The February 20th Movement Communication Strategies: Towards Participatory Politics

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Communication Strategies of the Moroccan February 20th Movement:
Towards Participatory Politics

By:
Houda Abadi

Under the Direction Carol Winkler, PhD

ABSTRACT

The wave of mass protests in the Middle East and North Africa highlighted the crucial role of information communication technologies in mobilization and political change. Debate among scholars revolved around the Internet’s potential for toppling authoritarian regimes. However, rather than seeing the Arab Spring as a direct result of social media, this study examines how the online and offline media strategies converged, interacted, or prevailed within the various socioeconomic and political contexts. It looks at the purposes and functions of each medium, with a discussion of the dialectical relationship between them.

Drawing on interviews and fieldwork in Morocco, as well as a critical examination of the movement’s communications, this study contributes to the debate about the role of social media
and the Arab Spring. It analyzes an Arab Spring movement that did not call for regime change, investigates relationships between the activists’ use of online and offline media, and examines the multiple forms of communication flows in meaning making and nation building within dominant and non-dominant Moroccan publics. Finally, the study explores how the February 20th movement’s communication approaches functioned within the historical, cultural, and sociopolitical context of Morocco in the present day.

The findings show that the activists generally relied on the online social platforms to respond to state allegations against the movement, counter hegemonic practices of the state, and to mobilize followers both locally and internationally. While the online environment helped set the agenda for political discussion, it was also, unable, on its own, to mobilize the Moroccan people to the streets. Online platforms simply could not substitute for traditional offline communication, with the result that the activists had to utilize both online and offline communication channels. Dismissing the notion that a homogenous Moroccan communication strategy prevailed in the February 20th movement, the demographic and political contexts in specific cities played a major role in the choice of communication platforms or messages. The study found the activists relied on offline communication strategies, with a particular focus on aesthetic practices to mobilize the subaltern publics. Through implantation of various cultural and linguistic practices, the movement worked to reformulate the traditional concepts of nation and state, create a shared history of oppression and resistance, and envision a new era of participatory politics.

**Index Words:** social media, February 20th movement, online media, offline media, dialectics, aesthetics, subaltern publics, aesthetic protests
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Houda Abadi

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Communication Strategies of the Moroccan February 20th Movement:

Towards Participatory Politics

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis to my loving daughters Aya and Nouri. Thank you for your unconditional love, patience, and belief in me. Your reminders of “Mommy, you can do this” have given me the strength to persist and complete this project. Thank you for never failing to lift my spirits. You have made me stronger, better, and more fulfilled than I could have ever imagined. I love you all across the universe and back.
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Chapter One

Introduction to the Study

The self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi on December 17, 2010 symbolically ignited massive demonstrations within Tunisia that prompted the official resignation of President Ben Ali 28 days later. The tragic act of defiance unleashed anger across the region and Bouazizi became a national symbol for the youth’s hopelessness, misery, and desperation (Ben Yahmed, 2011). The 26-year-old street vendor from Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia set himself on fire in desperate protest against police humiliation and confiscation of his produce cart (Dabashi, 2012). His tragic death generated “a region-wide wave of sympathy, an empathy that was quickly politicized by the mass recognition of his desperation . . .[and] the long-term failure of Arab states to deliver on promises of citizenship, political freedom, and economic development” (Dodge, 2012, p. 5).

