differences and conflict. The title below the image is an obvious reference to the Clash’s 1982 hit, but it is the form of the words that particularly symbolic in this case. The word “Rock” is slanted on the same angle as the window from which the family peers, giving a sense of destabilization reinforced by the irregular letters of the font. “The Casbah” that is being rocked is a traditional North African citadel, of which there are many in Morocco, usually durable stone structures as alluded to by the uniformity of the text. Together, the phrase “Rock the Casbah” conveys both visually and symbolically a sense that traditional social structures and ways of being are being challenged in this film.

*Rock the Casbah*’s trailer starts with slow, sad instrumental music accompanied by scene-setting shots of a luxurious villa interior and its grounds where people are walking slowly up a hill to the house, as if for a solemn occasion, as a black SUV arrives. The scene then cuts to Sophia being greeted by emotional hugs from her mother and two older sisters, with one remarking that “no one could have predicted it,” suggesting that she’s missed a major sad event in her family. It becomes evident that it is the death of her father when the camera cuts between Sophia seeing the preparation of his corpse and her sister caressing his portrait while reminiscing about his qualities as a self-made man and supporter of his family. Viewers quickly find out that

may not be the father's only interpretation as the sister's solemn remembrances cut back to the preparation of the corpse and the uncle's shock to find his brother's penis erect, serving as early symbolism of the father's sexual exploits outliving him. Here the music shifts dramatically to Bing Crosby's upbeat big band tune "Road to Morocco" paired with scenes of swimmers in Tangiers' harbor and Sophia sitting on a hill overlooking the sea, with the juxtaposition suggesting that there might be more to Morocco than sunny holiday stereotypes. It becomes apparent that Sophia hasn't been here in a long time as her mother remarks "We've missed you darling" and her sisters tease her about her success playing terrorists in Hollywood.

From here the trailer moves from establishing context and narrative to the conflicts at the heart of the film. A string of quick juxtapositions move from superficial to more serious: when Sophia asks why her sisters are talking about scars at the wake, one explains "She had her boobs done, her own personal revolution!" eliciting disapproving looks from a group of elders, the grandmother tells her emo grandson that his nose ring "makes him look like a girl" as she eats McDonalds and Sophia informs her family that she is separated from her husband, to which her mother adamantly responds "in our culture, we don't divorce." From this point we see an eruption of conflict, largely between Sophia and her older sisters, who have stayed in Morocco, and between the daughters and their mother, about her complicity in their father's deceit. The climax comes as one daughter screams at her mother "How could you keep quiet??" and then cuts to an earlier scene where the mother slaps her at the funeral dinner to which she responds "Screw you! I'm going to drink beer and forget you all!"

Then the music shifts once more to a poignant ballad by Antony and the Johnsons combined with sweeping bird's eye views of Tangier at dawn as one sister prays on the porch. In a scene highlighted in promotional photos we see the mother on the couch with her daughters



gathered around her as they comfort each other, giving a sense of reconciliation as she says “He’d be happy to see us all together, to see the house full like this.” There is the connotation that despite all the paradoxes and misguided attempts to establish a sense of self separate from the family unit, there is still love for the man they lost, mourning for certain truths they believed and acceptance of a more candid and critical understanding of the shared experiences of family and culture. The father is carried out of the house to his burial and then the sense that life goes on in a lighter register as the sisters drink beer, go to the supermarket and spy on Sophia’s reunion with her husband in the scene from the cover.

### *Horses of God*

While *Rock the Casbah* is billed as “a comedy about a tragedy,” *Horses of God* is all tragedy. When I purchased a copy of Mahi Binebine’s *Les Etoiles du Sidi Moumen*, the book on which the film is based, in Casablanca, the proprietor of the bookstore solemnly informed me “This is a hard story. Very hard.” Like *Rock the Casbah*, *Horses of God*’s cover also consists of a single image against a white background, but is significantly darker and more complex. The image is



Image 6: *Horses of God* cover

a close-up of a 10-year-old Nabil, the best friend of the film’s protagonist Yacine, whose body (head and torso) occupy the majority of the cover. Nabil is wearing a t-shirt under a dirty jersey as we see him in the early scenes of the film playing football matches with Yacine against boys from other slums that often end up in brawls, giving the sense that these boys have to fight for existence from an early age. The choice of Nabil for

the cover is an interesting one given that he is not the main protagonist, but can be read as one of the film's most tragic characters by far given that he is the most sensitive, quiet, almost effeminate boy who perhaps suffers most from his harsh circumstances and setting. One of the most remarkable features of Nabil's body is its lighting, with his left side illuminated as if from a far-off glow, while his right side is shrouded in darkness, with this juxtaposition showing up most clearly on his face and carrying connotations of both tensions between good and evil and the multifaceted nature of human beings. The other remarkable feature of Nabil's body is the fact that his shoulders appear to be disintegrating before our eyes, a clear reference to the suicide bomber he will become. Across his chest is the Arabic title *Ya Khayl Allah* in white script, with the French title *Les Chevaux de Dieu* printed in yellow just above it. Like the script superimposed over Nabil's body there is the suggestion that his fate as a suicide bomber has been pressed upon him. Below the title on Nabil's lower torso is an image of a jihadist in army fatigues demonstrating a combat move to the adult Nabil and Yacine with a mosque in the background. Below the image is the text "No one is born a terrorist," again in white Arabic script. The pairing of a training scene and this sentence, plus the decision to put an adolescent version of Nabil on the cover versus an adult, together carrying humanizing connotations and suggest an attempt to see the light beyond the darkness that is terrorism, or at the very least understand what makes a child who once dreamed of being a football star blow himself up in a crowded restaurant.

The trailer for *Horses of God* is much darker and plays with the dramatic conventions of action films. The movie is a fictionalized account of the May 16, 2003 series of suicide bombings in Casablanca that killed 33 victims and 12 suicide bombers, as well as the bombers' background in now infamous Sidi Moumen shantytown. Its trailer begins at the end with the clap

of a drum and a shot of the back of a grand taxi crowded with men traveling down a nondescript city street suddenly appearing on screen, as if the viewer has suddenly awoken in the middle of a scene. Building sound effects accompany the taxi's progress before the screen goes black with another drum clap and "Casablanca, 2003" appears in the center with a close up of Yacine in the front seat behind the text a second later. Then several jump cuts: a man with Islamic beard and dress asking "will you really do it?" a shot of four young men in dark jackets and backpacks walking down a shadowed Casablanca street, a close up of someone fastening a suicide vest and telling its wearer "we'll meet in paradise," Yacine's face as he gazes up at the fastener, a shot of the four young men with backpacks from the front, with sun on their faces, who might have been four high school students on their way to class, Yacine and Nabil in the restaurant that is their target, looking at each other, followed by a black screen and the phrase *Inch'allah*, or "God willing." After a moment text showing the film's selection for Cannes, then the black is gone.

The next thing we see is a bunch of boys playing soccer on a dusty dirt pitch and a close-up of an adolescent Yacine yelling from the goal "Let's go guys, cover the pitch!" then an aerial survey of a relatively small slum with the text "Shantytown of Sidi Moumen, Casablanca." Then a close up of Yacine showing Nabil a picture of "the best goalie in the world" to which Nabil responds "You'll be like him."<sup>5</sup> Next another aerial shot of the slum, which seems to have grown immensely, with the phrase "two brothers growing together" over its top, before a cut to an older teenage Yacine with a vendor's cart in a dirt street lined with laundry telling his brother Hamid "I'm sick of this job." Hamid resembles a gangster with his beanie, tank top, metallic chains and tattoo, which is confirmed when the camera jumps from Yacine selling oranges to his brother selling drugs, then back to both of them in the street as Hamid says "if something goes

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<sup>5</sup> The picture is of the world-renowned Soviet goalie Lev Yashin.

wrong we can't both go under," foreshadowing the following scene of violent police repression that ends in him being hauled off to prison.

Again, black, then an aerial shot of a boy running through the slum shouting that Yacine's brother is back accompanied by a hopeful piano melody, and a shot of a very different looking Hamid – clean, in Islamic dress, with a beard – being reunited with Yacine, who tells his mother "he's gone weird." Hamid invites Yacine to someone named Noceir's and Yacine and Nabil are shown entering the back of a room of praying men, followed by another clap of the drum and a shot of a factory surrounded by a wasteland of trash as a man says "here you will find your path through prayer." Then a quick sequence: Yacine being threatened with a knife, joining the brotherhood, men praying in front of a mosque, a jihadist leading training exercises, the brothers sharing a meal in the mountains and a close-up of an Islamic cleric in black as he says "Death does not scare us." The slow instrumental movement in the background reaches a crescendo as another sequence of mostly happy moments play across the screen: the future suicide bombers playing soccer during one of their training camps, flashing back to Yacine's childhood days as a goalie, drinking tea with a girl he likes, contemplative window gazing, playing in a stream in the wilderness, ritual washing before prayer. It becomes apparent that a myriad of experiences have led these young men to this point and that in radical Islam they found brotherhood, protection, adventure and purpose in a world that treated their lives as inconsequential. We see the boys running through the streets of the slum, the only world they know, as both adolescents and teenagers, the freedom of Yacine on the back of a motorbike driven by Nabil, and finally an adult Yacine in Islamic dress staring at the picture of his goalie idol with Nabil's words "You'll be just like him" replaying in his head, as a cleric slowly pulls the picture from his fingers. Then, all childhood dreams eclipsed, we're back at the beginning of

trailer, replaying scenes for which we now have infinitely more context and meaning. Hamid asking Yacine “Will you really do it?” to which he harshly responds *Ana makhayf*, or “I’m not afraid.” Again, the strapping of suicide vests, Hamid watching his brother from outside the restaurant, Yacine and Nabil locking eyes, and then a final aerial shot of a group of figures in darkness on the edge of an abyss with the lights of Casablanca in the background.

These covers and trailers are indicative of how filmmakers imagine their films, as well as their attempts to fix an interpretive frame for publics. They are obvious simplifications of the narratives meant to draw publics in, but they also do remarkably well at conveying the internal complexities of characters rooted in particular social contexts. Above all they highlight the vastly divergent experiences of globalization whereby impoverished young children are subject to a myriad of violence while the elite adult daughters of an industrial magnate lack nothing materially yet suffer from a violence associated with the imposition of patriarchal authority.

### **The new Moroccan cinema as discourse**

*Rock the Casbah* made its world premiere at the 2013 Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), indicating expanding aspirations about the audience for Moroccan cinema and its role in an increasingly transnational cinema landscape. After the screening, Marrakchi took the stage to answer questions about the film in much the same language as many Moroccan filmmakers of her generation: saying the film is fiction inspired by reality, that she didn’t want the music to be folkloric but something more universal, and that she thinks Moroccan audiences are ready for boundaries to be pushed through cinema. These three themes stand out as a refrain in the discourse of the new Moroccan cinema: 1) the importance of telling stories rooted in the real, 2) participation in a universal alternative cinema and 3) an engagement with the publics as part of a new cultural politics.

### *Docu-Fiction*

Perhaps the most striking rhetoric about the new Moroccan cinema concerns its relationship with reality. Filmmakers repeatedly assert their intention to show a different or lesser-known side of Morocco, Arabs and Muslim society. This cinema is known for making films that challenge taboos and conservative social norms, but it is also caught up in a complex web of transnational storytelling and in a geopolitical moment where Arabs and Muslims have been presented in particular (often problematic) ways and state control has kept more traditional news media from opening up spaces for meaningful exchange. In some ways Moroccan cinema speaks back not only to the Western world, but also to the narratives constructed in Morocco and other authoritarian and transitional societies where globalization has sharpened social stratification. The realities addressed by this cinema are often opposed to superficial, often essentialist portrayals and Orientalist stereotypes, suggesting that what is being talked about is a particular set of taboo realities that were previously obscured, both in transnationally and locally where such issues as alcoholism and prostitution are often purported not to exist and blatantly absent from media discourse. Through these realities certain themes have become salient: religious fundamentalism, violence, sexuality, gender norms, corruption, migration, etc, as well as more nuanced ways to tell such stories.

A key component of the discourse surrounding Moroccan cinema is the desire to address the complexities of Moroccan modernity by telling stories rooted in the real. Often these stories originate from filmmakers' personal experiences and are fictionalized to fit cinematic forms. Thus these films have been referred to as a new/hybrid genre of "docu-fiction" (Nejjar) or "cinema of the real" (Ayouch), but even absent explicit labels all of these filmmakers have used similar rhetoric to position their films as fiction inspired by reality and making use of

documentary filming tactics. A report on the 2013 Moroccan National Film Festival in Tangier describes this movement in Moroccan cinema as “a dual structure with a documentary component, and another fictional, supported by the interplay of performers who give the real a dimension that transcends TV news” (Bakrim, 2013). Sometimes this documentary component is the result of small budgets that require filmmakers to make use of the world around them, but just as often it seems to be an aesthetic choice, or some combination of the two. Kilani describes some of the motivations for moving in this new direction in *Sur la planche*: “It looks like a documentary, but it isn’t at all a documentary...however, I wanted to keep the energy, the vitality, the rough and rugged dimension of the real” (Cratzborn, 2011). Part of this emphasis on documenting reality can likely be attributed to the journalistic and documentary background of filmmakers such as Kilani, and Ayouch has also discussed on multiple occasions his decisions to use non-professional actors being an aesthetic choice.

Purporting to address “reality” has also made these films and filmmakers, and their relationships to various realities, subject to debate. Given their position as cultural elites, telling stories from societal extremities has made filmmakers like Nabil Ayouch or Laïla Marrakchi subject to critiques: that Ayouch is representing realities that are not his own and that Marrakchi’s portrayals are not representative of the Moroccan majority, resulting in a dichotomy between miserablism and opulence. Mahi Binebine, the artist and author who wrote the novel on which *Horses of God* is based, discussed being shocked at the other Morocco he discovered after the terrorist attacks of 16 May 2003, saying “In going to Sidi Moumen, I discovered a Morocco that I didn’t know, a Morocco that shocked me, a sort of Calcutta” (Marmié, 2010). Ayouch cites his own experience growing up in a banlieue north of Paris as making him familiar with marginality: “I grew up in Sarcelles, I know physical, moral, verbal violence, I know what it

feels like to be on the margins” (Lafitte, 2013).<sup>6</sup> Ayouch was familiar with Sidi Moumen as a filmmaker prior to the 2003 attacks, but still admits to being shocked that the suicide bombers came from there (ibid.). For Ayouch, *Horses of God* is an attempt to

“show a reality that we did not want to see or that we didn’t know: that of a slum where, certainly, there is social, cultural, intellectual and economic misery. But I try to go beyond this. The axiom that says ‘misery equals kamikaze’ is false, because if not we’d have millions of kamikazes. I try to explain that the inhabitants of slums are above all human beings who have been abandoned by state and societal structures” (Guessous, 2012).

In the film aerial shots show the shantytown growing dramatically over the course of the 1990s with the encroachment of neoliberalism and simultaneous growth of inequality, accompanied by a reduction in the social function of the state. An article about the Ayouch’s filmmaking almost a decade after the attacks makes clear that these realities haven’t changed, as one slum resident reported “‘We exist on odd jobs like this shoot and we wait. When the factory next door opened we were hoping to be hired, but were quickly disillusioned. They didn’t want anything to do with us,’ said Aziz, 27 years old, unemployed since he dropped out of school” (Oulmouddane, 2012). Ayouch’s refrain that there were victims on both sides of the attacks belies a notion of liberal society in which Morocco is based on “cultural diversity and multiculturalism, different communities, different races, different religions” (Forster, 2013). Amidst the controversy surrounding her first film *Marock*, Marrakchi likewise decried notions of a homogenous Morocco, but also of peaceful coexistence, saying “I’m sick of this phony Morocco, falsely homogenous, harmonious. Morocco is diverse and varied, multiple, splintered...” (Barrada,

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<sup>6</sup> This is true, however, in Morocco Ayouch is seen as a sort of *filis à papa*, or daddy’s boy, given that his father (Noureddine Ayouch) has been quite successful since his return and his political activities have brought him close to the monarchy.



2006). To a certain extent we see realism being interpreted as the material conditions of everyday life, yet stopping short of a radical denunciation of structural inequalities while privileging individual difference.

If *Horses of God* shows the reality of shantytown life, *Rock the Casbah* delves into realities from the other end of the social spectrum, that of a family of a wealthy industrialist who has clearly been on the “right” side of the neoliberal equation. If people ignored or remained ignorant of places like Sidi Moumen, *Rock the Casbah*’s luxurious villa on a hill overlooking Tangier is a vision of Morocco that many have perhaps too often wanted to see. As a lukewarm review from *La Vie Eco* reported “The tourism office must be beside itself with joy: In *Rock the Casbah*, Tangier dazzles, figs are full of sun and the women damningly beautiful. Laïla Marrakchi spares no expense in flattering the public’s eye, in honing fantasies of luxury, of calm and pleasure, perhaps even some envy” (Guessous, 2013). Another publication refers to the film as “a beautiful tribute to Tangier and a sort of paradise lost” (Boussageon, 2013). Suggestions of Orientalist opulence and more than a hint of colonialist nostalgia raise questions about the neocolonial nature of Morocco and the extent to which an elite with close ties to the former colonizer has merely taken over its function, living within a cocoon of wealth. Marrakchi has frequently talked about wanting her films to show a different side of Moroccan society than a Moroccan cinema she has qualified as “miserabilist,” but by focusing on internal lives and struggles she also ignores the extraordinary impact of this elite on lives beyond their own and offers an escape into a privileged Morocco where everyday struggles don’t exist. That said, while the settings are idealized, the characters are not and in many ways could be read as misguided, self-centered and not particularly positive, if sympathetic, portrayals.

Both Marrakchi and Ayouch have both discussed that their films seek to represent certain often-observed realities rather than judge anyone, despite the fact that representations are never mere reflections. According to Ayouch, Moroccans were a bit too eager to move on from the 16 May attacks, deciding not to talk about them without attempting to understand the realities that produced them. In returning to the attacks almost a decade later, Ayouch stated “What interests me is understanding how 10-year-old kids transform into human bombs. If we really want these things not to happen again, we have the duty to go through the looking glass (to see from other perspectives)” (Forster, 2013). This idea of cinema as a mirror of society is espoused by many filmmakers of the NMC, including Marrakchi, who “considers more than ever cinema to be a mirror that must be brandished in the face of Moroccans” (Pajon, 2013). Marrakchi shows that it is women, and their ability to make decisions and take responsibility for them, that is most often sacrificed under the weight of a patriarchal family culture that often makes use of religion to reinforce itself. This situation is made even more evident in considering the dominance of media by men, and the fact that the strong women’s voices in Moroccan cinema are seen as a sort of anomaly. In depicting the transgressive ways that some women deal with this state of affairs, Marrakchi’s films can be and are interpreted as offensive by many segments of Moroccan society and interpreted as attacks on the foundations of what it means to be Muslim and Moroccan.

In considering the public discourse provoked by these films, the roots of mediated depictions of Moroccan “reality” in colonialism must be considered as well as its relationship with the postcolonial state. For many, filmmakers’ use of state and French funding coupled with flagrant and unabashed representations of everyday life that contradict Islamic norms or construe them as backward, underscores an extension of discursive logics associated with colonialism. Yet filmmakers see their films as important interventions in a field (and on subjects) too long left

to foreigners. Many Moroccan and Arab filmmakers more broadly feel a duty to contribute to conversations about terrorism in particular and the difficulties their societies are facing in this historical moment, when the prevalence of representations of terrorism in (particularly Western) popular culture has skyrocketed in the wake of 9/11, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and ongoing conflicts around al-Qaeda and ISIL. At the same time, terrorism's status as a geopolitical priority means that the resources available for storytelling around this issue and public interest are immense. In discussing the evolution of his filmmaking, Ayouch points to 9/11 as a formative moment and the differences between the films he made before and after that event, calling *Horses of God* "harsher, more in touch with reality" (Mrabet, 2013). According to Ayouch, the film tries to counterbalance simplistic and stereotypical representations of Islamic fundamentalism, as well as Muslim societies more broadly.

"I've always been extremely saddened by the way most American blockbusters interpret violence, especially violence associated with radical Islam. They have a pretty phenomenal ability to dehumanize it, to remove names and faces. I wanted to explore this kind of violence, with the duty to probe the depths of reasons why a kid would transform himself into a human bomb. I wanted to focus on this genesis, on this way of life, without making violence into a spectacle. This is really the intention of the film, to say that the micro-traumas that shape us in childhood inform the type of adults we become later. This violence makes it so that one is a little more permeable than others to certain ideas, ideologies. And it is this relationship – constructed, visceral, organic – that interests me" (Mrabet, 2013).

When asked about the prevalence of terrorism as a theme in Moroccan cinema Ayouch responded "It's logical that Moroccan filmmakers talk about Islamism. Americans do it regularly, so why not us? We have the right to give our point of view on a topic that affects us so

deeply” (Saadi, 2013). This also comes at the risk of reifying certain societies’ association with terrorism, in a region that has many realities, especially those regarding everyday life, that are not at all wrapped up in terrorism. In stark contrast to *Horses of God*, *Rock the Casbah*’s engagement with terrorism takes the form of a comedic plot line as the film pointedly pokes fun at American media through Sophia’s typecasting as a terrorist. According to Marrakchi, “Here there is always a bit of humor, of irony, or derision, even when facing serious crises” (Pajon, 2013). Humor doesn’t necessarily fit well with what Marrakchi says are Western expectations of “[Arab] filmmakers who make shocking, provocative films that violently denounce injustices” (Hamri, 2013), one reason she says *Rock the Casbah* didn’t show well in Western markets.

Inherent in these debates about neorealist representations in Moroccan cinema is the question of who speaks for Morocco? Both Ayouch and Marrakchi tell stories rooted in specific social contexts: Ayouch dealing with the impoverished margins and Marrakchi with a cosmopolitan elite. To critics they are often understood as patronizing, as purporting to hold a mirror to Moroccan society for the people that inhabit it. The question of who gets to brandish that mirror and for what purpose is obviously controversial, and its difficult to overestimate the interpretive power accorded to filmmakers. Admittedly one of the strengths of Moroccan cinema is its diversity, however in an increasingly transnational media environment the films that get taken up, publicized and debated, seem to be those concerned with realities that challenge fundamentalist ideologies while affirming transnational discourses about secular modernity and avoiding outright criticism of the neoliberal state.

#### *A universal alternative cinema*

Often using the personal as a window to the universal, the new Moroccan cinema tells stories based in the realities of Moroccan society, yet is underscored by more universal themes capable

of being transferred to other contexts and identified with by diverse publics. According to filmmaker Nour-Eddine Lakhmari, Moroccans have similar problems as those plaguing societies around the world. “We’re a little bit sick of representing Morocco as a folkloric stereotype... We want to see films about us, told from our point of view, telling the world that we have universal problems” (Quilty, 2009). In Marrakchi’s first film those problems related to adolescence, while *Rock the Casbah* takes on patriarchy and familial conflict, highlighting tensions between individuality and the group as well as between generations. As Marrakchi remarked “There are both personnel things and those that are more universal. As soon as you touch the topic of adolescence, you tell stories that are for the most part common, which are key to situations that transcend borders and cultures” (Antona, 2006). Likewise *Horses of God* takes on poverty and exclusion on the margins of global capital. Fundamentally the universal dimensions of these stories makes it possible for Moroccan filmmakers to simultaneously draw on and develop their own cultural referents while speaking to diverse publics.