The fall of the long term Tunisian dictator empowered and emboldened youth in the region and galvanized popular political action in Egypt. Contributing to the growth of the Egyptian movement were the online activities of 31-year-old Google marketing executive Wael Ghonim. Ghonim’s “We are all Khaled Said” site commemorated a blogger who Egyptian police had murdered in 2010. Ghonim (2012) used his Facebook page to raise public awareness about police brutality, corruption, and the lack of democracy in Egypt. He sent one simple message: “Today they killed Khaled. If I don't act for his sake, tomorrow they will kill me . . . Egyptians, my justice is in your hands” (p. 60). The site quickly gathered thousands of online members and became one of the most popular dissident Facebook groups in Egypt (Lim, 2012). The resulting Facebook group provided the diaspora with an online platform where they could connect to the issues facing Egyptians day to day and to participate with their fellow citizens. As such, it created domestic and transnational networks that exerted pressure on the elites (Lawson, 2012).
Many Egyptians identified with the use of the first person call (i.e., “We are all Khaled Said”) on the Ghomin site. Thousands of people mobilized, took to the street, and protested against police brutality. Protestors carried posters of a smiling young Khaled Said juxtaposed with his battered corpse (Wright, 2011). Affiliated groups organized several silent protests involving thousands of Egyptians, including the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize winner Mohamed ElBaradei (Lim, 2012). The “We are all Khaled Said” movement intensified the emotions of anger, frustration, and resentment against the Mubarak regime (Lim, 2012). Activists used Said’s brutal death as a representative anecdote to encourage a collective fight against corruption and police brutality and to engage disaffected youth in the cause of political change.

The Arab Spring serves as a powerful example of the people’s power, creating a new youth synergy across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). A wave of protests and demonstrations swept the region producing a domino effect where young people demanded their governments provide political, economic and social reforms. Shared years of repression, high unemployment, food inflation, corruption, poor living conditions, human rights abuses and lack of political freedom in the region triggered revolutionary waves of protests (Frangonikolopoulos & Chapsos, 2012; Nashashibi, 2012). Thousands of people poured into the streets and demanded the fall of their regimes. In a period of just six months, the geopolitical map of MENA drastically changed (Dabashi, 2012). As the vast protests in Tunisia (one of smallest in the MENA region in terms of territory and population) and in Egypt (one of the largest countries in the region) succeeded in toppling autocratic regimes and dictatorial governments, similar mass movements spread throughout the Arab world in the hopes of breaking the chains of fear and oppression.
The Arab Spring empowered and promoted political and civil liberties in the Middle East and North Africa. As Agathengelou and Soguk (2011) eloquently stated, "these regions and peoples, once bracketed as ‘traditional’ and lacking agentic visions, and hence having no ability to chart the course of their communities, let alone to change and shape their world, are now making a visible and audible claim to global just politics” (p.552). Ordinary people challenged societal taboos, governmental establishments, and demanded political changes from their leaders.

One key group empowered by the Arab Spring was women, who defied their stereotypes as helpless victims of oppressive patriarchies. As Nada Darwazah of the UN Human Rights Middle East Office argued, "The Arab uprising has at long last empowered women to claim a larger presence and role in the public arena, which is something revolutionary, and somehow contrary to decades of gender stereotyping" (United Nations-Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, n.d., para. 2). In fact, the Arab spring unveiled “numerous examples of courageous Arab women heroes risking not only their reputation but also their physical safety for the sake of reform” (Al-Malki et al., 2012, p.81). The Arab Spring brought about a new era of possible opportunities for female citizens in the Arab world.

This sweeping wave of political upheaval of the Arab Spring also fundamentally altered the region’s interactions with global powers. It toppled regimes, realigned states for geopolitical interests, and showed the limitations of American power in the Middle East (Agathangelou & Soguk, 2011; Keiswetter, 2012). The geopolitical changes and revolutionary forces threatened western domination of the region (Dabashi, 2012), as the western policy of containment and backing of Arab autocrats in the interest of stability had proven to be a failure (Human Rights Watch World Report, 2012). The unprecedented show of the people’s power to remove Arab dictators through grassroots popular revolts "shattered the familiar presumption that only a
western European or a North American is the authentic agent of direct (i.e. unmediated) democracy and political change" (Agathangelou & Soguk, 2011, p. 552). The Arab Spring thus became a historic moment in MENA’s history rich with the promise of reform and democracy.

Whether a temporary phenomenon or a lasting impetus for change, the Arab Spring fundamentally altered the internal political landscape in the MENA region. Autocratic presidents in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, and Libya lost their positions as they tried to cling to the status quo. Constitutional monarchies, like the one in Bahrain, relied upon financial backing from the United States and Saudi Arabia to suppress its popular uprising with heavy violence. Some monarchical governments, such as those leading Morocco, Jordan, and the Gulf States, accommodated some of the citizen movements’ demands. For example, in Saudi Arabia, the regime pacified the domestic unrest with a reform package worth over $150 billion and granted Saudi women the right to vote in the 2015 municipal elections (Lawson, 2012). In Morocco, King Mohammed VI allowed the people to vote in a national referendum on a revised constitution that purportedly curbed his powers and called for the official recognition of the Amazigh languages. In Jordan, King Abduallah dismissed the unpopular government of Samir Rifai, which led to an electoral commission. However, in both the cases of Jordan and Morocco, the Kings’ executive powers remained effectively undiminished (Dalacoura, 2012).

Though the Arab Spring has brought many positive changes, the rapid and expected social and political transformations in the region have proven difficult. Both internal and external actors have employed a sectarian narrative to advance their own geostrategic and political interests. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 has emerged as a central factor in fueling sectarian tensions. The balance of power in Iraq shifted, providing an opportunity for Iran to project its influence in the Levant and deepen its ties with the Assad regime and Hezbollah in
Lebanon. As a result Saudi Arabia and Iran are now battling for regional supremacy, as the events in Yemen and Syria make evident. Yemen is on the verge of a civil war in the aftermath of the Houthis takeover. Saudi Arabia and a wide coalition of Gulf countries, including Egypt, Sudan, Morocco, and Jordan, are bombing Yemen. In Syria, a flow of weapons and money to Sunni rebel groups from foreign nations (e.g., the United States, Turkey, Qatar, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia) continues. On the other hand, Russia, Iran and Iraq are assisting the Assad regime with weapons, money, and militia. Consequently, sectarian fighting between the Sunnis and Shia has overshadowed and forestalled regional political reforms.

Furthermore, severe challenges still face the people in their day-to-day quest for safety and freedom. In Egypt, another military dictatorship has replaced the Mubarek regime. In Syria, the civil war is entering its fifth year, leaving more than 220,000 dead, and more than half of the country’s population displaced as a result of the ongoing violence (United Nations-Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2015). In 2011, public opinion polls in Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE found a public divided between those who thought the region “was better off” and others who thought it was “too early to tell” (Zogby International, 2011). In 2014, polls in these same countries found that the number of those who thought the region was worse off had more than doubled (Zogby Research Services, 2014). The initial, simplified notion of a single Arab Spring trajectory has now developed into a much more complex narrative that highlights the differences in the trajectories at work within each country.

The international media provided oversimplified explanations for the factors giving rise of the Arab Spring movement. Articles in major western newspapers highlighted the democratic role of social media in the Arab Spring rather than presenting a more nuanced understanding of the historical, sociopolitical and cultural context that gave rise to the protest movements. For
example, one headline in the *New York Times* described the Egyptian Revolution as “Spring Awakening: How an Egyptian Revolution Began on Facebook” (Vargas, 2012). Similarly, the BBC correspondent Paul Mason (2011) wrote in the *Guardian*, “Technology has expanded the power of the individual-their sense of injustice, social and personal- and the whole recent history of revolt, from Iran to Egypt to the French banlieues, is driven by this” (para. 16). Hugh Tomlinson (2011) wrote in the *London Times* that the contribution of social media had become one of the most persuasive narratives around the Arab Spring. Another *London Times* columnist wrote, “The Arabs finally understood the power of new media” (Binyon, 2011, p. 6-7). As Cottle (2011) argued, the failure of international media to cover collective dissent in the Middle East prior to the Arab Spring (e.g. the Kefaya movement between 2004-2007 and the 12 hours of the 2003 protests in Tahir) contributed to situating the Arab Spring as a series of sudden and spontaneous revolutions divorced from the region’s historical and political contexts.