In many ways this aspiration to the universal is built on the universal model of Hollywood even if it aspires to do it differently. *Horses of God* and *Rock the Casbah* bear marked signs of the action and dramedy genre conventions to which they respectively subscribe. Significantly, both are lauded in the trade press for their production values (particularly editing), which had a primary complaint about Moroccan cinema in the past. In innovating around production structures and taking on taboo topics, filmmakers of the new Moroccan cinema demonstrate aspirations to not just to open up their own market, but to also become a leader of the cinema in the Global South and an advocate for alternative viewpoints to those articulated by a globally dominant Hollywood industry. When asked if he considered himself a product of “Third World cinema,” Lakhmari responded “Cinema is universal. Maybe we don’t have the

same means, the same industry, but we're there. Today we no longer have complexes: we put our cameras where we want and we dare much more" (Mrabet, 2013). Addressing universal issues and telling stories of urban modernity in a transitional society, however, often means that industry norms and expectations are challenged. According to filmmaker Swel Noury "Foreign sales agents often complain our films don't feel Moroccan enough" (Dale, 2009). Yet these concerns seem to be exactly the point for filmmakers of the NMC who express a desire to defy stereotypes and clichés, often using the specific as the path to the universal.

Both Ayouch and Marrakchi have expressed a fundamental interest in attempting to understand the complexities of the human experience through storytelling. With *Horses of God*, Ayouch wanted to emphasize the universal nature of youth in showing "Young Muslims have the same aspirations as Western youths, we have to stop believing they come from a planet with distant customs/mores" (Strauss, 2015). In doing so, Ayouch contends that fundamentalist Islam adopts the same trajectory as other radical ideologies, from anarchism to right-wing nationalism. In *Rock the Casbah*, notions of universality revolve around family tensions, patriarchy and generational conflict whereby "...we discover a one-of-a-kind family similar to so many others" (Milleliri, 2013). The notion of family drama as universally relatable, however, is often combined with Western narratives about modernity and the Arab World. "While *Casbah* plays more like a conventional French family saga [than *Marock*], complete with sibling rivalries, sexual tensions and contentious inheritances, it continues to explore notions of class and culture in a country caught between Muslim traditions and ever-encroaching Western influences" (Mintzer, 2013). According to Marrakchi, these are exactly the reductive binaries she sought to subvert, as she said "We are all contradictory, we all have weaknesses, we all have strengths. What interests me is to show women with their weaknesses, their emotions...this is the truth I try

to portray” (Febrayer, 2013). The film is frequently referenced by Western media (in this case French, as the film did not receive any major attention in the US) as a case study in contradictions between tradition and modernity, demonstrating the difficulties of ambivalence in the face of modernity. The point is that these are not “fragile/delicate” women with flaws, contradictions and imperfections because they are Arab women, but rather because they are human beings. These contradictions might have local specificities and challenges, but they are fundamentally the products of a globally hegemonic patriarchal modernity, even as it exists in uneven and varying degrees.

That these films have been popular and debated does not mean that they are not subject to critique. *Rock the Casbah*’s storyline was frequently referred to as familiar and predictable at best and clichéd at worst. For one Moroccan critic these clichés focused on class, as she stated “these women’s qualms ring hollow, false, it is very difficult to identify with them, to believe in their protected sufferings, to be moved by their programmed attempts at emancipation...” (Guessous, 2013), while foreign critics tended to focus on character development and dialogue. As *Le Monde* wrote “One can clearly see where Laïla Marrakchi is coming from with this family drama in the form of a Persian fable: to give voice to Moroccan women, conditioned by the rules of an oppressive society. The problem is that in trying to be explicit, convincing, it ends up becoming cliché” (Nouchi, 2013). The title of the *Le Monde* article “Rock the Casbah”: nothing to do with the legendary Clash song” seems to suggest that the film is not explicitly political enough, the tone too light and its beautiful visuals and whimsical nature detrimental to the story it wants to tell. “As an Arab woman filmmaker, people expect you to be a radical auteur and make very serious dramas like ‘A Separation,’ (...) but I grew up watching Hollywood movies and I aim to make popular films that do address serious issues but also feature characters that we

can relate to, not necessarily people living on the margins” (Keslassy, 2013). The question of to whom people can relate aside, the critiques of Marrakchi’s films are often gendered in nature and appear to be anchored in perceptions of elite women’s frivolity and a version of modernity inextricably linked to the habitus of a particular social class.

*Horses of God*, on the other hand, is much darker and construed as infinitely more socially relevant. Moroccan critiques tended to focus on Ayouch making the terrorists too human, but by and large the press supported this intervention emphasizing societal failure: “...even if they committed abominable, atrocious acts, they were also victims because they were manipulated, recruited. And because the family, society did not do what they were supposed to do” (Guessous, 2012). Foreign press focused much more on the individual factors than societal failures, characterizing radical Islam as a form of redemption for individual failures or faults (Forster, 2013; Lafitte, 2013). In general Western media seem preoccupied with the process of radicalization as if radical Islam has some universal magical formula through which it brainwashes people. Ayouch is thus critiqued for not providing all the answers to a Western radicalization thesis that above all wants to know “but HOW do suicide bombers become radicalized?” In discussing the difficulty of disagreeing with films made to denounce terrorism, one critic claims *Horses of God* “never succeeds in bringing us into the programming of blind faith...The omnipresent why and how of entrapment in a certain religious life with its absurd precepts remains nevertheless inaccessible to the pseudo-acuity of these films” (Péron, 2012). Likewise, another critique stated “The film explains everything: the bankruptcy of society, corruption, poverty, the absence of points of reference...without giving a real answer. Because Nabil Ayouch skipped the key period in the story: the prison” (Forster, 2013). The assumption that a character going to prison a thug and coming out an Islamist is the key transformation



ignores the multitude of micro aggressions and indignities that populate the lives of those on the margins, and on which the entire first half of the film focuses. In this case we might as well be talking about disenfranchised black youth in the US living lives saturated with various types of violence, going to prison and coming out gang members. Both cases are a play for easy answers that don't involve addressing actual injustices built into societal structures locally and globally, but rather disrupting the mythical moment of radicalization. Because Ayouch's film was less likely to be written off, he was offered greater opportunities to speak back to these critiques. When asked about leaving out this "key" scene, Ayouch responded "Indoctrination is discursively unremarkable. It's the manipulation of texts and current events. An almost ripe fruit is picked. A fruit that ripens through abandonment, because of the absence of education, of a health system, of social justice...All these traumas inform the adults they become. At the end of this path, Islamists show up to brainwash them. What interests me, it what happens before that" (Aubel, 2013). Ayouch also references similar social situations happening in the European suburbs, meaning that the margins of global capital transcend borders and religions in constructing two very different experiences of social development, of winners and losers in the neoliberal globalization game.

As an outward-looking industry with a colonial past and aspirations at infiltrating markets in Europe and elsewhere, one of the primary concerns of Moroccan cinema's critics seems to be the image of Morocco abroad. Marrakchi's frustrations with this are telling, as for many, the new Moroccan cinema could be damaging to Arab Muslims already much-maligned by media and a country heavily dependent on international tourism and investment, where depicting social problems could challenge its credibility in the international community. Director Hakim Noury, who makes popular comedies, once referred to Moroccan films solicited by international

festivals as “miserabilist films with a colonial sensibility,” saying “The West sees us as natives. It encourages this genre of films because it bothers them when we come compete with them on their territory” (Bennani, 2005). Yet the new generation of filmmakers is much more ambivalent to the forces of capital and institutional politics, frequently working within them in a way that privileges certain ideological frameworks, but also makes possible certain critical interventions. That the government doesn’t seem interested in withholding support or suppressing these films suggests that they are in fact benefiting from the recognition of Moroccan critical voices in the international arena and the accompanying perception of the country as a bastion of artistic freedom in the MENA region. In a moment of regional instability, Morocco seems to be seizing the opportunity to use Moroccan cinema as currency to improve its reputation vis-à-vis freedom of expression and human rights more broadly. As Moroccan cinema pioneer Ahmed El Maanouni points out, Morocco enjoys “a freedom to tackle subjects which is sufficiently rare in the Arab world to be noteworthy. But we filmmakers also have to be more daring. I’m convinced of one thing: the more we show ourselves as we truly are, the more we are universal,” (Masters, 2007). If filmmakers can continue opening up spaces for expression, Kilani believes Moroccan cinema can become synonymous with an alternative approach. “If we can make it from a different point of view, then we will be making a real contribution to cinema” (Quilty, 2009).

### *Popular culture and politics*

Long the domain of the state, the rise of the new Moroccan cinema and independent media more broadly signal a shift in the relationship between culture and politics, gradually making room for multiple and more ambiguous visions of Moroccan modernity. As cultural producers make use of transnational networks and alternative funding models they also secure more flexibility in whether and how to use state resources. This liberalization of the cinema sector is notable in the

context of Arab media long limited to official narratives, as one journalist pointed out “we have a lot more liberty in culture than in politics” (Bennani, 2007). This greater leeway makes public culture an avenue for political commentary challenging the status quo in a way that is not possible in politics itself, stymied as it is by corruption, in-fighting and monarchical intervention. Culture has typically been seen as a secondary concern, but that is changing given the rise of the knowledge economy and creative industries increasingly being seen as a vector of economic development. That production has proliferated at a time when Islamists political power was on the rise means that cinema has come to serve a critical social function as a site of commentary and claim-making by citizen-subjects. As one actor alleged “In my opinion, the role of Moroccan cinema replaces the function of the intelligentsia in other societies, particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries” (ALM, 2005). This critical function is especially powerful given the lack of reading culture in Morocco, a society that produces more movies than books (Rfaif, 2014), and also raises questions about who this cinema is for and the function it serves for various publics.

While both Marrakchi and Ayouch have affirmed that having Moroccan publics engage with their films is important to them personally, there is also the sense that Moroccan publics alone are not enough. Marrakchi recounts that with a film distributor for an uncle she spent a lot of time at the cinema as a child and “I wanted to created what I missed most in my childhood as a film-love, Moroccan films for Moroccans” (Pajon, 2013). While *Marock* broke records at the box office and can be seen in some ways as the first film of the NMC to challenge taboos, generate an uproar and pass the censors, *Rock the Casbah* received remarkably little coverage in the Moroccan press relative to the plethora of press generated by *Marock*. Especially notable in this regard is that Telquel did not dedicate one feature article to the film, when the magazine was among the most ardent publicizers and supporters of Marrakchi’s previous film. Telquel

copiously covered *Horses of God* from the “making of” to its festival showings. When *Horses of God* played at the Marrakech film festival Ayouch said “Despite the success of the film abroad, I’m particularly happy to present it to the Moroccan public. After all, it is our trauma” (Oulmouddane, 2012). For Ayouch his film is an alternative account from that of authorities, aimed at the Moroccan public first and foremost, but in touch with the economic realities that the Moroccan market is small and shrinking.

“I want the film to touch Moroccans. This is really important to me. The attacks wounded the whole country, and its reaction counts eminently in my eyes. I am very happy about appropriation of the film, the reactions it provokes, I’m happy that it opens up the debate. Afterwards, yes, I want the film to travel. And in terms of market, I can’t count on Morocco” (Lafitte, 2013).

*Horses of God* did extremely well on the festival circuit, and got more vastly more international play than most Moroccan films, including an endorsement from producer Jonathan Demme who was able to facilitate a North American distributor.

But in an article following the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris, Ayouch lamented the fact that the film didn’t elicited the kinds of wide-ranging debates in France that it did in Morocco. “In France I would have liked the film to generate a broader debate. I find it a shame that extreme situations like the one on January 11 have to happen in order for us to be deeply concerned with these problems” (Strauss, 2015). Franco-Maghrebi cultural producers like Ayouch and Marrakchi were pushed to the fore in the aftermath of the attacks, and along with other intellectuals and artists Marrakchi signed an open letter published in *Le Monde* titled “Et maintenant, qu’est-ce qu’on fait?” that calls for defending French values. The letter states “These murders are the expression of the worst. The deaths are ours. But we should not weep in our

corner, we must unify our tears so that they become a tide, a force. And now, what do we do? Together, let's be in solidarity. We stand ready!" (Collectif, 2015). Then, and in the aftermath of the Paris terror attacks later that year, there is the sense that culture plays a crucial role defending and advancing the liberal social project in Morocco and elsewhere. After the attacks Ayouch maintained that he was "still hopeful for [France] and for the youth of this country and the changes that we can bring as artists, as film directors. We're on the front line" (Dale, 2015b). According to Marrakchi "We must resist, because culture remains the best weapon against obscurantism" (Hamri, 2013). The importance of being outward looking and engaged with the world, of fighting for openness and understanding in increasingly heterogeneous societies where difference and dissent are often demonized, are seen as critical functions for cultural producers and their products.

*Horses of God* and *Rock the Casbah* both came out in theaters in 2013, by all accounts a bumper year for Moroccan cinema, when 9 of the top 11 films at the country's box office were Moroccan and many made extensive rounds on the festival circuit. It was also the wake of the Arab Spring, when increased attention to the region and its dynamics were a geopolitical priority and revolutions had disrupted film industries elsewhere in the region, creating an opportune moment for Moroccan cinema and for a broader national cultural offensive positioning Morocco as exceptional. As part of an exhibit at the Louvre dedicated to Medieval Morocco Ayouch was "given 'carte blanche' to organize a 3-day event in mid-2015, including screening of his films and exhibition of his photographs, complemented by debates with a journalist from *Le Monde* newspaper" (Dale, 2015a). This type of engagement with the realities of contemporary geopolitics marks a shift in Ayouch's filmmaking as it has been affected by events like 9/11, 16 May and the Paris attacks of 2015, as he said "I moved on to a more contemporary cinema,

which relates to a dynamic geopolitics and an environment in which I live, that I observe daily in Morocco” (Lafitte, 2013). These global events have served as inspiration for a many filmmakers, including Ayouch, and there is also the sense of bearing witness to a society amidst divergent experiences and responses to globalization. For a filmmaker like Ayouch “The geopolitical situation of Morocco is so rich, especially given that the rest of the world is talking about Arab countries. The Arab world is moving fast and I feel very excited to be part of that. We should be the first ones to express our point of view on the key issues we face” (Dale, 2015a). Marrakchi’s interventions are less direct and more metaphorical, as she equated the death of the patriarch in *Rock the Casbah* with recent developments in the Arab world, saying “This death symbolizes the end of an era. Now that the leader is gone, one starts to feel the rumbles of revolt” (Nedelec, 2013). This revolt is inextricably linked to Marrakchi’s film title *Rock the Casbah*, a song by English punk band The Clash that is widely reputed to have been inspired by the Iranian revolution and the banning of rock music by Ayatollah Khomeini. As Marrakchi stated “My film is not really rock’n’roll, but it also carries a message of freedom. Sofia, one of the daughters of the family, who works in New York, explodes everything when she returns to the family home. She sets fire to the Casbah, not really of course, but symbolically” (Pajon, 2013). The implicit suggestion that revolution against traditional forms of power is imported from the West, whether via music from The Clash or Sophia’s return, denies a long history of indigenous resistance and incremental struggles as part of Moroccan modernity. Marrakchi’s ambivalent portrayal of Western modernity clearly indicates that the West does not have all the answers, however, it’s not hard to see why such suggestions have ignited controversy. For Marrakchi, the employ of that fraught relationship is born out of her own experience, but fundamentally her point is about the questioning of authority; in other words

about social constraints and a certain distance that allows for alternative ways of understanding the world. In many ways Marrakchi and Ayouch's embedding in transnational networks of funding and storytelling in a post-9/11 era impose on them a certain burden of representation at the intersection of public culture and politics.

### **Cinema as mediated activism**

The new Moroccan cinema industry is characterized by a production process whereby filmmakers draw on their networks abroad and the global cinema community as well as/in addition to domestic Moroccan resources. While a need exists for a broader range of cinema investors, funding opportunities from both the Moroccan government and European Union projects aimed at promoting development and democracy through culture have provided the foundation for many productions whose budgets are often completed by private capital. That said, the new Moroccan cinema is confronted with distribution mechanisms that often exclude its products from major markets and theaters. A growing engagement with the global film festival circuit is ameliorating the situation somewhat and a constant cycle of news coming out of the region post-Arab Spring has helped increase visibility and interest in its cultural products, although this interest is often accompanied by specific expectations about genre and topic. What is clear, however, is that films such as *Rock the Casbah* and *God's Horses* intervene in public culture by taking on controversial social issues and in doing so challenge the hegemony of state-produced narratives about Moroccan society and culture.

The discourse of Moroccan cinema is one that emphasizes its roots in reality and the universal nature of its narratives. Two ways in which this discourse is constructed is through a hybrid genre combining reality and fiction, and appeals to universal values and themes, in an attempt to construct the new Moroccan cinema as an alternative cinematic space openly engaged

with political realities and its context of creation. The discourse of new Moroccan cinema positions these films as a form of mediated activism challenging Morocco's traditionally centralized media discourses, as well as well as an attempt to integrate political norms and participation with those of global civil society in a way that is inclusive of, yet not specific to Morocco. In many ways these films act as platforms for the production of a certain segment of Moroccan filmmakers as public intellectuals speaking for a progressive counterculture oriented toward individual liberties, secularism and a more variegated understanding of Moroccan experiences and everyday life.

All of this suggests that shifting industry logics create the conditions of possibility for ideological interventions, creating cinema as a space of encounter through which filmmakers negotiate societal tensions, offering alternative visions of Arab societies in opposition to official channels. For the filmmakers constructing this discourse as an intervention, their new Moroccan cinema is symbolic of a society in transition and a version of Moroccan modernity more open to the world. Additionally, this suggests that a key component of new Moroccan cinema is the intention not only to make a contribution to cinema, as Kilani suggests above, but also to intervene in the social and political landscape by illuminating certain realities, asking difficult questions and eliciting debate from a society in the midst of many transitions. By embracing these roles, new Moroccan cinema has become a space that blurs the lines between cinema as art form and mediated activism. The conditions of possibility for this type of critical social commentary emerged in conjunction with economic, and to some extent political, liberalization in Morocco, in increased openness to global capital and new distribution mechanisms have opened up avenues for alternative storytelling and depictions of Moroccan life that challenge hegemonic narratives about society and culture through cinema. Ultimately the simultaneous



development of critical discourse and the “eruption of Moroccan cinema in the social field as an expression of the imaginary” seems to have changed the relationship – and relevance – of cinema and society (Bakrim, 2013). Engagement with the social imaginary has put cinema on the political agenda, as heated debates demonstrate.

While the changing role of cinema in society is attributable to many factors, perhaps the most influential is increased filmmaker autonomy and willingness to engage in open activism. “Filmmakers, yesterday stuck in a narrow theoretical framework...have opened their eyes, their arms to the real, the modern, the complex. And good debate, one that can circulate between cinema and society, has emerged” (Boukhari, 2007). If the new Moroccan cinema has aspirations at the real, it also has aspirations at influencing real outcomes. The uprisings and political reforms of 2011 have presented new challenges and issues to be addressed, and in some ways this cinema is as experimental as the recent changes in society. In addressing her subjectivity and the way she positions herself as a filmmaker, Kilani says “in becoming a filmmaker I left the neutrality of a researcher in order to deliver all my subjectivity and say ‘I’” (Fabre, 2012). By speaking from somewhere and pushing the boundaries of representation the filmmakers of the new Moroccan cinema have participated in the production of culture as a deliberative space, even if the nature of their interventions are often called into question. While some audiences interpret this cinema’s social criticism as aversion to Moroccan society, filmmakers seem keen to demonstrate exactly the inverse: that it is commitment to their society and belief in its possibilities that keep them engaging in social and political debates through cinema. Marrakchi emphasized in an interview that the end of Marock “isn’t a sad end for my heroine, it is this memory that demonstrates the attachment she has to Morocco. And this is a positive force” (Antona, 2006). Similarly, standing on the stage at TIFF four years later, after the premier of her

second film, Marrakchi emphasized the important role leaving Morocco played in allowing her to engage in social commentary, saying “there comes a moment where it’s important to leave the family, the clan, in order to realize oneself and express oneself.” In other words, the shifting industrial logics of the new Moroccan cinema and its situation within transnational networks allow for ideological interventions by filmmakers that construct cinema as a discourse of social critique in which Moroccan modernity is articulated and contested.

## Chapter 4

### **Mamfakinch: From Protest Slogan to Mediated Activism**

In February of 2011 Moroccan protestors took to the streets en masse, joining a wave of collective uprisings throughout North Africa and the Middle East that became known as the Arab Spring. In Morocco the protest movement became known as *le Mouvement de 20 Février*, or M20, after the kingdom's largest day of protests that led King Mohamed VI<sup>1</sup> to promise constitutional reform. One of the slogans of the Moroccan protestors was Mamfakinch, which means “no concessions” in Moroccan Arabic, in reference to the frequent cooptation of oppositional movements by the regime and frustration with the slow pace of democratic reform.

While Moroccan protests have come and gone, Mamfakinch remains as the name adopted by an offshoot of M20 that developed into a powerful media organization. Modeled after the Tunisian website Nawaat.org, which played a role in the country's Jasmine Revolution, Mamfakinch defines itself as an activist citizen media portal, which according to the website, is composed of Moroccan activist bloggers who value democracy, liberty, respect for human rights and the right of access to information. Unlike Tunisia's revolutionary orientation, Morocco's protests were largely oriented toward reforming the existing system, with a focus on limiting the political power of the monarchy and its allies. In this moment, Mamfakinch served several functions aimed at exerting pressure on authorities to accelerate reform: compiling live coverage

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<sup>1</sup> Mohammed VI is the current king of Morocco, who is popularly referred to as “M6.” He took over the throne in 1999 after the death of his totalitarian father, Hassan II, and is widely popular due to his “prince of the people” persona and reformist agenda, although few of those reforms have resulted in any meaningful change to the governing authority of the monarchy.

of protests, circulating both reformist and revolutionary culture, distributing news to both Moroccan and foreign media, and distributing foreign news coverage to Moroccans – all with the aim of making information accessible to average citizens (Akalay, 2011). In less than a year Mamfakinch had more than one million unique visitors to its site, was attacked by pro-regime groups, and won the 2012 Google/Global Voices Breaking Borders Award. What was initially a blog-based platform for aggregating information about protests and dispelling rumors about the M20 movement, eventually developed into a space for discussion and analysis of political agendas that continued to aggregate and curate content about M20 and social change in Morocco.

Mamfakinch raised questions about the process of public formation and engagement with a new cultural politics, whereby a divided political sphere, the Arab spring moment and its aftermath, and media affordances intervened in Morocco's historically authoritarian political culture. Bayat (2010) calls this "agency in a time of constraints" in reference to the ways ordinary people make themselves present to or encroach on power in their everyday lives. In the case of Morocco cultural initiatives such as Mamfakinch have resulted in new modes of cultural politics defined by the formation of flexible publics, which primarily exist around the periphery of political life and occasionally coalesce around specific claims in highly visible ways that cannot be ignored, both by a monarchy not accustomed to responding to its citizen-subjects, and global society at large. In the case of Mamfakinch we see independent media become a forum for interaction outside the purview of the state in an environment where the media have long been closely linked with those in power. Additionally, the mediation of protests and protest culture by independent media allowed for public formation across diverse geographic and social spaces from the local to the global, expanding the range of relevant approaches and actors. The loosely

networked publics that emerged employed discourses and networks of protest emerging out of the Arab Spring moment to make claims aimed at the monarchy and government, demanding increased accountability from those bodies.