**Communication Approaches to the Arab Spring**

Prior to the 2011 Arab uprising, communication scholars began to examine the relationship between the increasing penetration rate of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the democratization reform process within MENA (e.g., Eickelman & Anderson 2003; Seib, 2007). A key factor motivating the study of social media in the Arab world was the fact that a majority of the MENA population was under the age of thirty and was increasingly savvy with technology. The Arab region has more than 135 million Internet users with an average annual growth rate of close to 30 percent (Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government, 2014) and a regional mobile penetration rate of 110 percent (Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government, 2014). From 2010 to 2011, the total number of Facebook users in the region has doubled (Dubai School of Government, 2011). Countries like the UAE, Bahrain,
Qatar, and Kuwait have penetration rates above 50 percent, while the average regional rate stands around 28 percent (Dubai School of Government, 2012). Youth between the ages of 15 and 29 make up 70 percent of Facebook users in the Arab World (Dubai School of Government, 2012).

Most pre-Arab Spring communication scholarship concluded that ICTs would facilitate the growth of democracy in the MENA region. Disregarding claims that low Internet penetration rates would cause ICTs to fail to reach mass audiences, for example, Howard (2010) argued that communication technologies enabled democratic change in Muslim countries due to content distribution between networks of family and friends. Other communication and media scholars maintained that social media gradually increased the pressure for democratization and reforms due to broader citizen access to independent news (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003; Lynch, 2006). However, none of the earlier studies predicted that social media would play a "significant and protagonist role in the overthrow of authoritarian regimes" (Frangonikolopoulos & Chapsos, 2012, p.10).

Since 2011, many studies of the Arab Spring have concluded that ICTs were one of the major contributing factors to the rise of the revolutions (e.g. Allagui & Kuebler, 2011; Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Castells, 2012; Cottle, 2011; El Nawawy & Khamis, 2012; Frangonikolopous & Chapsos, 2012; Ghonim, 2012, Howard & Hussain, 2011; Khamis, 2011; Lim, 2012; Stepanova, 2011; Wilson & Dunn, 2011). Such studies enumerated the benefits and democratic potential of ICTs, some going so far as to dub it “Revolutions 2.0,” the “Facebook Revolution,” and the "Twitter Revolution”. For example, the Project on Information Technology and Political Islam (2011) concluded that social media played a central role in shaping political debates, often preceded major events on the ground, and helped spread democratic ideas across international borders. In the *Role of Digital Media*, Howard and Hussain (2011) adopted a
similar perspective: “There are many ways to tell the story of political change. But one of the most consistent narratives from civil society leaders in Arab countries has been that the Internet, mobile phone, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter made the difference this time” (p. 35). Howard and Hussain maintained that new media transformed localized and individualized dissent into a structured, organized movement that mobilized for a common cause.

By selectively focusing on the Arab Spring as a social media phenomenon, some communication scholars and media outlets falsely positioned technology as the single driver of social change. The excitement around web 2.0 platforms led Mark Pfeifle, former U.S. National Security Advisor, to call for nominators to consider Twitter for the Nobel Peace Prize (Rodriguez, Ferron & Shamas, 2014). Given that only a small group of online users generated a significant amount of content (Wilson & Dunn, 2011), an overly deterministic perspective is misleading, as no direct correlation exists between the spread of online social media and the tendency for social protests (Stepanova, 2011). The Arab Spring revolutions did not happen exclusively in cyberspace; activists had to move beyond Facebook pages and tweets. People had to be willing to be physically present in the streets and put their own lives at risk to demand that their governments meet their goals (Agathangelou & Soguk, 2011; Khoury, 2011).