### **Mediated activism and new modes of cultural politics**

This chapter uses Mamfakinch as a lens through which to analyze mediated activism in Morocco. Following *Telquel* and the new Moroccan cinema, the collective is yet another manifestation of an emergent independent media in Morocco that is creating new discursive spaces across platforms, this time with a non-commercial and explicitly activist bent. The Moroccan regime's liberal attitude toward the Internet in its early days led to its construction as radically democratic and unregulated space, an understanding that has shifted as high profile crackdowns on individual actors, including some associated with Mamfakinch, have made the Internet a new frontier for Moroccan civil society's longstanding struggles over human rights. Mamfakinch's use of the digital in processes of content creation, campaign coordination and information curation constitutes one node in an alternative information infrastructure constructed around democratic conceptions of culture that are increasingly distant from official discourse and institutional politics.

I situate this work within a subset of the emergent global media literature on mediated activism that is concerned with the nature of online contention in various contexts. Specifically I draw on the work of Zayani (2015), Sreberny & Khiabany (2010), and Yang (2011), all of whom make arguments about the implications of the digital for the relationship between people and power in authoritarian states. Their work focuses on understanding dynamics of contention online as rooted in local articulations of multiple forces, many of which are transnational in

nature and historically contingent. My work aspires to be part of this tradition, while also putting it into conversation with the literature on contentious politics and publics.

In *Networked Publics and Digital Contention*, Zayani (2015) contends that the changing media environment in the MENA region is changing the nature of political engagement through “new ways of creating, consuming and using information” (p. 6). In analyzing the evolution of what he calls “digital spaces of contention” in Tunisian everyday life, Zayani comes to the intersection of the digital and political from the ground up, emphasizing the myriad of social forces at play and the ways in which articulations online may not be “necessarily politically framed, but are political in other ways” (p. 13) and the types of challenges that poses to an authoritarian society. While I agree that digital platforms and practices have offered new discursive spaces and modes of contention (in fact that is the key argument of this chapter), I argue that the digital accounts for only a subset of larger cultural field and, in the Moroccan case, its construction as a space of contention for a left in crisis.

In their book about blogging in Iran, Sreberny & Ghiabany (2010) make a similar argument that “the blogistan has become a space of contention between the people and the state” (p. 5) and any attempt to account for this phenomenon must address the porous nature of authoritarianism in the country. The contradictory role of the state in this context, as developing ICTs while simultaneously attempting to manage ideological challenges to its authority, is indicative of the political potential that exists in these spaces. Similar to Morocco, “in Iran, the closure of many press titles meant the opening up of websites carrying news and editorials, while blogs contain new material not available within the regime-controlled channel” (p. 10). In order to analyze the intersection of such materials with the politics, Sreberny & Ghiabany situate

blogging within a longer historical trajectory of revolution and pro-democracy movements without reducing blogging to an inherently political act.

Yang (2011) emphasizes the creative aspects of online culture while emphasizing that “contention is not limited to the political realm...Nor does activism necessarily have explicitly political goals” (p. 2). Many online discourses and debates are fundamentally about the articulation of various social imaginaries and are as much about the nature of modernities as particular causes or claims. In China, the internet offers a platform for “humor, play, and irreverence” while also being “participatory and contentious” (p. 15). We see similar dynamics of play and parody online in most parts of the world (including Morocco), and Kumar (2015) argues that participatory practices associated with viral culture are part of a “newly emerging discourse of social and cultural critique on the Indian web” (p. 232). While digital technologies do offer affordances that facilitate content creation and circulation, in many ways the internet is just the latest platform offering uncharted territories for self-expression and community formation. While focusing explicitly on online activism, Yang (2011) acknowledges that these developments parallel offline developments in around “the expansion of culture, community and citizen activism” (p. 17). The intersection of on- and offline spaces is fundamental to understanding the dynamics of digital contention in terms of ongoing discourses to which publics respond, what texts people take up online and where the political comes into play.

My intervention involves integrating analyses across industry logics, technological platforms and cultural politics, so that it becomes clear how political economic shifts and technological affordances create the conditions of possibility for certain types of claim-making, as well as how those mediated claims are then taken up in public culture. Additionally, in regard to the emergent field of digital studies, I make the case that the artificial separating out of the

digital makes little sense and that in order to really understand the digital we have to look at it as part of intermedia relationships and convergences. Given the way media systems have developed around the world, I adopt a comparative, cross-platform approach in order to situate the digital in relation to other media forms. Ultimately, this discursive analysis of Mamfakinch as an organization sheds light on the minute practices through which online collectives come together with media and civil society to establish networks of mutual support and reinforcement that are at times capable of bridging ideological divides.

The question raised by using Mamfakinch as a lens to think about media and cultural politics in Morocco is: How do organizations such as Mamfakinch produce and mobilize information infrastructures and symbolic resources? Additionally, in what ways does this mobilization produce opportunities for the articulation of alternative social projects and critical issues by publics often disillusioned with institutional politics? I contend that Mamfakinch taps into newly networked and increasingly worldly youth digital cultures in order to act as a platform for publics disillusioned with institutional politics and unaccustomed to making direct demands of power. In doing so it allows for making the private public and leverages transnational networks against national politics. Mamfakinch's production and circulation of oppositional culture taps into the widespread frustration with corruption and constant cooptation that made Mamfakinch such a successful Arab Spring slogan in the first place. Mamfakinch members, like many other independent media producers, frequently talk about bypassing the state and established media organizations in producing "real" stories from "real" people. This suggests that the symbolic systems advanced by the state are somehow not real, or at the very least do not represent the everyday realities inhabited by many Moroccans, while Mamfakinch opens up a space for defiant claims that publics are no longer willing to make concessions on certain issues.



As stated above, I conducted a discourse analysis of Mamfakinch as an organization, building an archive of their work from 2011 through 2014. I also followed the collective and individual members on social media and conducted interviews with four members of the collective, including co-founder Hisham Almiraat. I originally intended to focus my analysis on three moments in which Mamfakinch intervened, however the Amina Filali case proved to be so rich in terms of illuminating dynamics at play in the aftermath of the Arab Spring that I decided to focus primarily on that case and relegate Free Koulchi and Danielgate to supplemental analyses.

I start by discussing Mamfakinch's operations and aims before situating them in the literatures on contentious politics and publics. I then construct a genealogy of the digital in Morocco and what it means for dissent. Finally I detail Mamfakinch's participation in mobilizations around the Amina Filali affair before concluding with the organization's transformation into the Association of Digital Rights (ADN), and its ongoing prosecution by the state.

There are several threads running through Mamfakinch that I want to outline before getting into its specifics. The first is industry and capital and in the case of Mamfakinch this is important because the Moroccan government has been partnering with major telecommunications firms (Vivendi, Etisalat) and investing heavily in making Morocco a regional telecommunications hub. Maroc Telecom has introduced two new, entirely self-funded high-speed fiber optic submarine cables since 2007 and is extending its reach into other West African countries. At the same time, the number of internet subscribers grew by 60 percent between 2005 and 2010 and it is estimated that a third of the country is online, mostly through mobile phones. The second thread is technological affordances, specifically the rise of user-

generated content, access to a wide variety of cultural forms and perspectives, and the possibility of anonymity. The third and final thread involves a cultural politics that centers on the production and circulation of texts, including information, editorials and irreverent or sarcastic humor. Through these overarching threads, it becomes clear that Mamfakinch makes possible both the production and mediation of conversations and sensibilities that previously took place in private, ultimately acting as a forum that merges public and private in order to push back on power.

### **Mamfakinch operations and aims**

The collective was co-founded by three bloggers, all of whom are activists involved in multiple online initiatives. At its height approximately 30 bloggers in various locations comprised the Mamfakinch collective, although the public was invited to submit information and essays for publication. As time passed a handful of 10-12 activists came to form the core of the collective that was required to have a four-year post-secondary degree. Operating through mailing lists, Google Docs, and occasional meetings or Skype sessions, the collective debated ideas for essays and articles, posted through Posterous, edited and translated information from other sources, and located its site on a server in Switzerland. Many Mamfakinch members have their own blogs or are involved in numerous other activist initiatives and say the site benefits from the cross posting between these platforms and publics (Errazzouki, personal communication, 2013). As Mamfakinch attempted to improve the legitimacy of the amorphous M20 movement and dispel rumors, one of its major challenges was verifying information. The site has been critiqued for publishing some information that turned out to be false, for instance a report that the northern city of Al Hoceima was surrounded by tanks (Mamfakinch, 25 Feb 2011). Despite these moments, Mamfakinch's goal of creating an alternative media not dependent on advertising and

a movement without concessions to the regime, can be seen as an attempt to affect cultural change and turn M20 into a viable political alternative by producing flexible publics that coalesce around issue-specific claims.

One Mamfakinch blogger believes that M20 and Mamfakinch emerged out of widespread disillusionment with the left in Morocco. “When the socialists came to power in 2002 and 2007, he said, they looked at the monarchy and said it’s too strong, so we’ll work with it on the conditions of respecting human rights and elections. The left had come to power in the collective imagination, but its collaboration with the traditional state apparatus and lack of progressive change left it without credible leadership, a clear political program or electoral strength” (Bennamate, personal communication, 2013). The failure of the left to institute meaningful change in Morocco led many, especially youth, to reject the ideologically-oriented political parties and activism of their parents’ generation, and the divided political sphere in general. Another Mamfakinch blogger I interviewed stated that the refusal of older generations and those in power to incorporate youth and new ideas into existing power structures has made youth a “formidable force” in opposition to “a palace that’s disconnected from reality...a blinded government that also happens to be deaf...[and] political parties’ [whose] main concern is to sabotage each other and get the majority while bowing down to the king’s will at all times” (Belmkaddem, personal communication, 2013). The ability of the king to exert influence, particularly on the media, means that frequently the only story being told is that of the government elites, and youth tend to be shut out of participation in discourse. A third Mamfakinch blogger contended that one mark of the group’s success has been “the greater media attention Morocco has received and continues to receive since protests began in February 2011...the most important thing is that international media organizations are not simply

defaulting to statements produced by state media, she said. The fact that our members are regularly getting interviewed suggests there's space and an interest to cover what the Moroccan regime doesn't want outsiders to know" (Errazzouki, personal communication, 2013). Rallying cries such as "Mamfakinch!" that began as protest slogans have developed into a form of symbolic capital that can be mobilized both on- and off-line in order to produce publics around oppositional discourses and culture. As a media organization Mamfakinch is a product of diasporic networks and technological affordances that allows for the production of different types of texts and publics than those of mainstream Moroccan media.

### **Flexible publics**

For Morocco, thinking about social change necessitates looking outside the realm of institutional politics to attempts to engage people in politics through culture. Warner's (2002) conception of a textual public is organized by discourse, sovereign in relation to the state and involves the attention of a populace unknowable until its address. It is rooted in social reality, but its power exists precisely in its ability to go beyond the known or intended and remake worlds by expanding the range of social imaginaries and their structural manifestations. Warner (2002) builds this notion of publicness on recuperative readings of Habermas, Arendt and Kant as part of the liberal tradition, where the individual as private person becomes the site of "publicly relevant rights" merely by virtue of being human (p. 39). This relationship between private and public has come to define modern political thought, especially in regard to the state's bearing on the individual. A public can be sovereign because it is composed of individuals operating outside the limits of state power. In short, it is "a space of discourse organized by discourse. It is self-creating and self-organized; and herein lies its power, as well as its elusive strangeness" (Warner, 2002, p. 69). This "elusive strangeness" derives from the self-organization of strangers,

interaction with whom is essential to modern society. Publics are often talked about as national or as necessarily corresponding with a political entity, but Warner (2002) draws on Kant's distinction between public and political, in recognizing that there are publics, particularly textual publics, "that do not correspond to any kind of polity," (p. 45) yet are political in a different way. "These critical publics... may set a higher standard of reason, opinion, and freedom - hence the subversive potential in [Kant's] picture of enlightenment" (Warner, 2002, p. 46). The subversive potential of reading publics is well documented throughout history, with perhaps the best example coming from Martin Luther's reforms aiming to end the Church's monopoly on knowledge and restore a direct relationship between God and vernacular publics.

From this perspective we can start to understand "the multi-contextual spaces of circulation" (Warner, 2002, p. 119) involved in the cultural life of the transnational Moroccan left (as part of media, educational institutions, NGOs, cultural orgs, etc) as part of a progressive counterpublic. Warner contends that counter publics are defined by their reflexive relation to dominant society and culture in that "They are structured by different dispositions or protocols from those that obtain elsewhere in the culture, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying" (ibid., p. 119). The Moroccan discourse of "bled schizo" is fundamentally about the norms of acceptability and their ideological foundations being radically different in different social spaces (a situation exacerbated by a highly stratified society and split publics) and the constant awareness of a public that is negotiating among those spaces, even if that negotiation involves a relatively privileged position. "Counterpublics are 'counter' to the extent that they try to supply different ways of imagining stranger sociability and its reflexivity..." (p. 122). In many ways the progressive counterpublic associated with Mamfakinch is responding to an Islamist counterpublic that came out of the marginalization of the left and has gained

legitimacy and political power in recent decades with its version of stranger sociability based on conformity to Islamic precepts. Both of these counterpublics have acquired varying degrees of agency in relation to the state, for which nationalism rooted in the monarchy is still the dominant paradigm. For moderate Islamists this meant formation of a political party (the PJD) and increasingly professional politicization, while the left has pinned its hopes on everyday urban culture and youth in particular as most recently manifest in the Arab Spring-associated M20 movement.

Warner refers to “mediated publics” in the sense that they are textual publics constructed through discourse, but the structure of their mediation in relation to digital platforms and practices warrants further consideration, particularly across variations in time and space. Warner blatantly states “One of the central claims of this book is that when people address publics, they engage in struggles – at varying levels of salience and consciousness, from calculated tactic to mute cognitive noise – over the conditions that bring them together as a public” (p. 12). That struggle is increasingly taking place online and processes of mediation associated with the digital are producing new kinds of publics and possibilities. In *The Wealth of Networks*, Benkler (2006) argues that a new stage of the information economy is emerging that is defined by networks where the “coordinate effects of the uncoordinated actions of a wide and diverse range of individuals and organizations, acting on a wide range of motivations” results in the “peer production of knowledge, information and culture” (p. 5). Benckler outlines a shift from an industrial information economy based on [centralized] capital-intensive industrial production of mass media to a networked information economy associated with increased access to the tools of information production [more decentralized], reduced barriers to entry and enhanced autonomy for participation in non market collaborative info production efforts.

The implications of access to the means of production and distribution for democracy and the public sphere are summed up when Benckler speaks of the internet revolution, not as a singular event or series of events as many accounts have done, especially as seen in the myriad of references to the Arab Spring as a Facebook or Twitter revolution. Rather, Benckler speaks of the internet revolution as a deep and ongoing structural transformation in the relationship between liberal markets and liberal democracies (p. 1). While acknowledging ongoing battles over the network's material and institutional manifestations, I analyze what these changes mean for illiberal authoritarian or semi-authoritarian societies. In the case of Mamfakinch we see an expanding array of relevant actors, realms of collaboration and opportunities to learn from and work with other initiatives – all associated with more democratic understandings of culture and a plane of politics that extends beyond the nation. In some ways writing in 2006 perhaps leads Benckler to understate the Internet's market-driven development as a tool for buying and selling, but his comparison of its capacity for information production with the previous mass mediated public sphere rather than some idealized version of the marketplace of ideas is a fair one. A networked information economy undeniably enables qualitative improvements in “the diversity of perspectives on the way the world is and the way it could be for any given individual” (p. 9).

Ito et al. (2008) bring together understandings of publics and networks in the concept of “networked publics,” which they use to refer to dynamically engaged publics defined by multidirectional information flows. Rather than traditional top-down flows of information, four trends that Ito et al. say define these new forms and forums for engagement are: accessibility, peer distribution, value at the edges and aggregation of information and culture (p. 2). Publics are networked in that they are increasingly active and able to both input and extract information at will, creating new possibilities for participation and sociability both in and outside of

institutional politics. In a case study of Indian Idol 3, Punathambekar (2010) uses the phrase “mobile publics” to explore participatory cultures surrounding television and their possibilities for overcoming ethno-national politics in northeast India. He argues that the combination of mobile phones and reality TV allows for the resurrection of certain modes of publicness and public interactions previously unimaginable due to the separatist politics of the region (p. 243). Specifically, the fan following of Idol contestant Amit Paul encompassed diverse publics mobilized to work cooperatively as “fluid and ephemeral” publics allowing for “the articulation of new cultural and political possibilities that might not be possible in more formal institutional settings” (p. 251). The modes and mechanisms of sharing and collaboration enabled by mobile phones for Indian Idol fans are forms of sociability that have the potential to be generative.

In the Moroccan case, significant hurdles also exist in the realm of institutional politics. A divided political sphere characterized by (at last count) thirty-four political parties, a king acting as ultimate arbiter and the complex system of royal privilege surrounding the *makhzen*<sup>2</sup> mean that the barriers to political change often seems insurmountable, especially in a country where politics itself has been reason for gross human rights violations at worst and paternalistic authoritarianism at best. Political parties are often seen as out of touch with reality and disillusionment with the preferred choices means that an emergent independent media are using technological affordances to reshape and democratize public culture. From its beginning as an attempt to aggregate information and media reports about Arab Spring protests to its shift toward critical analysis and operation as cultural conduit, Mamfakinch maintained that peer production of information and a culture of critique could challenge the status quo in a traditionally top-down

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<sup>2</sup> *Makhzen* is a Moroccan Arabic word meaning “storehouse,” that was used to refer to the state in the form of a governing establishment revolving around the sultan and associated notables in various sectors. More recently it has come to stand in for an extensive system of royal privilege and clientelism associated with the contemporary Moroccan state. This “deep state” surrounding the monarchy is understood to be the real center of power in Moroccan political life despite the existence of parliament and other ostensibly democratic institutions.



political and media environment. The organization played a role in producing what I am calling “flexible publics,” or groups that coalesce around particular issues, asserting claims in public and provocative ways. In the Moroccan case, flexibility is key due to a long history of cooptation of opposition movements and particularly in finding places to counter the maneuverings of power at critical junctures. When moments of crisis and particularly problematic issues arise, groups such as Mamfakinch are capable of harnessing technological capabilities, social capital and symbolic resources in order to coalesce around public conversations, resulting in a sort of activist information infrastructure that can be mobilized via its loosely connected network.

When I say flexibility I mean it in multiple senses: the flexibility to move between platforms, to tackle diverse issues, to move between on and offline spaces, to respond quickly to the maneuverings of power and, perhaps most importantly, the ideological flexibility to build support among disparate groups. This sort of coalition-building among sometimes unlikely allies fundamentally involves attempts to construct a meaningful/viable opposition through orientations toward broad issues like human rights and dignity. Unlikely allies though they may be, leftists and Islamists share the common experience of being seen as the greatest threat to the monarchy at some point and the target of repression both in physical space and online. A global crisis of the left and a generation of youth more likely to forsake fixed ideological orientations for loose ties and individual commitments, mean that this can be seen as a project of critique that takes as its target the both the powers that be and the movements, parties and ideologies that have historically opposed them. In the midst of this disillusionment with political parties (understood as lacking real power) and institutional politics writ large, there is the sense that a more democratic culture has the potential to be generative in a way that politics does not. This is about changing mentalities to some extent, but also about starting a conversation that engages

with the diverse lived realities of Moroccans and creating points of encounter among split publics. In this way flexible publics are very much a process that through articulation seeks to expand the social imaginary and find resonance among diverse and diffuse subjectivities, ultimately seeking to reconstruct the relationship between the individual and society, as well as the private-public continuum.

### **Digital genealogies**

#### *Telecommunications and ICT Service providers*

Telecommunications in Morocco are built on the back of postal, and later telegraphy, infrastructure. Although today the word “telecommunications” is associated with electronic communication, the prefix “tele-“ derives from the Greek “at a distance” meaning that the post is in fact among the earliest of telecommunication mechanisms. Sultan Moulay Hassan, established the “poste chérifienne” in 1892, which became the l’Office Chérifien des PTT<sup>3</sup> in 1913 after the Treaty of Fez established Morocco as a French protectorate (Barid Al-Maghrib, 2013; Maroc Telecom, 2014). A 1924 dahir, or royal decree, established the monopoly of the “Moroccan Office of Telegraphs and Telephones” in all telecommunications services (Bulletin Officiel, 1924), which continued after Moroccan independence in 1956 under the new “Ministry of Post and Telecommunications” (Barid al-Maghrib, 2013; El Kabsi, 2003, p. 63). A reorganization of the ministry in 1984 led to the establishment of *al-Maktab al-Watani lil-barid wa al-Itissalat*, or the National Post and Telecommunications Office (ONPT) as a public institution formally separate from political power (Barid al-Maghrib, 2013; Ibahrine, 2004, p. 2; ITU, 2001, p. 7; Maroc Telecom, 2014).

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<sup>3</sup> PTT stands for *Les Postes, télégraphes et téléphones*, the French government telecommunications agency, or which the Moroccan PTT was derived.

Today the major telecommunications provider in Morocco is Itissalat al-Maghrib (IAM)/Maroc Telecom, the successor of the ONPT. Maroc Telecom emerged from Law 24-96, which separated the postal and telecommunication functions of the office and aimed to liberalize and privatize the Moroccan telecommunications sector, previously under government monopoly (Maroc Telecom, 2014) Maroc Telecom<sup>4</sup> was born as private corporation in 1998, although it continued to be 100 percent government owned until 2001, when French multinational Vivendi bought 35 percent for \$2.3 billion USD (ANRT, 2001, p. 4; ITU, 2001, p. 7; M.K., 2000), followed by additional acquisitions. In 2004 Maroc Telecom listed 14.99 percent of its capital on the Casablanca and Paris stock exchanges (Maroc Telecom, 2014). Vivendi's 53 percent stake in Maroc Telecom was bought by Etisalat in 2014, and the Moroccan state continues to control a 30 percent stake in the company (Maroc Telecom, 2016).

The same law that gave birth to Maroc Telecom established National Agency of Telecommunication Regulation (ANRT) in 1998 to oversee the liberalization of the telecommunications market. Along with Jordan, Morocco was the first country in the Arab region to issue a second mobile license in 1999 (ITU, 2009, p. 16-17). According to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), WTO agreements were an important factor in driving telecommunication market liberalization in the Arab region (ITU, 2009, p. 17). An early study of the internet in Morocco states "Morocco obtained around \$215 million from international organizations at the end of 1998 to liberalize its telecommunications, postal and IT sector" (El Kabsi, 2003, p. 100-101). In 1999 the World Bank approved an Information Technology Sector Adjustment Loan (TPI-SAL) of \$101 million USD in conjunction with

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<sup>4</sup> "...result of Law 24-96, the incumbent Maroc Telecom was created as a limited liability company and partially privatized in 2001 when 35% was sold to the French company Vivendi.xviii Since then there was an additional sale to Vivendi and in 2007, part of Maroc Telecom was offered to the public through a listing on the Casablanca Stock Exchange. At the end of 2010, Vivendi owned 53% of the shares, the Kingdom of Morocco 30% and the public 14%." (Constant, 2011, p. 8)

African Development Bank funds of \$113 million USD requested by the ANRT to “support Government efforts to effectively implement the reforms the new legal and regulatory framework now makes possible” (World Bank, 1999, p. 2), basically privatization of the telecommunications sector. In particular the loan supported the distribution of a second mobile license, which was awarded to Médi Telecom in December 1999 after a transparent bidding process that yielded a record-breaking \$1.1 billion USD (ANRT, 2001, p. 19; ITU, 2001, p. 5; World Bank, 2001, p. 2). A multinational corporation, Médi Telecom was composed of foreign investors Portugal Telecom (30.5%) and Telefónica (Spain, 30.5%), as well as local players BMCE Bank (20%), Groupe Afriquia (11%) and CDG (8%), a signal that the Moroccan government was serious about opening up the telecommunications sector to foreign direct investment (Constant, 2011, p. 9; ITU, 2001, p. 13). Established in 2000, Médi Telecom became the second mobile operator with its Méditel<sup>5</sup> mobile service.