Other communication scholars openly denounced deterministic views of social media in the Arab Spring, but still depended on those same platforms as the basis of their research. For example, Della Ratta and Valeriani (2012) explicitly rejected the view that the Arab Spring was Internet-determined or exclusively Internet-based, but their analysis still used online platforms, web application features, and Arab tech savvies as the central components of their study’s methodology.
Nuancing the simplistic assumption by some that social media alone spawned the Arab
Spring, communication studies have begun to document the various roles ICTs did play in the
Arab Spring. ICTs helped organize, disseminate information and raise public awareness about
critical issues facing the country (El Nawawy & Khamis, 2012; Frangonikolopoulos & Chapsos,
2012; Kurzman, 2011; Lynch, 2011; Stepanova, 2011; Youmans & York, 2012), create emotional
bonds (Castells, 2012; Frangonikolopoulos & Chapsos, 2012; Ghonim, 2012; Howard and
Hussain, 2011; Lim, 2012), form networks of affinity and solidarity (Allagui & Kuebler, 2011;
Benkler, 2006; Castells, 2012; Ghonim 2012), function as platforms for political contestation
enabling the exchange of civic discourse (Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; El- Nawawy & Khamis,
2012; Ghonim 2012; Khamis, 2011, Lim, 2012; Lynch, 2011), serve as a mobilizing tool (El
Nawawy & Khamis, 2012; Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Ghonim 2012, Khondker, 2011; Lim,
2012; Lynch, 2011), and act as a media watchdog to engage the international audience (Cottle &
Libby, 2011; Lynch, 2011; Wilson & Dunn, 2011). In sum, the lower cost of entry invited
participation from local and transnational networks, built solidarity, and generated feelings of
identification among online users.

That said, those who study communication approaches to the Arab Spring need to move
beyond the debate on the democratic revolutionary nature of the Internet (Aouragh & Alexander,
2011), recognizing that not all platforms of cyberactivism will be equally successful as catalysts
for political change (El Nawawy & Khamis, 2012; Moharan-Martin, 2000; Rodriguez, Ferron &
Shamas, 2014). While Internet tools are a powerful force in disseminating information and may
serve as accelerating factors of social protests, different sociopolitical factions may utilize these
very same tools for different political purposes. Revolutionaries and authoritarian regimes alike
use social media to serve political goals of (Rodriguez, Ferron & Shamas, 2014; Youmans &
York, 2012). Further, youth in the MENA region utilize other forms of creative media and alternative communication channels to ignite public mobilization and civic engagement from below.

For successful mobilization and change, Arab Spring activists had to establish strong ties beyond the sphere of online communication (Tarkowski, Fathy & Melyantsou, 2011). Mosques, soccer fields, coffee shops and cabs widened oppositional networks and complement urban social elite networks, serving as crucial spaces for information dissemination (Lim, 2012). According to Tufeki and Wilson’s (2012) study, which focused on the relationship between social media and the decision to participate in political protest, 48.4 percent of participants heard about Tahrir Square demonstrations through face-to-face communication, 28.3 percent through Facebook, and 13.1 percent through the telephone. Activists engaged in a wide range of outreach tools that were not technologically driven, such as, flyers, pamphlets, music, visual images, re-appropriated national symbols, and other aesthetic forms of protest to reclaim the streets.

**Description and Significance of the Project**

This research study will contribute to the debate about the role of social media and the Arab Spring by analyzing Morocco’s February 20th movement’s use of online and offline communication messaging strategies. It investigates the purposes and usage of these mediums and the dialectical relationship between them. The study uses a qualitative, multi-method approach that includes interviews with senior strategists of the February 20th movement, on-site observations of movement events in Morocco, a rhetorical analysis of the online and offline communications, and a deep analysis of the political, historical, and cultural context. It explores the social movement’s approach for building a collective identity for mobilization and the transformation of the overall social structure to strengthen citizenship rights. The study will
expand the definition of social and emerging media to privilege situated experiences and indigenous production of knowledge. As such, it will offer a more nuanced analysis of social movements’ consumption, production, and circulation of emerging new and social media and its relationships within cultural, social, and political context.