In the early 2000s, the mobile market in Morocco exploded, which is particularly significant given that it came to be the mechanism through which most Moroccans access the internet. In its first annual report, ANRT noted that “teledensity in the mobile sector rose dramatically from 0.4 percent to 15.68 percent, an increase of 3820 percent between 1998 and 2001” (ANRT, 2001, p. 6). Similarly, a 2004 report states “Growth rates in the Moroccan cellular market have exceeded 242 percent for the last four years making the cellular market one of the fastest growing, not only in Africa and the Arab world, but also in the entire world,”

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<sup>5</sup> Portugal Telecom and Telefónica left Médi Telecom in 2009, and CDG and FinanceCom became the major shareholders (Orange Maroc, <http://corporate.orange.ma/A-propos-d-Orange-au-Maroc/Histoire> ). In December 2010, Orange, which is a 2006 rebranding of France Telecom, bought a 40 percent stake in Méditel - by 2015 it controlled 49 percent and began rebranding the company as Orange au Maroc (Orange au Maroc, [http://www.orange.com/fr/content/download/40331/1268468/version/2/file/CP\\_Orange\\_Meditel\\_FR\\_081216.pdf](http://www.orange.com/fr/content/download/40331/1268468/version/2/file/CP_Orange_Meditel_FR_081216.pdf) ).

(Ibahrine, 2004, p. 4). In 2007 ANRT issued a third mobile license to Wana<sup>6</sup>, this time a CDSM license (Henni, 2007), although in 2009 Wana received a GSM license and shortly afterward a joint venture between Kuwaiti firm Zain Groupe and Morocco's Al Ajial Investment Fund Holding bought 31 percent of the ONA's<sup>7</sup> 51 percent stake in the company (ANRT, 2009, p. 23; TeleGeography, 2009). As of 2017 these three players – Maroc Telecom, Méditel and Wana – continue to be the only mobile operators in the country. By 2015, mobile penetration reached 127 percent (ANRT, 2016, p. 3). These significant transformations in the telecommunication sector were part of a broader movement toward economic liberalization in Morocco and occurred around the same time that Morocco signed free trade agreements with Europe and the U.S. as part of a more generalized processes of privatization.

**Internet entrance.** In Morocco public access to the internet became available in 1995 through the ONPT (Constant, 2011, p. 2; El Kabsi, 2003, p. 36). According to a World Bank report “Initially, ONPT rented out its bandwidth to ISPs through leased lines and the ISPs then sold dial-up services to customers... When Maroc Telecom was formed in 1998, it modified its policy and began selling services directly to customers making it difficult for smaller ISPs to compete” (Constant, 2011, p. 27). In 1999 Maroc Telecom purchased 80 percent of Casanet (Jankari, 2000), an internet service provider (ISP) and creator of Menara, the first Moroccan search engine in 1995 (El Kabsi, 2003, p. 47). By 2002 Casanet was 100 percent owned by Maroc Telecom (Maroc Telecom, 2014). Limited bandwidth meant that “internet service providers suffered from bandwidth saturation; they feed from specialized 64Kb/s lines, which

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<sup>6</sup> Originally Wana was an internet service provider under the name Wanadoo Maroc a subsidiary of France Telecom's ISP division Wanadoo and then became Maroc Connect after being bought by Attijariwafa Bank and CDG. In 2005 Maroc Connect was sold for 40 million euros to ONA, now SNI, whose major shareholders are the Moroccan royal family. In 2007 it was rebaptized Wana Corporate (Constant, 2011, p. 9 & 27; Henni, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Omnium Nord Africain, or ONA, was a private Moroccan holding company controlled by the royal family. In 2010 it merged with Société Nationale d'Investissement (SNI) and dropped the ONA title, although it is still controlled by the royal family.

creates a bottleneck and slows data throughput” (El Kabsi, 2003, p. 68), leading many Moroccans to refer to the internet as the “world wide wait” (Ibahrine, 2004, p. 7). Other early barriers to the internet in Morocco included cost in relation to incomes, low literacy (and digital literacy) levels, a significant rural population and lack of non-English content, especially Arabic content (non-Latin URLs, or IDNs, didn’t become available until 2011).

**Broadband.** In 2003 high speed internet became available in Morocco via ADSL (ANRT, 2003, p. 20 & p. 27). At that time “users had options in obtaining high-speed Internet at speeds ranging from 128, 256, 512, or 1024 kbits” (Constant, 2011, p. 8). The year high speed internet became available, ANRT reported “Morocco has about a million internet users, representing a penetration rate of 3.3 percent and a 42 percent increase over 2002 estimates” (ANRT, 2003, p. 26). ADSL service was and continues to be dominated by Maroc Telecom, which inherited the wired network. Fixed broadband access is “essentially limited to ADSL because cable modem is not a viable alternative (due to the popularity of satellite television) and where the cost of fiber installation for local access is often prohibitive” (Constant, 2011, p. 25).

**Deployment of 3G.** By all accounts, the arrival of 3G in Morocco heralded an incredible expansion of internet usage. In 2006 ANRT awarded three 3G mobile licenses to Maroc Telecom, Méditel and Wana Corporate at a price of 360 million MAD per license (ANRT, 2006, p. 26). In selecting the operators ANRT held what Constant (2011) calls a “beauty contest” rather than a bidding war, in a process that “focuses on technical criteria rather than price, and includes questions that request prospective operators to address equity in coverage especially in rural areas, job creation, service provision, and to also provide strong indication of financial viability” (p. 15). The introduction of 3G mobile broadband in 2007 resulted in: an almost three-fold increase of international internet bandwidth (from 25 130 Mbit/s to 75 000 Mbit/s), a 40

percent fall in fixed broadband prices and expansion in mobile broadband penetration from 2.3 percent in 2008 to 10 percent in 2010 (ITU, 2011, p. 18). Maroc Telecom's ADSL monopoly was challenged by the introduction of 3G mobile broadband, leading to a significant drop in prices and corresponding increases in usage; Morocco now ranks among least expensive both in Arab region and EU for mobile internet pricing (ANRT, 2016, p. 8-9; ITU, 2011, p. 18).

During the period when 3G was introduced in Morocco the country improved by 10 places to 90/152 on the ITU's ICT Development Index (IDI) (ITU, 2011, p. 13), resulting in a second place ranking in the most dynamic countries based on change in IDI ranking between 2008 and 2010 (ITU, 2011, p. 15). While Morocco ranks relatively well in the access (79/152) and use (65/152) sub-indices of the IDI, its ranking is dramatically lower in the skills sub-index (122/152), which uses literacy rates and school enrollment to measure "a country's level of human capacity and its ability to absorb and take advantage of ICTs" (ITU, 2011, p. 37).

Problems with education continue to plague the country despite improvements, and are one reason a major emphasis on increasing postsecondary education has been part of Morocco's digital policy initiatives. Despite education problems, "The number of internet users grew by an estimated 60 per cent from 2005 to 2010" and became "the communication platform preferred by Moroccan youth" (Zaid & Ibahrine, 2011, p. 7). In 2010, 65 percent of individuals ages 12-65 were using the internet (ITU, 2011, p. 109), although access continues to be uneven. Morocco has the sharpest rural/urban divide listed in the ITU index – 40.4 percent in rural areas<sup>8</sup> and 75.6 percent in urban areas (ITU, 2011, p. 119). Reported motivations for internet use are primarily communicative and cultural/entertainment (ITU, 2011, p. 123).

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<sup>8</sup> Rural users also more likely to use via internet cafe (ITU, 2011, p. 119). The number of cybercafés had reached 8,950 in 2009 (Ibahrine & Zaid, 2011, p. 18).

More recent numbers from the ANRT show that more than 90 percent of subscribers use mobile internet access (ANRT, 2016, p. 7), via 3G using a mobile phone or USB modem. Mobile broadband usage has mushroomed from 1.4 million subscribers in 2010 to 13.3 million in 2015, while ADSL subscribers grew from .5 million in 2010 to 1.1 million in 2015, for a total of 14.4 million Moroccans with Internet access or about 42 percent of the population, not counting internet cafe users (ANRT, 2016, p. 7). The country's early adoption of 3G means that in 2011 the percentage of the Moroccan population online "exceeded most countries in the MENA region including neighbors Egypt and Tunisia" (Morocco = 49/100; Tunisia = 37/100; Egypt = 27/100) (Constant, 2011, p. 20). Morocco's early prioritization of telecom development and liberalization have been lauded by organizations like the ITU, which published a report titled "Effective regulation case study: Morocco 2001," even as the country has at times struggled to keep up its early momentum.

### *State strategies*

The Moroccan state was an early advocate of the strategic importance of telecommunications, and its turn-of-the-century regulatory framework and liberalization policies are often lauded as an example for the Global South, as well as a reason the Morocco manages to break the ranks of countries with far more resources in terms of telecom penetration and usage.<sup>9</sup> The major regulatory shift associated with law 24-96 in 1998 was preceded by several state initiatives to modernize and expand the telecommunications sector beginning in 1987 with a \$125 million USD loan from the World Bank (World Bank, 1995, p. 5), followed by a 1993-1997 project receiving 743,56 millions UC from various donors, including the African Development Bank (ABD, 1999). "A major effort was made as part of the 1993-1997 program to extend and

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<sup>9</sup> "Similarly to mobile telephony, four out of five countries with the highest level of Internet user penetration are GCC countries (chart 1.13). The only exception in the top five list is Morocco, with a penetration of 33.0 per cent, as of 2008" (ITU, 2009, p. 10).



modernize the telecommunications network, develop rural telecommunications together with a wide range of new services such as data transmission and cellular services” (El Kabsi, 2003, p. 35). After the passage of law 24-96 the *Sécretariat d’Etat aux Postes et Technologies d’Information* (SEPTI) constructed a five year plan (Plan quinquennal 1999-2003) promulgating ICT development as national priority (e-Morocco 2010, 2007, p. 10).

Telecommunication reform for the digital age and as part of the global economy, like many successful Moroccan projects, had support at the highest levels. In his 1997 Throne Speech, King Hassan II talked about telecommunications privatization being imperative because the need for investment in the sector went beyond the abilities of the state, saying “In the field of communications, a reform of the institutional framework governing this sector is inevitable due to demands from the increased liberalization of the world economy on the one hand and rapid technological developments on the other” (El Kabsi, 2003, p. 62). For the Moroccan state, telecommunications was seen as a profitable industry in and of itself that the country was uniquely positioned to benefit from, but also a tool for economic development and access to other industries<sup>10</sup> associated with the global knowledge economy. This was of special urgency in Morocco given that the economy suffered dramatically as a result of drought and “the economic situation is characterized by predominantly low value-added commercial activities and low levels of productivity, Morocco must orient itself toward the knowledge economy, which constitutes a formidable vector of development, capable of orienting commercial activity toward sectors with high added value” (El Kabsi, 2003, p. 20). In 2001, telecommunications accounted for 4 percent of Morocco’s gross domestic product and between 1998 and 2001 the sector accounted for 66 percent of foreign investment in the country (ANRT, 2001).

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<sup>10</sup> One industry that has created jobs in Morocco as a result of the country’s investments in telecommunications is call centers. Morocco has become a major hub for the off-shoring of French and francophone call centers.

The government adopted several successive strategies to capitalize on this growth and become a player in the global information society. A national strategy under the name “E-Morocco/E-Maroc” was adopted in 2001 to “establish a very high bandwidth national data network for applications in education, e-commerce, e-government and many other important areas” (Ibahrine, 2004, p. 8). “Drawn from the SEPTI strategy of 1999-2005, the themes of e-Morocco focused on closing the digital divide and positioning Morocco globally as a key ICT player. The premise was to create an ecosystem of good governance and enabling regulation that fosters competition, knowledge production and ICT exportation” (Constant, 2011, p. 6). The major points of the plan included: liberalization of telecommunications; establishment of a legal and regulatory framework for infrastructure; education, training and research; e-government at state and local levels; and battling the digital divide (Rochdi, 2001, p. 254-255). According to a 2007 plan update, Morocco’s emphasis on ICTs is based on the industry’s “crucial role in the effort undertaken to elaborate and materialize a specific model of sustainable social and economic development for Morocco” and cites Mohammed VI as saying, “This is because we strive to ensure for our great people a global and integrated development, allowing Morocco to occupy the position that it deserves in a world transformed by the digital revolution underway”(Morocco, 2007, p. 9).

Digital Morocco 2013 (aka *Maroc Numeric*): National Strategy for Information Society and Digital Economy 2009-2013 was initiated in 2009 under the patronage of the Ministry of Industry, Trade and New Technologies with the support of Mohammed VI. It outlines four strategic priorities: social transformation, utilities based on usage, computerization of small and medium enterprises, and development of the IT industry (Morocco, 2009, p. 21). The major shift from previous strategies seems to be its external focus, as seen in the emphasis on offshoring,

export of IT services and establishment of Morocco as a regional telecommunications hub. Constant (2011) contends that Maroc Numeric 2013 stands out from previous strategies in its emphasis on broadband and integrated support for ANRT's regulatory mandate (p. 6-7). Investment in the project was estimated at 5,187 millions MAD, not including private sector capital (Morocco, 2009, p. 96).

However, a 2014 evaluation of the project by Court of Auditors, the body charged with analyzing public sector finances, indicates the project achieved less than optimal results. Specifically, the evaluation notes that "The MN2013 strategy was weak in priorities, initiatives and actions," basically lacking in concrete measures as to how these overarching ambitions would be realized (Cour des Comptes, 2014, p. 4). Of the four strategic priorities listed above, the best results came in e-Gov projects (this is also probably the priority over which the ministry has the most direct control), although only 36 percent were completed and 38 percent in progress at the time of the evaluation (Cour des Comptes, 2014, p. 2). The worst results came from social transformation/educational initiatives, of which only 11 percent were completed and 20 percent of the initial projects were abandoned (Cour des Comptes, 2014, p. 2). As this was the first formal evaluation of such a strategy, it was impossible to take the challenges of previous projects like e-Morocco into account in developing Maroc Numeric 2013 or to compare their results (Cour des Comptes, 2014, p. 4). Several online news outlets picked up the report, indicating a move toward transparency and accountability on government projects, with H24info reporting "In a severe report, the Court of Auditors enumerates the flaws and malfunctions of a strategy supposed to get Morocco out of the digital torpor... Rarely has a national strategy been so decried" (H24info, 2014). Despite this, by the end of 2014 a new plan "Maroc Numéric 2020" was in the works.

Aside from, and sometimes as part of, these overarching visions for a digital Morocco, the country has taken steps to build investment in and development of telecommunications into its regulatory framework from the beginning. One of the most important provisions in this area is the concept of universal service, which was “first introduced into Morocco in Law 24-96, which defines it as ‘the making available to everyone of a minimum service consisting of a telephone service of specified quality at an affordable price, together with the connection of emergency calls, the provision of an information service and a directory of subscribers, either in printed or in electronic form, and the provision throughout the country of telephone booths installed in public places, all in keeping with the principles of equality, continuity, universality and flexibility’” (ITU, 2001, p. 35). It is even more remarkable to note that this concept originated at a time when the total teledensity of the country (fixed and mobile) was 5.4 percent (ANRT, 2001, p. 6). According to the ANRT “The introduction of competition into the telecommunications sector has been accompanied by measures enabling access to telephone service for everyone, whatever their social category or place of residence” (ANRT, 2001, p. 51).

In order to make progress toward this reality, Law 24-96 required all operators of public networks to contribute 4 percent of their turnover to a Universal Service Fund (ITU, 2001, p. 35). This provision was not enacted until 2004 when Law 55-01 modifying and completing Law 24-96 specified that all operators of public telecommunications networks must contribute 2 percent of their turnover before taxes to a Universal Service Fund to expand access in underserved areas, and .25 percent of turnover for research (Bulletin Officiel #5266, 2004, p. 2064-2065). The Universal Service Fund in particular aimed at “incentivizing infrastructure development in remote and hard to reach areas. If operators invest in those areas on their own, the amount they spent is reduced from their USF contribution (“Pay or play”)” (Constant, 2011, p. 17). One

program supported by this fund is PACTE, which aims at bridging the digital divide and bringing telecommunications service to rural communities. Adopted in 2006, it was implemented in 2008 with a budget of 1.44 billion MAD and the aim of reaching 9,263 rural communities and completed in 2012 (ANRT, 2016). Subsequently a National broadband plan was adopted in 2012, with the goal of generalizing access to high speed internet by 2022 (ANRT, 2012).

### *The material internet*

One of the major contributions of the state has been its investments in building Morocco's material telecommunication infrastructure. By 2001 Morocco's transmission network was almost entirely digital (ITU, 2001, p. 11), a process that has since been completed. El Kabsi's (2003) report on the early development of the internet in Morocco states that "In July 1999, the national telecommunications operator IAM undertook an operation aimed at improving Morocco's Internet infrastructure that extended the capacity of its Internet network by constructing a new international cable capable of 4 Mbps of traffic, an increase of about 40 percent of the global capacity of the Moroccan network which became 14 Mbps" (El Kabsi, 2003, p. 38).

Maroc Telecom has introduced two new, entirely self-funded high-speed fiber optic submarine cables since 2007. The Atlas Offshore cable was a 34 million USD project with France's Alcatel to connect Asilah in northwest Morocco to Marseille (TeleGeography, 2007), and then in 2012 Maroc Telecom invested 16 million USD constructing the Loukkos cable to connect Asilah with Rota, Spain via the Canalink cable based in the Canary Islands (TeleGeography, 2012). Cable construction has been largely oriented toward dealing with increasing demand from call center traffic as well as broadband users. Morocco is now connected to the international network via four fiber optic submarine cables, with Maroc Telecom owning the two connecting Asilah and part owner of the two connecting Tetouan

(SeaMeWe3 consortium cable and Estepona-Tetouan) (TeleGeography, 2016). “During 2002 – 2010 Morocco increased its international bandwidth capacity from 200 Mbit/s to 75,000 Mbit/s, with 25 percent increase in the last year alone. In 2010, there was 2,461 bits per person in Morocco, higher than Algeria and Egypt, similar to Jordan but significantly below Tunisia” (Constant, 2011, p. 9). Maroc Telecom has also stated plans to construct a new terrestrial cable between Laayoune in the disputed Western Sahara and Nouakchott, Mauritania to increase service to its sub-Saharan Africa<sup>11</sup> clients, one of its biggest growth areas.

Cables have also been a source of controversy over the years as Maroc Telecom has been accused of throttling transmissions to benefit its own interests, especially given its position as the sole landline internet provider. The operator has blocked VoIP applications multiple times (2012, 2014, 2016), and in 2012 blamed a drastic decrease in internet speeds on a cut in the Atlas Offshore cable (Yamani, 2012), a declaration that was greeted with suspicion by many users as it came at a time when the company was trying to push its own VoIP application, MTBox. The 2016 VoIP blockage was the result of a vague decision issued by ANRT in January 2016 and included all internet providers, which were subject to widespread social media campaigns aimed at reversing the ban. When VoIP applications were unblocked in October 2016 prior to Morocco hosting an international climate conference (COP22), many Moroccans were outraged at the implication that the communicative convenience of foreigners took precedence over their own.

### **Democratic hopes and dystopian fears**

Because the early official vision for telecommunications and the internet in Morocco focused on economic and social development, with the government approaching new forms of online

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<sup>11</sup> Maroc Telecom began buying telecom operators in West Africa shortly after its privatization and has continued to make acquisitions in this area over the years. When Etisalat bought Vivendi’s stake in Maroc Telecom, Maroc Telecom took over Etisalat’s investments in the region.

expression largely as a steam valve, few restraints were imposed. Early on the internet inspired hope, both for democratization and for a re-ordering of the center/periphery that would allow Morocco to overcome many of its development hurdles and participate in the new global economy. El Kabsi (2003) contends that “For Morocco, unlike other countries of the Maghreb and the Middle East, the Internet is synonymous with liberty and open-mindedness thanks to the pluralistic sources of data that it puts unreservedly at the disposal of the citizen and the opportunities for contact with others through e-mail” (p. 80). On the other hand, there were fears that countries struggling to overcome colonial legacies and economic dependency would fall further behind in this new high tech world. “This can lead to new international alliances that favor new penetration of large foreign companies and thus a new permanent dependence that can be called ‘electronic colonialism.’ Instead of getting countries back in the running, the arrival of the Internet would create a new long-lasting dependence on the masters of technology” (Mattelart, 1994, p. 24-25) ” (El Kabsi, 2003, p. 84). And although technology does put the tools of information production in the hands of everyday users, it’s hard to argue that companies like Google haven’t come to own the internet in certain ways that allow the company to impose its will on the global stage.

Internet development was limited by telecommunications infrastructure, but also imaginaries about the role internet could occupy in society. At the Internet Society’s (ISOC) annual conference (INET) in 1997, Najat Rochdi, the president of the Moroccan branch of the Internet Society (MISOC) stated “Internet will never be a working class phenomenon. It will be a tool for the specific purposes of professionals” (El Kabsi, 2003, p. 66). As with many early predictions about the internet, this one was wrong and only four years later Rochdi wrote an article about the government’s E-Maroc strategy, in which she stresses that “new opportunities

are opening to all Moroccans, allowing for more social inclusion, competition, progress, development and quite simply, active and informed citizenship” (Rochdi, 2001, p. 264). What Rochdi perhaps could not have anticipated is the extent to which the internet and digital tools became a new front in the fight for freedom of expression and human rights more broadly.

### *New front for freedom of expression*

Morocco has consistently ranked poorly on the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Press Freedom Index, with its highest ranking (#89/139) coming in the index’s first year, 2002, while its worst came between 2010-2014 when it consistently ranked #136/152. This is important to consider because digital media are built on the back of other media, as well as their norms and understandings of what is acceptable. In this way online freedoms are intertwined with broader environments around freedom of speech and expression rather than isolated to the internet. As seen in previous chapters, Morocco’s media have consistently walked a fine line between freedom and repression, with widely acknowledged “red lines” around the monarchy, Islam and the Western Sahara. A 1999 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report about the state of the internet in the MENA region asserts that “Jordan and Morocco...have no Internet-specific laws restricting free expression; however, both have laws that curb press freedom, and those laws, such as the ones that prohibit defaming or disparaging the monarchy, narrow the boundaries of what can be expressed online” (HRW, 1999, p. 3). Generally the challenges for press freedom are not about widespread violent repression, but inconsistency and the constant uncertainty about when a journalist or publication will become public enemy number one. This leads to a high degree of self-censorship and widespread unwillingness to push boundaries for fear of being hauled into court and fined or subjected to an advertising boycott, as in several high profile cases that resulted in substantial drops in Morocco’s ranking on the RSF press freedom index.



On the other hand, the advent of the internet as a platform for information meant the opening up a far less regulated space that allowed for both new kinds of media outlets and new types of content, especially content off limits for traditional media. According to HRW “Algeria, Morocco, and the Palestinian Authority have made little if any effort so far to control online content, allowing Internet users access to a wealth of political and human rights information that the local print and broadcast media cannot publish” (HRW, 1999, p. 1). At this point Moroccans using the internet were primarily using it in cybercafés located in major cities, and without restrictions. But it is important to note that the lack of censorship online was not the result of a lack of ability by the state. It maintains ownership of the international gateways required to access the internet, making it much easier to control content if it desired. Instead, it mostly used this control to maintain the competitive advantage of IAM over other early ISPs. As one Casablanca-based ISP owner reported to HRW “Private ISPs...must use the lines and international gateway maintained by IAM. For the services it provides them, IAM ‘imposed whatever prices it wants’ while competing with them as an ISP itself” (HRW, 1999, p. 65). IAM driving up prices also meant that the cost of internet use remained prohibitively high for many Moroccans until increased competition was introduced in the form of 3G.

### *Filtering regimes*

The OpenNet Initiative (ONI), a collaboration between Citizen Lab at University of Toronto’s Munk School of Global Affairs, the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard, and cyber research think tank the SecDev Group, aims to “investigate, expose and analyze Internet filtering and surveillance practices” (ONI, 2016). In 2006 ONI conducted empirical testing for internet filtering in 40 countries, including Morocco. The report concluded that “Morocco’s Internet filtration regime is relatively light and focuses on Western Saharan independence, a few

blog sites, and highly visible anonymizers” (ONI, 2007, p. 4). However: this filtering, limited though it is, is the product of a filtering regime that is highly centralized (most likely blocked from the Internet backbone), highly consistent, and highly concealed (Faris & Villeneuve, 2008, p. 17). The country’s motivations for filtering at that time were confined to the security/conflict category, focusing on the Western Sahara and terrorism associated with radical Islam (Faris & Villeneuve, 2008, p. 26). ONI (2007) also noted that the filtering is not comprehensive (information available on blocked sites can often be found elsewhere) and that internet censorship does not compare to crackdowns on free speech and the press. Analysis showed that of the 40 countries tested Saudi Arabia and Tunisia competed for the title of most prolific filtering regime, while Libya filtered only political content, Morocco only security/conflict and Egypt and Algeria remarkably didn’t demonstrate any evidence of filtering (Faris & Villeneuve, 2008, p. 6 & 19). Several years later follow-up testing found that most Western Sahara-associated and Islamist sites were accessible (ONI, 2009). Instead of systematic filtering, authorities started prosecuting individual users based on existing press and penal codes, as well as an anti-terrorism law passed in the aftermath of the May 16, 2003 Casablanca bombings.

### *Blogoma*

Moroccan bloggers, also known as the “blogoma,” began testing the boundaries of their newfound online freedoms early on. Fouad Mourtada was among the early arrests related to the internet. The 26-year-old IT engineer was prosecuted for creating a fake Facebook account in the name of the king’s brother, Moulay Rachid, which was characterized as identity theft despite Mourtada’s claims the profile was meant as a joke. Mourtada was sentenced to 3 years in prison and fine of \$1300, suffered mistreatment in prison and received a royal pardon about a month later (Manach, 2008). According to RSF “This is the first time a Moroccan has been convicted

for an online offense and Mourtada was the victim of a summary trial. We are worried about the effect on freedom of expression on the Moroccan Internet as all of the country's bloggers will feel targeted” (RSF, 2008b). Bloggers and human rights advocates launched a campaign calling for Mourtada’s release with a website [helpfouad.com](http://helpfouad.com), indicating the beginnings of a network dedicated to protecting freedom of speech online.

Later in the year blogger Mohamed Erraji was arrested for publishing an article titled “The King encourages the nation (to rely) on handouts” via online news site Hespress (Amnesty, 2008). Erraji was hastily tried and sentenced to two years in prison plus a 5,000 MAD fine for “disrespecting the king” (Pfeiffer, 2008). He appealed the verdict and was provisionally released a few days later, only to be acquitted on procedural grounds in the following weeks following a strike by bloggers and an international mobilization at [soutienerraji.blogspot.ca](http://soutienerraji.blogspot.ca) (RSF, 2008c). According to the 2008 RSF press freedom index “ A series of prosecutions of journalists and Internet users has shown that press freedom in Morocco stops at the doors of the royal palace” (RSF, 2008a, p. 16).

While Erraji will forever hold the distinction of being Morocco’s first imprisoned blogger, many more have joined his ranks. Hassan Barhoum, a blogger and journalist, faced defamation charges for circulating a petition to put a local prosecutor on trial for corruption (CPJ, 2009). Barhoum was sentenced to six months in prison and a fine of 5000 MAD for circulating false information (RSF, 2009). The Association of Moroccan Bloggers (ABM)<sup>12</sup> formed in April 2009 to represent the interests of bloggers and elevate their standards under the

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<sup>12</sup> The Association des blogeurs marocains, or ABM, elected Said Benjebli, an Islamist and member of Al Adl wa Ihsan, as its president, leading to allegations from authorities that the group is a fundamentalist one and refusal of official recognition (Mandraud-Le Monde, 7 April 2010). Benjebli, a future M20 leader, responded to questions about the association’s relationship with Islam saying “J’étais islamiste mais je suis laïc à présent. Notre mouvement aussi est laïc et nos adhérents viennent d’horizons très divers. Athées, socialistes, amazighes, laïcs, toutes les couleurs sont représentées dans notre association. Nous sommes avant tout libres et nous fonctionnons de manière démocratique” (Belayachi - Afrik.com, 9 April 2010).

rubric of citizen journalists. In December 2009 and January 2010 two ABM members, Bashir Hazzam and Boubakr Al-Yadib, were imprisoned in conjunction with protests in the south of the country: Hazzam for posting a statement calling for the release of student protesters and linking to a video from the protest and Al-Yadib for participating in an illegal protest and covering it on his blog. Additionally, Abdullah Boukfou, the owner of the cybercafé from which Hazzam blogged received one year in prison, the harshest sentence of the three. The following year Mamfakinch co-founder Almiraat published an interview with Hazzam on the Global Voices Advocacy page, in which Hazzam stated “I think the reason behind my arrest was to impose a media blackout around the events that occurred in Tarhijcht, after the violent intervention of the security forces against unarmed students and the population that sided with them. They are trying to prevent the truth from filtering to the public” (Almiraat, 2010). Notably, Hazzam credited both human rights and Islamist organizations for his release, both of which organized campaigns to support him. The Moroccan state has a long history of not talking about events or information that it would rather ignore, and bloggers present an imminent threat to the state’s ability to control information.

In many ways the internet became a refuge for Moroccan independent journalists after prosecution of their print publications. Many independent online publications like *Lakome*, *Goud* and *Febrayer* were born out of the same moment as Mamfakinch. For example, *Lakome* was a joint project of Ali Anouzla and Aboubakr Jamaï, both of whom had worked for numerous publications known for independent watchdog reporting and subsequently shut down by court cases and fines. For stalwarts of Moroccan independent media, the new spaces created by digital platforms allowed access to content that traditional media could not cover. By some accounts, Web 2.0 and social media in particular “triggered a revival of the media’s traditional function as

a watchdog, acting as a check on the misconduct of the political regime” (FOTN, 2013).

Although in no way a traditional news site, Mamfakinch participated in this revival with a more activist agenda and a focus on information curation, becoming part of a network of mutual reinforcement, support and publicity alongside its peers in the new electronic press.

### **Mamfakinch!**

What one notices in analyzing Mamfakinch is the flurry of activity that pops up around certain issues and then dissipates when the issue is resolved or reaches a stalemate. Obviously the Arab Spring received intense coverage on the site, but since then the site has acted as a sort of structuring mechanism and collection of cultural resources that remains in the background until called upon to deal with a particular crisis or advance a specific claim.

On February 17, 2011 Mamfakinch came online. The site’s first post was an open letter dated January 29, 2011 directed to King Mohammed VI and Moroccan citizens calling for democratic political reform. Inspired by the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, the letter states: “Morocco is in a phase of setbacks and recoil in its democratic project. The social and economic situation of large segments of the Moroccan people is cause for great concern in conjunction with the rampant cronyism and rent economy (clientelism?)” (Mamfakinch, 2011b). It then goes on to call for dismissal of the current government and dissolution of parliament, the formation of a national committee representing the interests of all communities to draft a democratic constitution based on a parliamentary monarchy, a variety of measures oriented toward social and economic justice and further investigation into the misuse of public funds and human rights violations. It ends with: “Morocco and Moroccans deserve a smooth and rapid transition to democracy,” followed by 31 names, including that of Mamfakinch’s co-founder Hisham Khribchi, who also goes by Hisham Almiraat. The letter was an echo of the call put out January

29, 2011 by *7ouria wa dimo9ratia l2an*, or “Freedom and democracy now” on Facebook calling for a demonstration on February 20. At this point planning for the Feb 20th march was well underway as Mamfakinch’s third post out of 28 for that day is an embed of a Feb 20 campaign video produced by Montassir Drissi that went viral, featuring first person accounts from young activists about why they’d be joining the demonstration February 20, including Mamfakinch contributor Nizar Bennamate. Already rumors and attempts to discredit the organizers were circulating, and one of Mamfakinch’s primary goals to provide a reliable portal for aggregating information about the demonstration. To this end the majority of the 28 posts on the site’s first day of existence were a collection of endorsements from political parties, NGOs and trade unions, including: Marxists, socialists, Islamists, human rights activists, and two trade unions, UMT and CDT. Importantly, Mamfakinch aggregated statements and endorsements from all these fronts into one place, linking to press releases and original stories in other media outlets, and providing some sense of who intended to participate and for what purpose.

What is clear from Mamfakinch’s first few weeks is the extent to which a battle of information took place around the initial demonstrations and the site placed itself on the front lines of that battle by responding to rumors, press coverage and the needs of a nascent movement that became known by the date of its first major demonstrations (February 20). Allegations abounded that this was a Polisario conspiracy, an anti-monarchy protest, and that the leaders were people of ill repute. At one point, the state news agency, MAP, printed a (false) press release announcing that the demonstration had been cancelled (MAP, 2011). Mamfakinch became a channel to talk back to these allegations, but also for expressing support, circulating plans and slogans, explanatory videos about the demonstrations, and for admonishing against violence and vandalism. On the day of the demonstration, it became the site for mapping and

documenting protests taking place around the country. In the midst of contemporary debates about “fake news” and “alternative facts,” it is clear that the battle over information did not begin or end with Mamfakinch. But the use of digital technologies in a country with an emergent independent media environment, an authoritarian monarch and a relatively new relationship with the digital led to a lot of accusations about their potential to lead people astray. A certain (limited) democratization of the information environment was taking place and it led to less dependency on official narratives advanced by the state, both to its own people and to the international community.

In order to make sense of Mamfakinch’s contributions, I look at its interventions around the Amina Filali affair and, to a lesser extent, the Free Koulchi campaign as indicative of the collective’s engagement with dynamics of contention coming out of the Arab Spring moment. While not necessarily the most intense of Mamfakinch’s mobilizations, they are representative of the diverse campaigns to which the collective contributed as part of a emergent information infrastructure moving across on and offline spaces. I want to make clear up front that in no way do I wish to suggest that these moments and their outcomes were produced or orchestrated entirely by Mamfakinch. In the case of Amina Filali, for example, women’s rights groups had been campaigning to repeal article 475 for years and led the way in raising awareness of Filali’s case. What I do want to suggest is that Mamfakinch’s members are particularly adept at using digital tools to pool relevant commentary, putting local and global press into conversation with each other, publicizing and documenting events, and activating activist/journalist/civil society networks to bring disparate groups into one conversation crafted to put pressure on those in power. The collective moves between on and offline spaces in constructing a critical media platform that intervenes in ongoing activist campaigns, in addition to launching some of its own.

In this way Mamfakinch operates as one piece of an emergent activist information infrastructure that is particularly effective in using digital tools to curate and aggregate conversations, as well as provide big picture analysis about the relevance of individual campaigns for broader social change in Morocco.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Amina Filali Affair*

Amina El Filali was a 16-year-old who swallowed rat poison in March 2012 after being forced to marry her rapist and suffering subsequent abuse in a village near the seaside town of Larache, Morocco. Her suicide sparked a wave of protests that focused their outrage on Article 475 of the Moroccan Penal Code,<sup>14</sup> which is often interpreted to allow rapists to avoid legal penalties if they marry their victims. These protests took place both in physical space and, perhaps to a greater extent, online, through diverse mobilizations such as the #RIPamina hashtag on Twitter, an “#RIPamina: No to rape with the complicity of the state” Facebook page, a documentary film entitled *475: When Marriage becomes Punishment*, as well as countless blog posts, editorials and local news stories. Filali’s story was picked up by global news organizations such as *Al Jazeera*, *Le Monde*, the *BBC* and the *New York Times*, which ran multiple stories, including a follow-up in January 2014 when Article 475 was successfully overturned. Moroccan media activists associated with Mamfakinch participated in attempts to attract the attention of global civil society and media to this issue while also engaging in more localized contentious politics. In its interventions Mamfakinch was forced to negotiate the tension between staging representations of Arab/Muslim women embedded in patriarchal political culture, and women as autonomous actors possessing reflexive subjectivities that empower them to affect change.

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<sup>13</sup> Mamfakinch bloggers contribute to the site under names including mamfakinch, basta, ibn kafka, nietzschan, demokratia karama, feb20democracy, and others. Unless the bloggers have been open online about their identities offline, I refer to them by the pseudonyms under which they publish on the site.

<sup>14</sup> The provision is not specifically Moroccan; similar provisions exist in Tunisian, Algerian, Jordanian and Lebanese law.



Prior to Filali committing suicide, Morocco was already embroiled in dynamics of protest and repression, as well as anxieties accompanying the first few months of a new Islamist government. To some extent protests carried on from the previous year, especially in the northern Rif region where activists associated with M20 demonstrated against the rural mountainous region's widespread poverty and economic marginalization in January and February 2012, marking the one-year anniversary of M20. Violent treatment by police and arrests of activists led to new waves of protests in Taza, and spreading to smaller villages like Beni Bouayache where a local M20 activist was arrested<sup>15</sup> (Schemm, 2012). On March 12 AMDH issued a statement that "The central office of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights expresses its solidarity with the citizens of Beni Bouayache, victims of a repressive campaign of intimidation by the Makhzen, demands the release of all arbitrary detainees and deplores the escalation of systematic repression of the state against the protest movements (AMDH, 2012a), and on March 14 a Rabat demonstration in solidarity with the Rif was violently dispersed by police under the auspices that it was unauthorized (Karam, 2012). The previous day Mamfakinch launched a campaign to "MediatizeRif," calling for an end to the media blackout on events occurring in the Rif. Mamfakinch retweeted from one of its contributors "RT @YassirKazar: MAP doesn't want to cover what's happening? No worries. Citizens will take care of it #MediatizeRif" (Mamfakinch, 2012b). Mamfakinch began live blogging coverage of protests, continued circulating the few stories being published (mostly in the electronic press) and reached out to international outlets.

It was in this environment that the news of Filali's March 10 suicide broke via an article published in the independent newspaper *Al Massae*, and bloggers and social media reacted

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<sup>15</sup> Bachir Benchaib was ostensibly arrested for being involved in gang and criminal activity (Washington Post, 12 March 2012).

immediately, with one blogger writing “Amina Filali is my Bouazizi” (Idrissi, 2012). On March 13, Almiraat picked up the story on Twitter, asking if anyone knew of additional sources and monitoring the spread of the #RIPamina hashtag across the globe. Almiraat also used Storify to compile relevant materials and produce a timeline and narrative of developments in the case, while encouraging Al Jazeera’s The Stream, which focuses on social media, to pick up the story. “@AJStream Follow hashtag #RIPamina. It mourns 16 yo Moroccan who committed suicide after being forced 2 marry her rapist w/parent's consent” (Almiraat, 2012b). On March 15 the Democratic League of Women’s Rights (LDDF) organized a sit-in of several hundred people in front of the Larache tribunal as part of its campaign against Article 475 (Bruneau, 2012). Article 475<sup>16</sup> does not explicitly address rape, but rather the “kidnapping or deception” of a minor, for which the perpetrator cannot be prosecuted once the victim “has married her *ravisseur*” (R.A. & M.B., 2012). The Filali affair comes on the heels of March 8, International Women’s Day, when the secularist Alternative Mouvement for Individual Liberties (MALI) published a manifesto titled “State! You rape us: March 8, 2012 Manifesto” (MALI, 2012). Posted on Vox Maroc, the blog of journalist and MALI militant Zineb El Rhazoui, the statement inscribes the fight for gender equality within human rights and voices concerns about the role of religion in Moroccan law, especially pertaining to women. “The Moroccan state holds onto archaic laws inspired by religion, making it an accomplice in the crimes committed everyday against women and their dignity” (MALI, 2012). By way of example the statement points to Article 475 and calls for a campaign against the law, citing testimonies of women being prosecuted for prostitution when they report rape and being married to their rapists, which absolves the state since spousal rape

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<sup>16</sup> Article 475 du code pénal: QUICONQUE, sans violences, menaces ou fraude, enlève ou détourne, ou tente d’enlever ou de détourner un mineur de moins de dix-huit ans, est puni de l’emprisonnement d’un à cinq ans et d’une amende de 120 à 500 dirhams. Lorsqu’une mineure nubile ainsi enlevée ou détournée a épousé son ravisseur, celui-ci ne peut être poursuivi qu’à la suite de la plainte des personnes ayant qualité pour demander l’annulation du mariage et ne peut être condamné qu’après que cette annulation du mariage a été prononcée (R.A. & M.B., 2012).

isn't recognized in Morocco – all of which indicate that the controversy surrounding Article 475 preceded Filali.

On March 14 the “#RIPAmīna: No to rape with the complicity of the state” Facebook page came online courtesy of Houda Chaloun. The page articulates six demands, including prosecution of Filali's rapist (who remained free), immediate repeal of Article 475 as it is “in flagrant contradiction with the treaties and international conventions ratified by Morocco,” a redefinition of rape and harsher penalties in the penal code, better judicial training and enforcement, and help for all women suffering similar fates as Filali (#RIPAmīna, 2012). The page also called for a sit-in in front of parliament on March 17 and commissioned graphic artist Faiçal Oulharir to design posters and t-shirts. The Mamfakinch account's first posts about #RIPAmīna were made on March 17 when it shared a Global Voices article about the #RIPAmīna protest page that included information about the sit-in taking place, and posted a Storify compilation of the sit-in made by Almiraat. Mamfakinch contributor Zineb Belmkaddem, who has been open about her own experience with domestic abuse, live tweeted the sit-in. The sit-in brought together multiple generations of feminists, including Union d'Action Feminine (UAF), a secular feminist organization in operation since 1987 and Woman Choufouch, an anti-harassment organization formed by students in (Woman Choufouch, 2011). According to Fatima Outaleb of UAF, “We know that in Morocco when women are united, it pays. The problem is that there is a crisis of leadership among the women's movement. Each group wants to take the lead on different issues...But women are divided and the left has been divided...We have to say, there is no compromise. The law should be adopted now. No excuses. We have to mobilize youth, the [anti-government] February 20 movement, even though we don't agree with some of their slogans” (Alpert, 2012). Filali's case highlights the stark stratification of access to

resources, education and assistance from associations among women of different geographic and class backgrounds, as well as associated ideological divisions in the women's movement and established civil society more broadly.

One remarkable aspect of the sit-in was that it was broadcast live by state TV station 2M. One Mamfakinch contributor tweeted “RT @\_\_Ghali: Bravo to 2M which is covering the demonstration live! Big up! #RIPAmna” (IbnKafka, 2012b). Two days earlier 2M invited the Minister of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development, Bassima Hakkaoui, and Nouzha Skalli, who held Hakkaoui's position in the previous government, to discuss the Filali case. Hakkaoui, the only woman minister in the new PJD government, had already been the subject of scrutiny from secularists given that she wears the hijab, which is unusual among Morocco's political class (Boukhari, 2012). On 2M Hakkaoui called for a debate to reform the law, but subsequently made several controversial statements about the case, including suggesting that women's rights groups were damaging Morocco's reputation. At one point she reportedly told blog-based news platform Yabiladi “Article 475 is unlikely to be repealed overnight under pressure from international public opinion. Sometimes the marriage of a raped woman to her rapist does not harm her” (Belabd, 2012). For Mamfakinch, an organization that had just launched a campaign to bring media attention to horrific events happening in the Rif, 2M's eagerness to cover the Filali tragedy might have seemed a convenient distraction on an issue clearly supported by the monarchy, as seen by its initiative in the 2004 Moudawana<sup>17</sup> reforms. On March 17 Almiraat shared a tweet supposedly from 2M's news director Samira Sitail “RT @SamiraSitail: -@YassirKazar I gave the order to cover #RIPAmna in order to eclipse the

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<sup>17</sup> The Moudawana is Morocco's family code, which was originally drafted in 1957 and reformed in 2004 after decades of activism on the issue and in a political context where a young monarch was in the process of cultivating a progressive image. The reforms resulted in Morocco being lauded as a leader among Arab/Muslim nations in putting in place a legal framework oriented toward gender equality. Among other changes, the Moudawana specifically outlaws marriage under the age of 18, but in practice the marriage of minors continued to be common.

Mamfakinch's operation #MediatizeRif (Almiraat, 2012d), although the @SamiraSitail account is now marked as fake.

Several petitions were circulated, including on petitionduweb.com and ipetitions.com that led Almiraat to tweet "A petition that supposed to invoke international solidarity written only in French? We lose a lot my friends. #RIPamina" (Almiraat, 2012c). A petition addressed to Morocco's ministers on Avaaz.org stated "Since 2006, the government has been promising to pass a law to stop violence against women, but has failed to do so. As concerned global citizens, we call on you to stand with women by immediately repealing Article 475 and passing comprehensive legislation addressing violence against women" (Avaaz.org). Avaaz<sup>18</sup> is forum for internet organizing founded in 2007 and run by Ricken Patel, a Canadian formerly associated with MoveOn.org. Ultimately the petition in Arabic secured almost 1.2 million signatures, and a corresponding one in English more than 700,000 (Avaaz, 2012). Many of the #RIPamina tweets were shared by petition signees such Mamfakinch contributor Bennamate "Just signed a petition urging @benkiraneabdel to stop violence against women and repeal Article 475 #RIPamina #Morocco [avaaz.org/en/forced\\_to\\_m...](http://avaaz.org/en/forced_to_m...) (Bennamate, 2012). Others expressed outrage at the situation, blaming tradition, Moroccan culture or Islam<sup>19</sup> as a backward and violent religion in its treatment of women. On March 17 Almiraat tweeted "Islamophobes jumping on the bandwagon 2 label #RIPamina as a case of Islamic law enforced on women. Know this: ths has nothing 2 do w/Islam" (Almiraat, 2012e). This is just one of the ways Mamfakinch positions itself between Morocco and the world, challenging both local practices and power structures as well as

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<sup>18</sup> Avaaz (which reportedly means "voice" in Persian) specializes in supranational forms of online mobilization, with "a single, global team with a mandate to work on any issue of public concern--allowing campaigns of extraordinary nimbleness, flexibility, focus, and scale" (Avaaz.org). For more on Avaaz.org, as well as its critics, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/nov/17/avaaz-online-activism-can-it-change-the-world>

<sup>19</sup> One quote included in Almiraat's Storify account said "#RIPamina. What a disaster. Look at what the wrong perspective of Islam leads to. I bet there are hundreds of similar stories...." (@JustLuai, 13 Mar 2012).

Orientalist perspectives and international interventions. The organization curates information specifically for the West and international NGOs as well as Moroccans in order to broaden the array of narratives coming out of the country, but also does not hesitate to critique those actors and institutions. Mamfakinch contributor Ibn Kafka, who self describes on his blog as “a Moroccan lawyer on probation,” also took on the idea that Article 475 was rooted in Islam by tracing the legal origins of article 475 to pre-revolutionary French law, saying “it is not because of the Islamization of Moroccan law that this rule exists, but because of its francization...” (Ibn Kafka, 2012a).

Meanwhile Mamfakinch continued to engage in debates around the Filali case, circulating blog posts, news articles and statements from human rights organizations. On March 20 Mamfakinch tweeted simply “#RIPamina This isn’t your fault,” and linked to the blog of a Moroccan woman who published a testimonial of her rape at the age of 17 under that heading (Lamqaddem, 2012). Mamfakinch contributor Errazzouki appeared on Al Jazeera’s The Stream as part of a panel discussion devoted to Filali. In the discussion Errazzouki asked whether Filali was already changing mentalities about rape in Morocco given the circulation of anonymous rape testimonies online in the aftermath of her suicide (Al Jazeera, 2012). As debates continued, it quickly became apparent that Filali’s case was not unique, nor was Morocco’s legal provision for rapists to marry their minor victims. The extent of sexual violence and abuse, as well as societal silence about them, quickly became apparent. On March 27 Mamfakinch published an excerpt from anonymous testimonies shared on Qandisha,<sup>20</sup> a collaborative women’s e-zine

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<sup>20</sup> Qandisha is named after the Moroccan folklore figure Aïcha Qandisha, who according to legend used her beauty to seduce the Portuguese soldiers occupying El Jadida, after which they disappeared. According to founder Misk “j’avais proposé Qandisha entre autres noms et termes marocains inspirant la force, la volonté, l’intelligence et la fierté. Qandisha a séduit tout le monde, d’autant plus que l’on s’attendait à déranger, vu les thèmes qu’on comptait aborder, exactement comme elle, ce qui lui avait valu une diabolisation séculaire” (Boyet, 2013; [http://www.lejournalinternational.fr/Qandisha-la-libre-parole-marocaine\\_a818.html](http://www.lejournalinternational.fr/Qandisha-la-libre-parole-marocaine_a818.html) ).

founded by journalist and activist Fedwa Misk in 2011, linking to the testimonials in their entirety (Mamfakinch, 2012j). Qandisha, like Mamfakinch, is another example of online platforms opening up alternative discursive spaces from which to question the status quo and built an alternative information infrastructure.

By all accounts March 2012 was a busy month for Mamfakinch, as the collective continued working on other campaigns and in many cases made efforts to connect those campaigns to Filali. The day after the #RIPamina sit-in, Mamfakinch tweeted “RT @Basta #FreeEzzedine #RIPamina #MediatizeRif one people one fight! #Morocco #Maroc” (Mamfakinch, 2012c) and the following day “Today, the #FEB20 movement will protest all around the country for #RIPamina, #RIPNabil, #FreeEzzedine, for change in #Morocco” (Mamfakinch, 2012f). Mamfakinch posted a petition in Arabic, English and French on ipetitions.com explaining Ezzedine Erroussi’s case and launched a campaign to bring attention to his plight via the hashtag #FreeEzzedine (Mamfakinch, 2012e). Mamfakinch also produced a twitter avatar, a Facebook page and organized a “freeze” to raise awareness of Ezzedine’s dire situation. The 23-year-old student at the University of Taza and UNEM<sup>21</sup> member was arrested on December 1, 2011 after participating in student protests against living conditions at the university and charged with belonging to an illegal organization. He started a hunger strike on December 19 that endured more than 100 days until he was released in May 2012 after having served the entirety of his sentence (Taarji, 2012). Mamfakinch circulated a letter from Erroussi published by L’Humanité.fr (Perrier, 2012) alleging that he’d been tortured in prison (Mamfakinch, 2012d). One Mamfakinch co-founder tweeted “#FreeEzzedine because a young peaceful protester deserves a better fate than a rapist #RIPamina” (@souhail\_, 2012),

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<sup>21</sup> UNEM or the Moroccan National Students’ Union, has been at the center of student activism since the 1960s and has been outlawed at various points.

referencing the fact that Filali's rapist walked free while a peaceful protestor remained in prison. On March 20 Almiraat tweeted "To read, by @IbnKafka: "Amina, Nabil, Azzedine, the victims of a Morocco gone wrong" yabiladi.com/articles/detai... #FreeEzzedine #RIPamina" (Almiraat, 2012f). Mamfakinch contributor Ibn Kafka writes that Moroccan youth are paying the price for societal stagnation and lack of political and economic reforms, citing the examples of Filali, Ezzedine Erroussi and Nabil Zouhri<sup>22</sup>, who died falling into a ravine after participating in Rif protests and being chased by police. According to Ibn Kafka: "To paraphrase General De Gaulle, Morocco has an appearance: Morocco Mall, the TGV and the festival of Marrakech, which play on repeat in Morocco's brand communications between Hillary Clinton press releases. It has a reality: a country where a child is forced by judges and families to marry her rapist, and where students die from contact with the police or for want of resignation to an arbitrary trial" (Ibn Kafka, 2012c). In addition to the Ezzedine mobilizations, in March 2012 Mamfakinch also circulated a full pdf of Catherine Graciet and Eric Laurent's book *The Predator King*, which had been banned in Morocco, as well as interviews with its authors. The collective also supported the #StopTGV campaign, pushed for fiscal reforms and launched a series of podcasts under the name MamCast.

In all of these cases public ire was primarily directed at Article 475 and the PJD government, specifically Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane, Hakkaoui and Minister of Justice and Freedoms Mustapha Ramid. The new PJD government, which has itself been adept in the use of social media, became the target of appeals directly to officials online: "@PJDofficiel #PJD nous exigeons une réforme d'urgence #RIPamina #Maroc" (Almiraat, 2012a; @M\_Benaj, 2012). In a press conference Mustafa Khalfi, Minister of Communication and spokesman for the

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<sup>22</sup> The Moroccan government maintained Zouhri's death was the result of an accidental fall, while others contended he was pushed by police.



Benkirane government, stated “This girl was raped twice, the second time when she was married (...) This situation needs to be investigated thoroughly with the possibility of increasing the penalties in the context of reforming article 475. We cannot ignore this drama” (Jazouani, 2012). Meanwhile Hakkaoui’s statements showed less conviction and more contradiction, as she refused to clearly state whether she would take the legislative lead on such reforms. Ramid added to the furor by issuing a statement that questioned whether Filali was actually raped, saying “the young Amina had a relationship outside marriage with the man who later married her, a relationship during which she lost her virginity” (Amar, 2012; Ministry of Justice, 2012). The statement from Ramid’s ministry questions many of the facts of the case, including: was Amina raped, or was she merely involved in an extramarital sexual relationship? Did she consent to the marriage and as a minor under pressure from the legal system and her family was she even capable of consent? Who is to blame for her death, the legal system or society? The lack of clarity in terms of the government’s response and elaboration of concrete steps toward reform exacerbated already existing anxieties among civil society (especially from secularists and the left) about the regression of human rights, including women’s rights, under the PJD.

On March 23 Hakkaoui, Ramid and Lahbib Choubani, minister of relations with parliament and civil society, held a press conference about the Filali affair. The event was live tweeted by Mamfakinch contributors Karim El Hajjaji and Omar Radi (who was there as a journalist) among others under the hashtag #debatBassima. According to the tweets, the ministers gave long-winded, off-topic introductions and emphasized that society bears the responsibility for Filali. The ministers took questions, and in a country where sex outside marriage is illegal according to article 490 of the penal code, Radi prefaced his question to the minister of justice by stating directly that he and his girlfriend have sex outside the context of

marriage. However, Radi was cut off by Ramid, who advised him not to continue as he was admitting to breaking the law and could be arrested. When Radi continued, the microphone was taken away from him. Later that day Mamfakinch shared a Storify account of the debate that ended with the tweet “Summary: ‘In Morocco no sex before marriage and no rape of street girls’ #WhatElse #RipAmina #debatBassima” (Mamfakinch, 2012h; @ChamaLesage, 2012).

Mamfakinch also published an episode of the sketch show Webnates<sup>23</sup> (bnates = girls), on virginity that ridiculed the importance of placed on virginity, the double standard for men and women, and the fact that many women have sex lives with the intention of re-creating their virginity surgically if it becomes a problem later (Mamfakinch, 2012h; Webnates, 2012). The fetishization of virginity in Morocco (and elsewhere) often means that once a woman is no longer a virgin her chances of marriage are practically nonexistent and she is dependent on her family for long term support, constituting an economic burden, as well as a mark on the family’s honor. It then becomes more acceptable to consider rape as merely a pre-marital indiscretion by marrying the woman to her rapist.

The next day the exchange between Radi and Minister Ramid made the front page of Al Massae. Almiraat wrote a blog post in support of Radi titled “PJD Hates Love - #RIP Amina #DebatBassima” saying “In Morocco in 2012, our political leaders continue to be divorced from reality and denial of their era, perpetuating the hypocrisy of a society that refuses to look in the mirror. The readily authoritarian attitude of the ministers, on the other hand, speaks volumes about the state of mind of those who govern this country today” (Almiraat, 2012i). Almiraat also produced a simple graphic poster (for use at the roundtable) with white and black text against an orange background with one side showing a man and a woman embracing with the text “-

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<sup>23</sup> Webnates features impersonations of Moroccan women from various backgrounds in the middle of humorous confessionals to their webcams about a variety of topics. It was commissioned by Morocco’s first web TV station, Yek TV, and was particularly controversial and often accused of being vulgar.

marriage = haram” and on the other side a man holding a gun to a woman with the text “+marriage = halal” (Almiraat, 2012i). The #RIPamina Facebook page shared Almiraat’s poster and associated blog post, which elicited mixed reactions. One user posted:

“Hold on a minute...the purpose of the page is to defend a victim and abolish certain practices that are outside logic and outside religion...but talking about a journalist who lives with his concubine?!...How is that related?...We are talking about the noble cause of Amina...taking advantage of the situation to talk about repressed sexuality, really it’s unacceptable. We are in a Muslim country and we are all against these practices - just to be clear - and thank you” (Nihale Yakine, 24 March 2012).

This led another user to reply:

“I think the author of the article wants to highlight the moral double standard that condemns sex between two consenting people who are not married, yet accepts that a rapist marries his victim. It’s sick. So, there is a connection” (Ensaf Azuagh, 24 March 2012).

That evening Hakkaoui participated in a roundtable organized by *Al Massae* (which had originally published the story) about Filali’s suicide at Casablanca’s Royal Mansour Hotel along with Filali’s parents and several civil society leaders. Filali’s rapist-turned-husband was also invited to the roundtable, leading Mamfakinch contributor Errazzouki to tweet a few days earlier “Bassima Hakkaoui apologetically defending Amina's rapist and inviting him to a conference. This is sheer absurdity. #RIPamina” (Errazzouki, 2012a). Again, Omar Radi attended the roundtable tweeting “Slogans in the audience. General indignation. #Almassaeconf #Ripamina” (Radi, 2012a) and “Ryadi<sup>24</sup>: stop talking about the facts related to #RIPamina, talk about the

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<sup>24</sup> “Ryadi” refers to a statement made by Khadijah Riyadi, head of AMDH, who was participating in the roundtable.

causes, and change the law” (Radi, 2012b). After the debate, a final tweet from Almiraat “Must say that Hakkaoui at least has the courage to face the public. We don’t like her much, but we’ve seen worse. Alright good night! -#RIP Amina” (Almiraat, 2012h). In a country that requires journalists to have official press credentials, many who attended the conference/roundtable/gatherings were bloggers or activists engaged in the online furor, a fact that Almiraat referenced the following year as part of a UNESCO conference about freedom of expression online. “Even without a press card, there were micro-bloggers at the press conferences on the high speed rail line (TGV), and also during the explanations of...Hakkaoui and the family of Amina Filali in 2012” (Mamfakinch, 2013).

Another group created on Facebook in the aftermath of Filali’s suicide was “The March of Free Women of Morocco which organized a women’s march for March 25, 2012 in opposition to Article 475 (Elouizi, 2012). Initiated by Najiba Berrada, the march effectively acted as a follow-up to the previous week’s sit-in in Rabat whereby a variety of organizations and actors assembled in Casablanca to decry what happened to Filali and push for reform. Mamfakinch documented the march, live-tweeting and posting several videos to its YouTube channel. Several European deputies took part in the march, having taken up the Filali affair in the European Parliament earlier in the week in the presence of Morocco’s ambassador to Belgium (Jaabouk, 2012). Other international reactions included a statement from UNICEF saying “The case of the young Amina is revealing of dysfunctions in the system of child protection in Morocco today” (UNICEF, 2012), while Human Rights Watch’s Middle East and North Africa director Sarah Leah Whitson said “Article 475, as bad as it is, is only the tip of the iceberg in Morocco’s failure to protect women and girls from violence. Despite reforms in Morocco’s 2004 family code, girls and women are far from being protected under the law when they are the victims of violence”

(HRW, 2012). In the face of intense local pressure and international attention the new PJD government made no move to act, likely wary of appearing to give in to public opinion, foreign or domestic. Within Morocco a National Human Rights Council (CNDH) delegation made several recommendations, including "...accelerating the implementation of a revised penal code (which has been pending for many years) so that this provision - and all other provisions - that are contrary to human dignity, the Constitution, the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, as well as the Convention on the rights of the child, are repealed" (CNDH, 2012). Important here is the idea that Article 475 is contradictory not only to the July 2011 Moroccan constitution, which proclaims gender equality, but also multiple international conventions to which Morocco is a signee, notably CEDAW and CIDE. Additionally, the constitution includes a clause that "establishes the primacy of international conventions ratified by Morocco over national legislation" (CNDH, 2011). In the aftermath of the press conference with the ministers Almiraat tweeted "@slima2485 the government is supposed to respect the constitution which stipulates that international law takes precedence #RIPAmira #debatBassima" (Almiraat, 2012g). Filali's impact on international opinion was evident when former Telquel editor Benchemsi appeared at the Oslo Freedom Forum for a debate about "The Arab revolts: A year after" only to be asked about Filali's case. Mamfakinch published a transcript in which Benchemsi attributes the outrage over Filali's case to a sense of power coming out of the Arab Spring, so that "when it happened, people rose up to say it's unacceptable. And to challenge is our right" (Mamfakinch, 2012i).

Over time immediate action gave way to analysis, which is where the bigger picture purpose of Mamfakinch comes into play. When the outcry surrounding Filali's suicide had

faded, the site published an interview with AMDH's deputy secretary Samira Kinani, who reflected

“Amina Filali shed light on a common occurrence. It is a rather frequent and rather taboo subject at the same time. These are the things that we don't say, but that are practiced regularly in society. And normally, associations/NGOs defending women's rights should do everything possible to break these taboos. Since then, there are many groups, for example on Facebook, that talk about this case. But we have not yet changed the law to forbid the rapist from marrying his victim, under the pretext that there are cultural particularities. So far nothing has been done” (Mülchi, 2012).

According to Kinani, it is everyone's responsibility to make sure cases like Filali's do not happen, and the fact that it does happen represents a societal failure. Many positive things have been said about Morocco's legal protections for women's rights in the aftermath of 2004's Moudawanna reforms and a 2011 constitution that proclaims equality of the sexes, however, the existence of contradictory codes, lack of enforcement and a persistent gap between legal provisions and lived reality mean that in practice rights are much more uncertain than they appear on paper. For Kinani “just talking about women's liberation in an impoverished, marginalized society...on which many things are imposed, this is pure hypocrisy” (Mülchi, 5 June 2012). If Amina Filali had not agreed to marry her rapist, what were her prospects then? Would she have an education or employment to fall back on? Family resources? Other marriage proposals?

Mamfakinch devoted the second edition of its MamCast podcast with lawyer Omar Mahmoud Benjelloun<sup>25</sup> to Amina Filali and Article 475 (Mamfakinch, 2012). Mamfakinch contributor Kazar tweeted “Don't miss the next #Mamcast of @Mamfakinch with Omar

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<sup>25</sup> Benjelloun is a leftist militant and the nephew of Omar Benjelloun, a socialist activist assassinated in 1975.

Bendjelloun #Justice #freel7a9ed #RIP Amina #FreeSokrat #Freekoulchi #Ramid #Maroc”

(Kazar, 2012). Mamfakinch shared AMDH’s 2011 report on human rights in Morocco in both Arabic and French, noting in a section on women’s rights Morocco’s poor position (127/135) on the World Economic Forum’s hierarchy of gender equality and the frequency of violence against women, including minors like Amina Filali (AMDH, 2012b). In this context Filali’s case becomes significant because it opens up discussion about many things – rape, legal loopholes, marriage of minors, victim blaming, familial honor, access to resources, gender-based violence, education – but also because the government’s response to these discussions doesn’t bode well for its relationship with civil society and indicates the same old stagnation long associated with dysfunctional institutional politics, despite promises for change.

Filali also figured in a Mamfakinch Counter Corner column written by Samia Errazzouki in response to a marketing professional’s article posted on a the U.S. Morocco lobby website about attending a 2012 International Women’s Forum conference in Morocco. Errazzouki contends that the account privileges the state narrative of Moroccan exceptionalism rampant in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. One of many problematic statements in the article states “Because of his [King Mohammed VI’s] decisions, divorce is legal, girls are encouraged to attend school and women are becoming an economic force in this country,” to which Errazzouki counters “If the author is going to applaud and generalize the position of women in Morocco, the author conveniently disregarded the case of Amina Filali. The young Moroccan girl who committed suicide after a court forced her into a marriage with her rapist” (Errazzouki, 2012b). This article is indicative of a common dynamic in the Mamfakinch project - that is a project of translation between the local and global, as well as a double critique of domestic politics and the way they are taken up in transnational discourses that circulate globally. Many of the events

held in Morocco each year are meant to feed the makhzen's narrative of the nation that is at best the product of a benevolent patriarch and at worse a benign authoritarianism. In the process many of them support retrograde representations of Morocco associated with orientalist exoticism, but that again is good for tourism, a major industry. In ignoring the nuances of modern Morocco and especially the highly variable situations facing a diverse and highly stratified society, these accounts are often oriented toward stability and fitness for investment above all else.

Mamfakinch co-produced a film by Nadir Bouhmouch titled "475: When Marriage Becomes Punishment"<sup>26</sup> (Bouhmouch, 2013). The product of a Kickstarter campaign and a collaborative team, the film was released almost a year after Filali's death and documents responses to Filali's case from media, feminist and human rights organizations, politicians and Filali's family, essentially asking "What makes a 16-year-old girl swallow rat poison and where does such desperation come from?" Narrated by Houda Lamqaddem, the activist and blogger who earlier published a testimony of her own rape on her blog, the film portrays Filali's suicide as the product of a myriad of forces deeply rooted in Moroccan society, but by no means unique to Morocco or Islam. In Filali's case the encounter of a young girl with a dysfunctional family, patriarchal society, financial dependency, lack of legal protection and physical violence may have ended with Article 475 of the penal code, but unfortunately many of these dynamics can be found most places in the world. Above all the film makes clear that Filali's is not an isolated case and connects the desperation of her act to that of other women who for various reasons live outside traditional gender norms and are marginalized even further for it. It shows the self immolation of Fadoua Laaroui, a single mother who lit herself on fire February 21, 2011 because

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<sup>26</sup> The film is available in its entirety on Vimeo <https://vimeo.com/60159667>



her application for public housing was denied due to her being a single mother. The tragedy of Filali and Laaroui's deaths is also discussed in an academic article by Mamfakinch contributor Errazzouki titled "Working class women revolt: Gendered political economy in Morocco" (Errazzouki, 2014). In January 2014 Mamfakinch published an interview Errazzouki did with *Jadaliyya* and an excerpt of her article (Mamfakinch, 2014). In assessing the impacts of political economy on marginalized women, Errazzouki attempts "to situate the circumstances of these disenfranchised working-class women within a broader political economic framework that considers factors such as the implementation of neoliberal economic policies and the entrenchment of a patriarchal authoritarian regime" (ibid.). Again, this case highlights the disconnect between discourse, especially official discourse about reform, and the everyday lives of women.

On January 22, 2014, nearly 2 years after Filali's suicide, Morocco's parliament voted unanimously to rid Article 475 of the clause that allowed rapists of minors to escape prosecution by marrying their victims (Alami, 2014). That day H24Info journalist and Mamfakinch contributor Bennamate tweeted "It's official: Article 475 is amended! #RIPAmna" (Bennamate, 2014a) and linking to his article about the amendment, which states "the proposed amendment was brought by several parliamentary groups, including l'USFP, le PPS et le PAM," indicating that the PJD did not take the legislative lead on amending the law (Bennamate, 2014b). While amending Article 475 is just the beginning, the debates that erupted in the aftermath of Filali's suicide and Mamfakinch's engagements in them, highlight the intersection of local contentious politics, state media blackouts, emergent youth digital cultures, Islamic anxieties at home and abroad, and transnational mediated activism. The resonance of Filali's case with widespread post-9/11 Orientalist discourses about Islam and the MENA region surely influenced its uptake

internationally, while new information infrastructures emerging out of the Arab Spring moment allowed civil society to seize on the issue while also speaking back to those discourses. As part of that information infrastructure Mamfakinch crafted and curated counter-discourses to both explanations rooted in Islam and tradition, as well as those coming from Morocco's Islamic PJD government while simultaneously engaging in mediated activism campaigns across a broad range of issues.

### *Free Koulchi*

In addition to acting as information producer and aggregator for diverse mobilizations, Mamfakinch has also launched some campaigns of its own. Early on it was instrumental in organizing the “Mamsawtinch” campaign against voting in the July 2011 constitutional referendum on constitutional changes endorsed by the monarchy and most political parties (Mamfakinch, 2011d). Almost a year later Mamfakinch collaborated with the Moroccan Human Rights Association (AMDH), and M20 activists and used the occasion of Morocco appearing before the UN Council of Human Rights in Geneva (May 22, 2012) to launch a campaign for general political amnesty in Morocco under the name #FreeKoulchi, or “free everyone.” The campaign launch denounced lack of governmental action on the Equity and Reconciliation Commission's (IER) report aimed at amending for and improving Moroccan human rights and called “on the Benkirane government and the House of Representatives to break with the status quo and to submit, discuss and adopt an amnesty law for all those who have been sentenced for political reasons” (Mamfakinch, 2012k). Pointing to reforming legislation on rape (an Amina Filali reference), the right to strike and reform of the press code as examples of the monumental amount of reform work remaining in Morocco, Mamfakinch outlined its goal of using general amnesty as “a starting point to a more profound democratization of Morocco” (ibid.). With this

in mind, Mamfakinch participated in the construction of a website at freekoulchi.org (now defunct), which hosted profiles and data on political prisoners.

#FreeKoulchi followed mobilizations dedicated to specific political prisoners, including #FreeEzzedine, and became a rallying cry for the release of various political prisoners, among them journalist Rachid Niny, rapper Mouad Belghouate “17a9ed,” and dissidents of the February 20 movement. It shared personnel, sit-ins, hashtags, protests and blog posts with Mamfakinch and other activist groups. Part of the outrage and sarcastic humor surrounding Danielgate used the symbolic repertoire of the #FreeKoulchi campaign, which tweeted “PS/Reminder: The Everyone in #FreeEveryone does not include serial rapists” on August 1, 2013, while another user tweeted “The Makhzen misinterpreted #FreeKoulchi.” Mamfakinch subsequently used the #FreeKoulchi campaign to advocate for journalist Ali Anouzla via #FreeAnouzla, the co-founder and editor of the online publication *Lakome*, who broke the story about Daniel Galvan Vina’s pedophilia and pardon. Anouzla was arrested several months later for being an “apologist of terrorism” because his website linked to a reported Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) video. Although Anouzla has been provisionally released he is still facing legal challenges, while *Lakome* has been blocked.

Through Mamfakinch’s formulation of the #FreeKoulchi campaign, and ongoing use of #Free[insert name] campaigns to advocate for the political prisoner of the moment, the hashtag and its language have been synonymous with the unjustly detained. It has also made Mamfakinch part of a far-reaching network of global civil society actors advocating for freedom of speech and legal protections for the press, not the least of which is Reporters without Borders, who constructed a mirrored version of *Lakome*. Mamfakinch’s defense of Anouzla is also a defense of dissent and an attestation to the technological, legal and symbolic tools it is able and

willing to invoke for Moroccans to have access to a diversity of voices and a discourse constructed outside the purview of state-sanctioned media.

### **From Mamfakinch to ADN**

In July 2012 Mamfakinch was the target of a spyware attack that jeopardized the anonymity on which many members of the collective depended. The site's editorial team received an email suggesting it would reveal a major scandal, but which turned out to be bait for the installation of spyware on the collective's personal devices. Earlier the site had been subject to DDoS attacks that made it difficult to access, but the spyware attack signified a new level of surveillance and significant investment in monitoring activists. Mamfakinch sent the spyware to Citizen Lab<sup>27</sup> at the University of Toronto, which identified it as "a variant of a commercial backdoor sold by the Italian Company 'Hacking Team'" in an October 2012 report (Marquis-Boire, 2012). Hacking Team claims to only sell its technologies to "worldwide law enforcement and intelligence communities," billing itself as "The Hacking Suite for Governmental Interception" (Hacking Team, 2016). Hacking Team's spyware is both sophisticated and expensive, meaning that cost would make it prohibitive to most individuals.<sup>28</sup> Hacking Team's Remote Control System software (also known as DaVinci or Galileo) allows for remote access to and tracking of infected devices: logging emails, passwords, social media accounts, webcams and more (Gallagher, 2012). Even if Hacking Team intended that its spyware be used against criminals and terrorists, technologies have affordances that can be used for a myriad of purposes, both good and bad, and intentionality doesn't always match up with use.

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<sup>27</sup> Citizen Lab does research "that monitors, analyzes, and impacts the exercise of political power in cyberspace." For more information see: <https://citizenlab.org/about/>

<sup>28</sup> A Privacy International report suggests that the software itself costs about \$200,000 USD (PI, 2015, p. 10).

This was not the Moroccan government's first purchase of surveillance technologies: in 2011 French newspaper *Le Canard Enchaîné* (Canard, 2011) and the cyber surveillance monitoring site *Reflets* published invoices showing that Morocco had invested more than 2 million dollars in computers and hard drives associated with a surveillance system named Eagle sold by a company named Bull through its subsidiary Amesys (Reflets, 2012). Eagle allows for Deep Packet Inspection (DPI), which allows for the filtering of data packets as they pass through the system. Amesys was the subject of a judicial inquiry in France (Gallagher, 2012) after the *Wall Street Journal* reported finding its Eagle software being used by Gaddafi's regime against its own citizens along with other surveillance technologies purchased from foreign companies after the UN ended international sanctions against Libya in 2003 (Sonne & Coker, 2011). Shortly afterward Amesys sold Eagle-related activities to a former Bull/Amesys director in an apparent attempt to improve its corporate image (Manach, 2013). RSF labeled both Amesys and Hacking Team as top five "Corporate Enemies of the Internet" in its 2013 report on cyber surveillance in the "era of digital mercenaries" (RSF, 2013). A 2016 piece about Hacking Team founder and CEO David Vincenzetti titled "Fear This Man," states that "existing international arms regulations did not cover spyware" (Kushner, 2016) until a 2013 amendment to the Wassenaar Agreement included surveillance software (Grannick, 2014).

As early as 1999, Human Rights Watch (HRW) acknowledged privacy online to be fundamental to extending freedom of expression into a global era. "By guaranteeing privacy of communications and authenticating the identity of communicators, encryption also enables free association between individuals in cyberspace, an important extension of a traditional right in the new circumstances of globalization" (HRW, 1999, p. 10). At a time in which people's lives and communities are less likely to always be local, they are often reliant on technologies to

communicate at a distance and should be able to expect privacy and access to tools (like encryption) that allow for anonymity. The power and resources of governments and corporations often mean that they are able to use new technologies to advance their own interests in ways that do not necessarily align with the rights of individual users. In a 2003 PI/GET report that warns about the widespread use of anti-terror legislation to crack down on civil rights in a post-9/11 world, the NGOs point out: “Governments of developing nations rely on Western countries to supply them with the necessary technologies of surveillance and control, such as digital wiretapping equipment, deciphering equipment, scanners, bugs, tracking equipment and computer intercept systems. The transfer of surveillance technology from first to third world is now a lucrative sideline for the arms industry. Without the aid of this technology transfer, it is unlikely that non-democratic regimes could impose the current levels of control over Internet activity” (PI & GET, 2003, p. 7). Vincenzetti is only one among many taking advantage of security fears to make sales of software that allow governments (including authoritarian ones) to surveil citizens.

The sale of surveillance technologies has become big business, and Morocco is a good customer. In 2015 Hacking Team itself got hacked, with the hacker tweeting from the company’s account “Since we have nothing to hide, we’re publishing all our e-mails, files and source code,” and linking to 400GB of company data (Ghattas, 2015). Leaked files showed that after Mexico and Italy, Morocco was the third highest revenue source, spending more than 3 million in recent years (Gallagher, 2015). A presentation prepared for a surveillance conference references regulations, activists (specifically mentioning Citizen Lab, Human Rights Watch, Privacy International and Anonymous) and the Wassenaar Agreement as having a chilling effect on the use of technology to fight crime (Gallagher, 2015), an ironic reversal on the usual use of the term

“chilling effect” which is usually used to refer to discouragement or suppression of free speech. Internal email revealed in the hack show disregard for concerns of human rights organizations about rights abuses, with one *Financial Times* article titled “Spectre of ISIS used to erode rights in Morocco” circulated by Vincenzetti with [NOT REALLY] added to the email subject line. Vincenzetti’s email states: “The ISIS menace looms on Moroccan horizon. The King of Morocco is a benevolent monarch, he never overcame any Moroccan Parliament decision, he is very different from his father, Morocco is actually the most pro-western Arab country, national security initiatives are solely needed in order to tighten stability and defend the country from extremists. Casablanca has been bombed by extreme Islamist a few years ago, FYI,” (Currier & Marquis-Boire, 2015). Clearly Vincenzetti believes himself more capable of assessing Morocco’s security and rights situation than the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH), the organization whose concerns are voiced in the article and which has been working on human rights issues in the country since 1979. For Mamfakinch the hack was accompanied by a sense of vindication as one contributor tweeted “ET VOILA. MAKHZEN A EFFECTIVEMENT UTILISE OUTILS DE SURVEILLANCE PAR HACKING TEAM CONTRE CITOYENS” and linked to analysis from The Intercept (Belmkaddem, 2015).

Morocco continues to be a Hacking Team client, a state of affairs Hacking Team justifies by the nation’s cooperation in the global war on terror. “Vincenzetti says his company lawfully engaged with a government that, he notes in an email, ‘is an ally of the U.S. and a partner in the fight against terrorism. Morocco is also an ally of most European nations, and Moroccan intelligence agencies recently provided France with essential information to locate the terrorists in Paris and in Bruxelles’”(Kushner, 2016). Later in 2016 internal documents from New Zealand-based surveillance company Endace revealed Morocco’s domestic surveillance agency,

the DGST, to be among its clients (Gallagher & Hager, 2016). According to Amnesty’s North Africa researcher “In Morocco, digital surveillance is intimately linked with repression of peaceful dissent — people who are peacefully protesting or criticizing the authorities face intimidation, arrest, unfair trials, and sometimes imprisonment. We fear that the more that these surveillance tools are sold [to Moroccan agencies], the more we will see human rights abuses, especially in relation to freedom of expression and information” (Gallagher & Hager, 2016). A 2015 Amnesty International report on torture in Morocco between 2010 and 2014 alleges the DGST participated in torture on multiple occasions and links the organization to secret detentions at a Temara prison (Amnesty, 2015). In any case, it is clear that Moroccan authorities have used and continue to use surveillance technologies obtained from foreign firms, which seem to have little concern about selling these tools to regimes with questionable respect for human rights and the rule of law.

#### *Association des Droits Numérique (ADN)*

Mamfakinch ceased publication in February 2014, and the two main reasons cited by members for its discontinuation were loss of momentum in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and backlash from authorities that threatened the anonymity depended on by many of the site’s members. According to Almiraat, the Hacking Team spyware attack discouraged members until the number of participants made the project simply unsustainable. Several members of Mamfakinch subsequently organized the Digital Rights Association (ADN), an NGO dedicated to establishing and protecting rights such as freedom of expression online, access to digital technologies, protection of personal data and participative governance of the internet, among others. This shift in focus demonstrates the flexibility and creativity of these types of collectives and their publics. Unfortunately ADN seemed to be under attack from the beginning. In September 2014 ADN



released a communiqué on Facebook decrying intimidation from authorities that caused a Rabat hotel to decline to host a joint workshop of AMDH and Privacy International that was to end with a press conference announcing ADN's formation (ADN, 2014b). The workshop, "Freedom of expression and human rights in the digital age," took place at AMDH headquarters, but ADN's communiqué issues a warning that the organization has sought legal council and reminds authorities of existing legal protections for freedom of assembly.

ADN was not allowed to register as an NGO, meaning the association lacks government approval and is de facto illegal. In its Facebook profile the organization outlines its mission to "raise awareness, promote and undertake research on digital rights; Defend human rights in the digital space; Advocate, mobilize and foster the convergence of stakeholder initiatives - government, private sector, civil society, the media; Constitute a force of proposal in terms of Internet governance" (ADN, 2014a). The organization hosted its first "Rencontres Raqmiya" (Digital Meetings) Dec. 13-14, 2014 in Rabat under the theme "Internet: Between private life and freedom of expression." Like the earlier atelier, authorities blocked the scheduled venue, but the conference took place elsewhere with many former Mamfakinch bloggers attending. Several months later in February 2015 an ADN communiqué indicated that police raided their headquarters, to which the association responded by denouncing "this new violation of civil liberties, a new episode in a black series of systematic attacks carried out by the State since the summer of 2014 against human rights associations and for which our association has also paid the price" (ADN, 2015). Amid this generalized campaign of dissuasion, ADN continued its campaigns to educate and mobilize publics in opposition to reforms of the penal and press codes that increased legal provisions aimed at cracking down on digital dissent in a post-Arab Spring environment.

ADN collaborated with international privacy activists at Privacy International to produce a report titled “Their Eyes on Me: Stories of Surveillance in Morocco” that aims to give names and faces to the often invisible targets of cyber surveillance (PI, 2015). Four Moroccans, including three former Mamfakinch contributors, participated in the report: Hisham Almiraat, Samia Errazzouki, Yassir Kazar and independent journalist Ali Anouzla. The report highlights increasing threats to privacy and freedom of association/speech online in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, especially for activists associated with M20, highlighting threats posed by government investments in surveillance technologies and nationalist hacking groups. Above all the report makes clear that Moroccan authorities combined cyber surveillance with more traditional means of intimidation such as phone tapping and police questioning. “State agents” visited the family of one Mamfakinch blogger located abroad multiple times, an act she described as “not [about having] answers or information. It is just to intimidate me so I can get the message. It is just about ‘We want you to know that we’re watching you, not just online but in person’” (PI, 2015, p. 25). Likewise, the article states that “Ali Anouzla likes to remind people that he’s been a victim of spying of all types. ‘There have been cars following me outside of Rabat, someone once came to film the keyhole of my flat – it turned out that he worked for the secret services. And obviously phones are tapped’” (PI, 2015, p. 33). Long held restrictions on traditional media extended to the internet and new means emerged to keep activists in check.<sup>29</sup>

While the internet had been heralded as a new terrain for liberty in Morocco, government use of surveillance technologies and post-Arab Spring crackdowns on dissidents meant that for Almiraat “they have turned the internet into something dangerous for those who want to take part

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<sup>29</sup> Rather than imprison bloggers (especially those associated with M20) for their online activities, the regime began bringing trumped up drug charges against bloggers like Mohamed Sokrate, Mohamed Dawass and Said Ziani. Sokrate was allegedly forced into signing a confession so that his father and brother would be released from jail (RSF, 4 Oct 2012).

in the public debate but have something to lose” (PI, 2015, p. 20). This chilling effect was especially potent for those who were not well-versed in digital technologies to begin with. According to Yassir Kazar, who describes himself on Twitter as “a serial startup” of cyber security companies, people react differently to the trauma of having their privacy invaded. “Some people manage to transcend it and to turn into a positive experience and others remain traumatised, especially if technology was not their cup of tea in the first place” (PI, 2015, p. 30). For Kazar the experience was an affirming one in that the government felt sufficiently threatened by Mamfakinch to put significant effort into its surveillance and intimidation. And Mamfakinch was by no means/hardly the only independent site under attack in post-Arab Spring Morocco. Around the time that Mamfakinch was subject to the spyware attack *Lakome*, *Goud* and *Febrayer* were all targeted by hackers. Nationalist hackers were the culprits for the most part: Anouzla’s online accounts were accessed by the Royal Brigade of Dissuasion, *Goud*’s homepage taken over by the Electronic Islam Army and *Febrayer* suffered a spyware attack from Moroccan Repression Force. Whether centrally orchestrated by authorities, nationalist groups or individual hackers, the attacks are indicative of growing resistance to the use of the internet by independent media to shift norms of speech and articulate alternative modernities.

I spoke with Almiraat a few days after the press conference meant to be the official release of the Privacy International report in Morocco. “Very early in the morning there were four police vans blocking access to the venue,” he said, “and ADN is not the only one [experiencing this]” (Almiraat, personal communication, 2015). For Almiraat there is a general feeling that civil society has become the environment where ideas, like-minded people can come together to build alternative views of the future, a situation that makes it threatening to the status quo. And the authorities don’t have to do much to instill fear in people. “We still have memories

of 70s/80s/early 90s,” said Almiraat “so it’s not a big leap” (Almiraat, personal communication, 2015). In many ways ADN is a response to a paradigm shift coming out of the Arab Spring in regard to official/authority attitudes toward the internet, but also activist attitudes. The democratic utopian vision of the internet as a tool capable of confronting authoritarianism gave way to an emphasis on building institutional frameworks to support more traditional forms of political struggle, as seen in the heavy involvement of AMDH and more traditional civil society organizations in ADN efforts. According to Almiraat “There was this realization that the internet is not enough” (Almiraat, personal communication, 2015).

ADN substitutes depth for the breadth of a collective like Mamfakinch that was more oriented toward public engagement than institution building inside existing political frameworks. But getting people to see the pressing nature of privacy policies and regulatory frameworks is a more difficult task than harnessing the energy of a popular movement. The PI report intended to put a human face on that struggle, and was meant to be the first in a series of three reports produced in collaboration with ADN. “It’s hard to make people realize that privacy doesn’t only concern people who have something to hide” said Almiraat. “People don’t see the direct link between privacy and freedom of expression.” Almiraat says ADN targets law students and young technologists who are familiar with things like WikiLeaks and the NSA. “In that way we’re elitist or selective and even then it’s a hard sell,” he said, “but journalists seem to understand that privacy is fundamentally linked to freedom of access and freedom of expression.” In this way Mamfakinch opened up conversations that had been happening in private, smaller circles to include broader publics, while ADN is about having more targeted conversations with specific publics. In many ways these specific publics are the ones that were brought to the fore by the Arab Spring moment/movement and demands for dignity, democracy and accountability from

authorities. At a time when Moroccan news organization were not really online and electronic journalism was in its infancy, Mamfakinch found its niche in curating online information, mobilizing around human rights/freedom of speech and privileging secular voices, especially those associated with civil society and the independent press. For Almiraat, Mamfakinch's legacy as part of that moment is wrapped up in its combination of on- and off-line efforts, and of using technology to pursue public conversations about topics and issues off limits in mainstream media. "It was the epitome of what the internet can do best, that is bring together like-minded people to work together regardless of distance or geography. In 3-6 months we had something like a million unique visitors, which shows that people want to talk about sex, religion, the monarchy. Mamfakinch showed that the internet can achieve some sort of change and be a motor in some circles, provided that people also organize and do things offline" (Almiraat, personal communication, 2015).

### *Judicial harassment*

On May 9, 2015 Morocco's official state news agency, MAP, published a short news bulletin under the title "Accused of digital espionage, the Interior files complaint" (MAP, 2015). Barely two paragraphs, the bulletin states that the Interior Minister filed a lawsuit with the public prosecutor's office against "certain persons who have prepared and distributed a report containing serious accusations" of espionage by its services, citing an unnamed source from the Interior Ministry (MAP, 2015). MAP gives no names, but the news bulletin appeared three days after Privacy International and ADN presented "Their Eyes on Me." In an example of the opaque way in which the Moroccan judicial system works, Almiraat apparently learned about the lawsuit via media reports as he told Reuters "We suppose they are talking about us" (El Yaakoubi, 2015). A statement from Privacy International confirms "Since the MAP dispatch, the Ministry

of Interior has not disclosed further information. Neither Privacy International nor our local Moroccan partner – the Association des Droits Numériques (ADN) – has been contacted by the Moroccan government” (PI, 2015). While the report didn’t really reveal anything that hadn’t been circulating on the internet for years in regard to the Moroccan government’s purchase of spyware or intimidation of journalists and activists, bringing those allegation out to circulate in the open was apparently a step too far.

Almiraat’s odyssey with lawsuits and court cases was just beginning. In September Almiraat and Karima Nadir (ADN VP) were interrogated by the Moroccan Judicial Police (BNPJ) in conjunction with the defamation suit filed by the interior ministry (Alami, 2015; FIDH, 2015). Besides the initial defamation charges associated with the Privacy International report, Almiraat was also charged in conjunction with 6 other journalists and human rights activists: historian and journalist Maati Monjib, journalists Hicham Mansouri, Abdessamad Iyach/Iach, Maria Moukrim, and Rashid Tarik, plus Mohamed Saber/Essabr president of the Moroccan Association of Youth Education (AMEJ). The five journalists were affiliated with the Association Marocaine du Journalism d’Investigation (AMJI) and all seven had worked with Dutch NGO Free Press Unlimited on training Moroccans to use the open source smartphone app StoryMaker, which allows for producing and publishing media from Android devices. Their work earned Almiraat, Monjib, Mansouri,<sup>30</sup> Iyach and Saber accusations of “threatening the internal security of the state,” while Moukrim and Tarik are charged with accepting foreign funding without notifying the government (CIHRS, 2015). The accusations carry maximum penalties of five years in prison and hefty fines. The trial, initially set for November 19, 2015, has been postponed four times over more than a year and as of writing was scheduled to take

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<sup>30</sup> At the time of the charges, Mansouri was already in prison serving time on the pretext of adultery.

place on January 25, 2017 (FPU, 2016). Most of the defendants have been told not to leave the country or prevented from doing so at various points; all have the trial hanging over their heads.

Almiraat's work on human rights and freedom of expression campaigns made him the subject of one himself. The *Global Voices* network, for whom Almiraat served as advocacy director from 2012-2014, has been instrumental in organizing the #Justice4Morocco campaign to draw attention to the ongoing proceedings against the free speech advocates. International observers and media have been present for trial dates thus far, while one *Global Voices* report noted "The local press was conspicuously absent" from a press conference organized prior to the March 23, 2016 hearing (Advox, 2016). In an interview posted on the online publishing platform *Medium* in December 2016, Almiraat is described as "currently in self-exile fighting some unjust charges that could land him up to five years of prison" (Nex, 2016). In terms of the trial he believes "we are being given the Oscar for our whole careers as activists. By that I mean that what happened to us is only part of a larger post-Arab Spring crackdown on civil society actors" (Nex, 2016). It's hard not to believe that the trial of Almiraat and his peers is just another example of the Moroccan government pursuing charges against activists and civil society organizers that are unrelated to their real crimes of participating in and publicizing the pro-democracy movement in the country.

*"They want to send a clear message that it's the end of the party." -Almiraat*

Mamfakinch became a key part of an information infrastructure in that the collective curated content and mediated between citizen journalists/activists and more mainstream media. The organization's international reach and ability to move across boundaries through its transnational network and direct attention to abuses made it particularly threatening to a regime that goes to great lengths to cultivate its image among the international community. Mamfakinch and its

subsequent evolutions indicate that new information infrastructures and modes of cultural politics are emerging at the nexus of technological and symbolic networks. In the Moroccan context these are defined by flexible publics and a sort of nimble politics, where the ability to operate amorphously across multiple scales, to produce publics and address issues by harnessing popular culture, while responding quickly to the maneuverings of power, become particularly important. Mamfakinch constitutes an attempt to turn a powerful moment into a viable opposition by harnessing demands that span traditional political/ideological divisions and expanding the realm of relevant actors with a stake in reform - from youth shut out of the political process locally to international human rights organizations. By channeling digital tools toward the overcoming of mainstream media blackouts, Mamfakinch intervened/changed the conversation and expanded notions about who speaks for Morocco.

Official opposition to ADN and Almiraat's trial are above all indicative of the shifting attitudes of authorities toward the internet in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. What began as a tool for business and economic development quickly came under the same restrictions as traditional media as it became more accessible to publics and understood as a tool for organizing and orchestrating opposition. Mamfakinch's status as an intermediary and curator facilitated the formation of a double critique oriented toward both domestic power/politics and international interventions. The repression encountered by ADN since its beginning and the organization's uphill battle in establishing interest in privacy raises questions about what this type of public formation means for everyday governance and more conventional forms of activism.

Mamfakinch is just one site that contributed to the emergence of independent media and a new cultural politics in Morocco. The production of flexible publics that make claims directed to those in the highest echelons of power depended heavily on Mamfakinch's ability to marshal



both technological and symbolic resources. Mamfakinch moved back and forth across the local and the global, working with local activists, media outlets, NGOs and supranational organizations to challenge official state discourse and narratives about the nation. Morocco's history of suppressing dissent has made cultural spaces like a key site of contention over political visions that are more recently intersecting with newly networked and increasingly worldly youth digital cultures. This is restructuring of the norms of interaction between people and power, in that publics are increasingly accustomed to making demands of those in power and expecting a response. By acting as a public forum for the mediation of these claims, Mamfakinch was able to translate them into the language of universal rights and democratic norms, using its transnational activist networks to invoke a politics of shame that is particularly effective in claims against an externally oriented economy like Morocco's. International attention, although not without its challenges and problems, can then provide additional resources for local campaigns, as well as increased security for activists. So we see that what began as an attempt to turn the Arab Spring moment in Morocco into a viable opposition using media, developed into a new mode of cultural politics defined by the formation of flexible publics and restructuring the norms of interaction between people and power.

## Conclusion

Telquel has been sold, Nabil Ayouch's latest film banned, and ADN is practically inactive awaiting the outcome of Almiraat's charges. Many would say that there isn't really an independent media in Morocco today, or what Ksikes referred to as "pure players." But Telquel still finds some critical moments amidst its more commercial orientation, after Lakome.com was blocked in Morocco it became Lakome2.com and Ali Amar has launched Le Desk, an online investigative journalism outfit operating through investors and subscriptions, with several veteran journalists of other independent media ventures. Independent media in Morocco continue to be engaged in a constant process of reinvention and reimagining of business models in relation to challenges from authorities. But regardless of what the controversial news outlet, film or activist campaign of the moment is, the bottom line is that culture has become a wider field for contention and claim making under Mohammed VI and independent media have become a discursive force in terms of challenging the interpretive authority of the monarchy through the nexus of cosmopolitan cultural forms and everyday urban culture.

This dissertation looks at the shifting relationship between culture and politics associated the emergence of independent media, the conditions of possibility for which were produced by three decades of economic liberalization and a moment of political transition. Once the domain of the state and the monarchy, culture – understood as the conjunction of everyday lived experiences and symbolic systems – has been remediated through magazines, film and various digital media platforms and practices. As a result mediated publics have emerged that simultaneously decouple culture and politics from under state authority and blur the lines

between them, resulting in new modes of cultural politics whereby culture, and independent media in particular, becomes a space for the pressing of claims and political agendas in an increasingly mediated world. The increasing penetration of capital and transformations in the role of the state mean that to the extent that the goals of independent media intersect with state priorities – such as opposition to Islamism or portrayals of a Morocco open to the world – they are supported, while any challenge to the monarchy’s position above politics results in opposition or censure. The varied and often contradictory responses of authorities to discourses emanating from *Telquel*, the new Moroccan cinema and *Mamfakinch* make evident the extent to which independent media and the state operate in a dialectic of dependency and antagonism.

What emerges from this dialectic is a picture of independent media associated with a progressive counterpublic positioning itself in opposition to the impunity of the monarchy on one hand, and the rise of political Islam on the other, that can ultimately be understood as a response to the failings of political parties. The attempt of this counterpublic to reorient understandings of right and left on the political spectrum away from support (or lack thereof) for the monarchy toward respect for human rights and the rule of law is the latest in a long line of attempts over the last century to establish communicative spaces that revolve around civil liberties and dignity. What distinguishes the interventions of contemporary independent media like *Telquel*, the new Moroccan cinema and *Mamfakinch* are their attempts to work within the forces of capital and technology to create new discursive spaces within a broader Moroccan media landscape. In the process we see a shift from state-sanctioned culture to more democratic conceptions of culture where the tools of media production and circulation are increasingly accessible to average people at the same time that global media corporations have “discovered” place and cultural specificity as an asset. By engaging with the lived realities of Moroccan society that exist outside nationalist

discourses about a homogenous Arabo-Islamic society and transnational constructions of Arabs and Muslims as the “others” of modernity, independent media produce texts that display a fundamental ambivalence about modernities caught somewhere between increasing global inequality and the newly neoliberal state.

Fundamentally what I am talking about is the increasing penetration of capital as part of globalization, and Morocco’s entry into global modernity. For Dirlik (2003) global modernity constitutes a shift from Euro-American domination of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the relatively decentralized orchestrations – of power, capital, ideologies – of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The shifting cultural geographies associated with my three sites of analysis are caught up in this process of decentralization and in the rise of regional centers, wherein increasingly networked forms of capital and communication intersect with geopolitical priorities, domestic policies, transnational cultural elites and local public culture. In the case of *Telquel* this manifests in the magazine’s mobilization of a secular Moroccan identity through Darija in order to foster opposition to the monarchy’s Islamic cultural hegemony and increasing fundamentalist challenges, highlighting Moroccans who are challenging social norms and bringing the traditionally marginalized into the center of the conversation. In the cinema it takes the shape of a shift in scale from taking the national as the assumed frame of reference to operating according to a wider regional and global framework, in part due to transnational influences in cultural policy and their interactions with globalization. In the process, filmmakers moving between translocal priorities and global media imperatives become important mediating forces among multiple modernities and for the production of alternative discourses. Finally, in the case of *Mamfakinch* the collective taps into newly networked and increasingly worldly youth digital cultures in order to act as a platform for publics disillusioned with institutional politics and unaccustomed to making direct demands of

power. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring and Islamist electoral victories in Morocco and elsewhere, there is an overwhelming sense by progressive counterpublics that an even greater shift in mentalities is needed than previously imagined, and that creating spaces of engagement (mediated or otherwise) is a starting point for that in a highly stratified society. In many ways media capitalism and the rise of new platforms and practices adopted by a left in crisis coincided with an Islamic revival and the rise of political Islam, both of which are responses to globalization in their own ways and can be read as part of liberal visions of progress amidst growing populist resentment around the world.

This project is situated within the sub-field of global media studies that takes the local as its starting point for analyzing cultural geographies of media production across multiple scales. I focus on the reign of Morocco's current king, Mohammed VI, beginning in 1999 with his ascent to power and reforms that resulted in the opening up for civil society via freedom of association and media liberalization, and ending in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and its significant challenges to his authority. However, I situate these relatively recent events within the larger context of 30 years of economic liberalization and broader histories of dissent in Moroccan media. In looking at localized practices and interrogating the strategic use of discourses about hybridity in relation to power, it becomes clear that multiple forms of Moroccan modernity are being advanced by various actors and competing for legitimacy among publics. My intervention involves integrating analyses across industry logics, technological platforms and cultural politics, so that it becomes clear how political economic shifts and technological affordances create the conditions of possibility for certain types of claim making, as well as how those mediated claims are then taken up in public culture. Additionally, in regard to the emergent field of digital studies, I make the case that the artificial separating out of the digital makes little sense and that

in order to really understand the digital we have to look at it as part of intermedia relationships and convergences. Given the way media systems have developed around the world, I adopt a comparative, cross-platform approach in order to situate the digital in relation to other media forms.

The combination of *Telquel*, new Moroccan cinema and Mamfakinch allows for analysis of shared histories, transmedia storytelling and the movement of discourses across platforms. Quite unexpectedly I discovered the extent to which overlaps in people and ideas exist among these three sites: Benchemsi's inspiration for *Telquel* was a magazine started by Nabil Ayouch's father in the 1980s, the cinema sector was both closely covered by *Telquel* (as one of the NMC's most ardent supporters) and one of the earliest adopters of Darija, several Mamfakinch bloggers contributed to Benchemsi's post-*Telquel* project *Free Arabs*, and one Mamfakinch blogger is now a journalist at *Telquel*. These interconnections paint a picture of a relatively small circle of journalistic, artistic and political affinities, defined by shared commitments to franker discourse about the challenges facing Moroccan society and to bringing symbolic systems into greater proximity with the realities of everyday life. In doing so, they deploy a high degree of cultural (and often economic) capital as part of diasporic networks linked to a transnational left, and challenge official narratives by bringing a wider array of cultural forms and perspectives into the arena of public culture. The majority of these cultural producers came of age in a post-Years of Lead Morocco in the process of liberalization and are part of a generation initially emboldened by policy changes under Mohammed VI to challenge the notions of national unanimity constructed by the monarchy. By taking up disjunctures associated with ethnicity, class, religion, gender, etc, independent media illuminate the vastly varied ways in which new forms of global interconnectedness are experienced even locally.

## **Hybrid texts and multiple modernities**

At the start of this study I announced the intention to analyze versions of modernity advanced by Moroccan independent media and their intersections with orchestrations of power in a global era. The reterritorialization of the nation in accordance with the logics of global capital, and the use of those logics by independent media to create new discursive spaces via media platforms advances a particular agenda that can be seen as simultaneously oriented toward democratization/human rights and continuing colonial affinities through culture. Meanwhile, the top down modernity through which the monarchy simultaneously cultivates the appearance of a primordial Moroccan nation, its role as mediator of multiculturalism and force for modernization through its commitment to the ever-receding horizon of a democratic transition, effectively obscures the unequal distribution of power among groups as well as outright oppression orchestrated in the name of national consensus. Independent media challenge this consensus and the notion of modernity on which it rests by remediating/positioning the nation as a historically contingent construction capable of being reconstructed or reimagined in a diversity of ways. Ultimately, increased openness to and availability of global capital and new mechanisms for cultural production and circulation have opened up avenues for alternative storytelling and depictions of Moroccan life and experiences that challenge hegemonic narratives about society and culture through media, making public culture into a site of contention over diverse societal projects. In my analysis of *Telquel*, the new Moroccan cinema and *Mamfakinch*, three themes emerge that crosscut the three case studies a part of a new mode of cultural politics: language politics, alternative information infrastructures and publics in public culture.

## *Language Politics*

One of the major overarching themes of this dissertation is the use of language by the independent media examined here. *Telquel*, the new Moroccan cinema and Mamfakinch all make use of Darija, or Moroccan Arabic, as part of multilingual media texts: as a francophone news magazine *Telquel* advocates for and includes some Darija, new Moroccan cinema unapologetically makes films in Darija, or moves between languages by social setting, relying on subtitling for the accessibility of diverse publics, and one of Mamfakinch's primary markers as a digital information curator has been its movement between Arabic, French and English, with texts often appearing on the site in multiple languages. In this way independent media move away from Moroccan media's reliance on classical Arabic and its associations with traditional top-down forms of knowledge production, toward closer proximity with the way language actually operates as part of the discursive terrain that is Morocco. We see language operating as both a practical tool for inclusion and a symbolic resource signaling political affiliations emphasizing secularism in public life. However, the perceived roots of secularism in French colonial politics makes arguments over language particularly controversial, as does the sense of Arabic being under attack that originates with colonialism and is reinforced by contemporary, post-9/11 Islamophobia and attacks on the Middle East. In this environment advocacy for Darija is seen as an attack on classical Arabic as the sacred and infallible language of the Qu'ran, as well as the religious foundations on which the legitimacy of the monarchy rests. Thus what francophone elites and Darija advocates might perceive as an emphasis on local or indigenous cultural specificity is interpreted as an attempt to re-orient Moroccan cultural geography away from Arab-Islamic socio-linguistic spaces and toward strengthening European, especially French, affiliations even further. Generally, it's not Darija that publics oppose, but its



institutionalization as part of attempts to desacralize public discourse and knowledge production, which secular leftists say is a functional necessity given that certain topics can't be discussed in Arabic. Pervasive references to *langue du bois*, or a refusal to engage or speak directly position Arabic as a tool of obscurantism that perpetuates a lack of transparency on the part of those in power in their dealings with publics. Independent media use Darija in an attempt to close the distance between symbolic systems and lived realities of everyday life as part of a broader democratization of culture that also contributes its political goals as part of a progressive counterpublic.

### *Alternative Information Infrastructures*

*Telquel*, the new Moroccan cinema and Mamfakinch are all part of networks of cultural producers – journalists, artists, activists – acting as public intellectuals and negotiating new information infrastructures. We see infrastructure move from a way for colonial administration to visibly demonstrate technical expertise and efficiency as part of its civilizing mission, to part of the paternalistic function of the state under nationalist postcolonial elites, to a major justification for the existence of a new neoliberal state in a global era. The withdrawal, or in the Moroccan case, neoliberal reconfiguration, of the state's role in media as part of a creative industries model means that there is an emergent information infrastructure that sits alongside (and sometimes intersects or challenges) that of the state. While the state and its partners invest in material infrastructure aimed at making Morocco a communications and technology hub of Africa, especially for former French colonies, cultural producers – including journalists, artists, and activists – acting as public intellectuals are making use these material resources to create new discursive spaces that act as a front for liberal social projects oriented toward human rights and freedom of expression that might also be personally and professionally profitable. These

efforts are built on the scaffolding of intellectual and student movements associated with 1965, moving from radical ideologies of revolution that separated that moment from nationalism's earlier reformist orientation to human rights associations rooted in civil society. The exile of Arab intellectuals in Paris in the 1960s, as well as educational networks and an increasingly authoritarian monarchy, further strengthened intellectual connections to France and intermingling with transnational currents of leftist thought. Combined with colonial and Cold War histories of information infrastructures built around French capital and political agendas, independent media emerge as part of freedom of expression networks that are in many ways bound up with flows of capital, as seen in *Telquel's* roots in financial journalism. Morocco's continued alignment with the West in the "war on terror" is used to justify its purchase of repressive surveillance technologies that are then used to target dissent, as seen in the case of Mamfakinch. However, the rise of the digital and its institutionalization as a (more) open space for individual expression and entertainment meant that many underestimated its potential for organizing and shaping new practices and forms of publicness. By harnessing the cosmopolitan and creative energies of newly networked digital youth, independent media emphasize more fluid ideological commitments in conjunction with more individualist information production, circulation and consumption.

### *Publics and public culture*

The remaking of the Moroccan public sphere by independent media has produced new kinds of mediated publics born of a renewed cultural dynamism and interest in changes taking place in Moroccan society. One of the ways independent media try to do this is by going beyond the texts themselves to event-making and constructs public culture as an arena for debates and encounters that are generative of political possibilities. Despite the opening of Moroccan public culture to

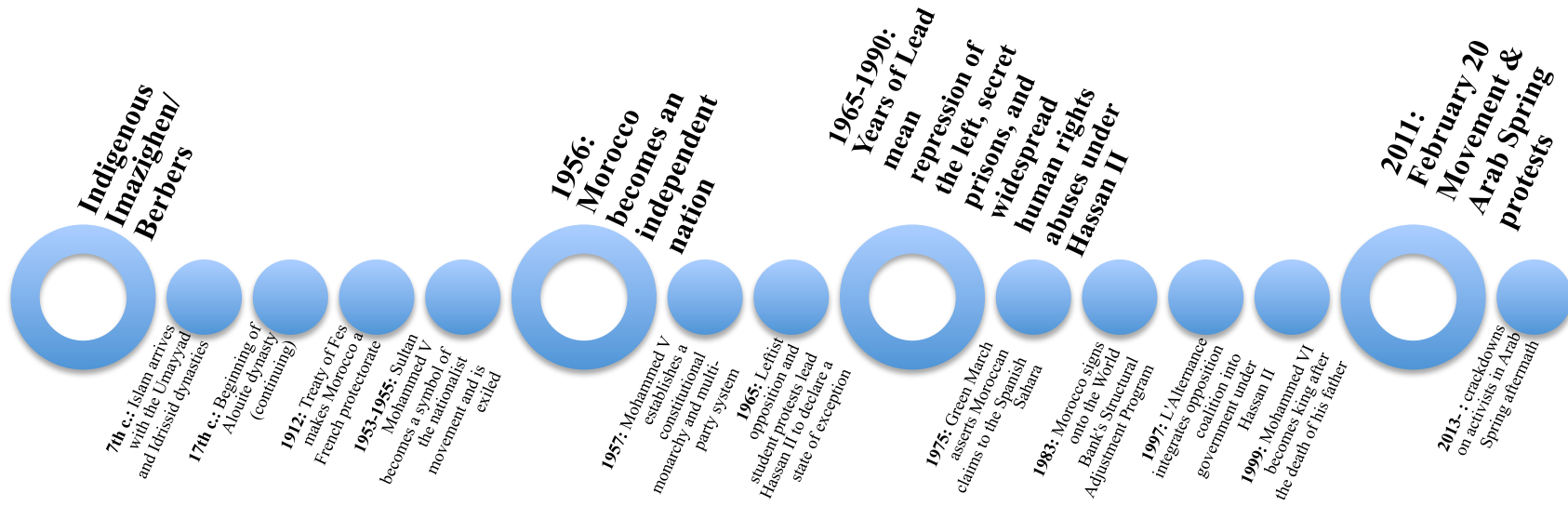
new forms of discourse and perspectives accompanying independent media, culture continues to be perceived as a relatively elite domain, and in the wake of the Arab Spring and an Islamist electoral victory, there is the sense that communication across split publics has become a social and political imperative. Constructing spaces for social mixing is difficult in a society where culture was long seen as subversive and freedom of association limited, and where deeply entrenched norms of sociability bisect around class and gender lines. In this environment, making rooms for a diversity of discourses, particularly underrepresented perspectives and publicizing marginalized forms of urban youth culture become a particularly important function for independent media. We see this in *Telquel*'s engagement with underground music scene, participating in the festivals, debates and cultural initiatives by filmmakers of the new Moroccan cinema and Mamfakinch's participation in online (i.e. Live-tweeting, petitions) and offline (protests and press conferences) mobilizations. In the process, new types of mediated publics emerge that I am calling "flexible publics" due to their flexibility in moving across platforms and ideologies, while also establishing a set of nonnegotiable principles around freedom of expression and human rights. Fundamentally we can think of this as a form of cultural politics by a left in crisis and an attempt to build a viable opposition in the face of increasing consolidation of power under the monarchy and a populist Islamist government.

### **Finally**

This dissertation deals with a specific set of closely intertwined independent media associated with a francophone elite/urban middle class, but with aspirations at speaking to and for broader publics and fundamentally challenging the cultural hegemony of the monarchy. But it's important to underline the fact that the progressive counterpublic associated with *Telquel*, the new Moroccan cinema and Mamfakinch is only one response to the rise of global modernity and

the reterritorialization of the nation as an authoritarian neoliberal state, with the other major response coming from an Islamic revival that has become a populist force in Moroccan politics. In order to further understand things like *Telquel's* sensationalist depictions of Islamists or popular outrage in response to challenging certain types of societal taboos, further analysis is needed of Islamist media and reactionary responses that are outside the scope of this project. This is particularly important given that there has been an attempt to reorient cultural geographies of Moroccan media production and consumption away from Europe and strengthen affiliations with the Middle East in a way that both supports the Moroccan monarchy and opens new markets. Given that the 2008 financial crisis in Europe and subsequent austerity measures have made money more scarce, the capital coming out of conservative gulf states like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE and Kuwait has been playing a greater role in Morocco, as seen in Vivendi's sale of its majority stake in Maroc Telecom to Etisalat. Overall, the emergence of independent media in Morocco can be seen as the product of shifting industry logics in Moroccan cultural industries to incorporate transnational flows of capital. The situation of this media within transnational civil society and activist networks allows for specific ideological interventions that push critical issues to the fore and challenge the cultural hegemony of the monarchy. Independent media then become a platform for the articulation of an alternative Moroccan modernity by a progressive counterculture and its contestation across public culture.

## Appendix A: Brief Timeline of Moroccan Political History



## Appendix B: Supplemental Telquel Images

Image 7



Telquel editorial meeting: Karim Boukhari (3<sup>rd</sup> from left) and Driss Ksikes (4<sup>th</sup> from left)  
Telquel, #9 (24-30 december 2001), p. 7

Image 8



Family tree of the publications produced by Telquel Média S.A., 2015

Image 9



Telquel #386, January 2007

“The international press supports us” - graphic showing logos from press organizations protesting Telquel’s latest ban

Image 10



Telquel cover #243, October 2006

Image 11

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Illustration accompanying Telquel's "Zakaria Boualem" column.



## Appendix C: The Daily Press in the Alternance Era

Going into the alternance era the partisan press remained dominant in the 1990s, with the socialist USFP's *al-Ittihad al-Ichtiraki* (Socialist Union) and center-right nationalist Istiqlal's *Al-Alam* (The Banner) securing the highest circulations. The daily press consisted of newspapers almost exclusively sponsored by political parties, unions or the state, often with separate francophone and arabophone editions. Besides *Al-Ittihad al-Ichtiraki* and *Al-Alam*, other major papers included *Al-Ittihad al-Ichtiraki*'s francophone counterpart *Libération*, *Al-Alam*'s francophone counterpart *L'Opinion*, the royalist *Le Matin*, the communist PPS's *Al Bayane* (The Dispatch), and later (1999) the moderate Islamic PJD's *Attajdid* (Renewal). Following the election of the Alternance government the first Moroccan independent daily newspaper appeared in October 1998, the arabophone *al-Ahdath al-maghribiya* (Moroccan Events) (Smolin, 2014; Vermeren, 2001). Smolin (2014) argues that *Moroccan Events* was the product of increasing sensationalism and commercialism in the Moroccan press, with its emphasis on crime and sex often encouraged by the state in order to increase its legitimacy as protector of the people. By 2004 Moroccan Events reached its peak with the highest daily circulation of 93,000 copies and since then has declined to a circulation of 24,000 in 2014 (OJD). Despite the success of Moroccan Events, the daily press remained largely conservative and close to those in power – it wasn't until several years later that other independent dailies really flourished, with *al-Massae* appearing in 2006 and *Akbar al-Youm* in 2009.

## Appendix D: The Politics of Nayda

Nayda became a much-reported on phenomenon in both Moroccan and foreign media outlets – including articles such as *Foreign Policy*'s “Nayda: Morocco's Musical Revolution” (Mekouar, 2010) and CNN's “Rappers in Casablanca rage against injustice” (Lakhani, 2012) – and subsequently received a great deal of scholarly attention. Many media and researchers tend to overstate Nayda's political dimensions, particularly in the wake of the Arab Spring. Caubet (whose Nayda article in *Telquel* is cited above) was one of the first scholars to publish extensively on the movement, frequently describing it as a “Moroccan Movida,” comparing it to the *Movida madrileña*, an artistic and political awakening associated with the Spanish transition to democracy following Franco's death in 1975. Some of the more nuanced and convincing commentary on Nayda include sociologist Zakia Salime's (2011) claims that hip hop and the Nayda movement in Morocco played a key role in establishing “the cultural frames and political claims” used by the M20 movement during the Arab Spring. Almeida (2013) argues that the Moroccan rap scene can be seen as a nonmovement (referencing Bayat, 2011) that constitutes a web of solidarities between individual actors who do not necessarily share ideologies, and that the cultural scene is more complex than revolutionary or cooptation accounts might suggest. In *Hip Hop Highways*, Bhat (2014) describes “a larger trend that has emerged since the Arab Spring to fetishize the revolutionary character of youth” and finds in her interviews with rappers their “desire to portray Moroccan youth as dynamic human beings with lives and concerns that exist outside of the Western obsession with democratic upheaval in Arab countries” (p. 31). Many young Moroccans associate Nayda with partying, moving and dancing rather than anything explicitly political, as Bhat (2013) confirms in her interviews. In this sense decorum and its disruption involves the throwing off of social conventions about being in public and the

refusal of a public to remain immobile, and whether that movement involves pleasure or politics, it undeniably involves new (often hybrid) cultural forms, experiences and ways of producing meaning.

In fact, some of the cultural production is not revolutionary at all. In a section titled “La Nayda, ‘movida’ ou coup de communication?” Vermeren (2009) questions who these new festivals<sup>1</sup> are for – Elites? Tourists? Investment? – and whether the Nayda movement is simply a communications strategy for a regime interested in perpetuating a less-authoritarian vision of itself both to its own publics and those abroad. In particular Vermeren (2009) questions Nayda’s characterization as progressive, noting the presence of patriotic lyrics that could be seen as quite conservative when compared with leftist groups of the 1970s. Popular rappers such as Don Bigg (2006) produced songs such as *Mgharba tal Mout* or “Moroccan until death,” a type of patriotism often seen as a response to the May 2003 suicide bombings in Casa, increases in security and the perception of Islam being targeted by the “war on terror.” In an *Telquel* editorial following the 2005 edition of L’Boulevard, Benchemsi describes a scene where gospel-gnawa fusion band Midnight Shems (midnight sun) extolled the virtues of *Allah, al watan, al malik* (God, country, king - Morocco’s national motto) and was joined by the crowd in singing the national anthem in an impromptu and enthusiastic expression of patriotism (Benchemsi, 2005, #180). Benchemsi cites an older man in his fifties as responding “It is well worth having suffered and been an activist for 30 years so these little shits can get excited about the king and country,” then goes on to portray the man as “closer to the unconditional of the *mouqaddassat* (the sacrosanct beliefs of Islam) than the young public of Midnight Shems”...who are living in a society where “the state, political parties and the ‘old’ in general are downright irrelevant”

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<sup>1</sup> Following the success of L’Boulevard, the Moroccan government invested heavily in what has been called “festivalization,” or programming major cultural festivals in many cities around the country.

(Benchemsi, 2005, #180). Benchemsi's near fetishization of youth is understandable in the light of widespread disillusionment with the unyielding ideological arguments of earlier generations, particularly those of the left, yet his comparison with the sacrosanct ideas of Islam doesn't seem to hold in a geopolitical arena rife with an identity politics where young Moroccans see themselves as Muslim first and Moroccan second (as a later *Telquel* study showed).

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