As will be discussed below, the study expands understandings of the Arab Spring in four ways. First, it shifts the focus on Arab Spring communication studies to a movement that did not call for regime change. It gives greater attention to a nation state that remained stable and evaluates how creative nodes of political and social possibilities could help avoid violent, future outcomes. Second, it investigates relationships between the activists’ use of online and offline media(s). Third, it discusses the strategic targeting of subaltern populations to create meaning and encourage participatory politics from below. Finally, it expands on previous studies of the February 20th movement by examining how the social activists in the February 20th movement challenged the hegemonic system, how they utilized particular communication channels for specific purposes, and how they worked to mobilize subaltern publics. Through these advances it will lay the foundation for the development of a new theoretical framework more suitable for future studies of social media in MENA social movements.

Moving beyond Regime Change Studies of the Arab Spring

Most communication studies examining the role of social media in the Arab Spring have focused on the experiences of countries that sought a regime change (e.g., Allagui & Kuebler, 2011; Comunello & Anzera, 2012; Della Ratta & Valeriani, 2012; Howard, Duffy, Freelon, Hussain, Mari & Marzaïd, 2011; Khamis, Gold & Vaughn, 2012; Khamis & Vaughn, 2011; Khamis & Vaughn, 2012; Lim 2012; Stepanova, 2011; Tawkoski, Fathy & Melyantsou, 2011; Valeriani, 2011; Wilson & Dunn, 2011). To date, the majority of the field’s studies on the Arab
Spring have focused on Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria to illustrate the potentials and limitations of cyberactivism in promoting mobilization and sociopolitical change. While most of these studies examine MENA countries that did experience leadership turnover, a few have focused on the Syrian government, where the regime retains its power through brutal violence and repression (Della Ratta & Valeriani, 2012; Khamis, Gold & Vaughn, 2012). The studies on the Syrian movement have evaluated the evolutionary stage of the tech culture (Della Ratta & Valeriani, 2012) and the role of the Internet in information sharing and mobilizing the Syrian people (Della Ratta & Valeriani, 2012; Khamis, Gold & Vaughn, 2012). One study compared the Arab Spring experiences in Egypt and Syria by examining both the responses of the activists and the regimes to their country’s respective communication strategies and by analyzing how political activists used both ICTs and traditional offline media communication to promote citizen journalism, mobilize, and combat repression (Khamis, Gold & Vaughn, 2012).

Although the Arab Spring collectively did mark a power shift and the end of stability for several authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, its character defies any single, homogenous interpretation. As Anderson (2011) states, “Tempting as it is to treat the Arab uprisings as a single movement, their causes and future missions demonstrate the many variations between them” (p.6). The revolutions that occurred within various states reflected divergent economic grievances and sociopolitical dynamics (Allagui & Kuebler, 2011; Anderson, 2011).

Examining protest movements that did not call for a regime change is important for understanding long-term changes and mobilizations in the region. As Fanon (1967) reminds us, liberation is more than a physical removal of a dictator; political and social consciousness is of utmost importance. Because the post-revolutionary democratic transitions in Tunisia, Egypt,
Yemen, and Libya have been fragile and may be short-lived, a better understanding of how communication strategies function in movements focusing on internal, long-term institutional reforms seems warranted. Nation building strategies, participatory politics, and identity politics are all avenues of understanding that could result from a focus on long-term political changes.

The context of communication and messaging strategies operating in movements that did not ask for regime change is also arguably different from ones that called for government overthrow. Movements that worked within nations run by monarchies that accepted reform instead of regime-based remedies worked from a different contextual framework than their Arab Spring counterparts. For example, monarchies have historically employed a ritualization of political discourse that hinders an opposition’s mobilization capabilities. Monarchies rely on symbols and rituals, rather than domination through violence, to legitimize and strengthen their regimes (Daadaoui, 2011). Because of a ritualized and, at times, sacred monarchical public sphere, engrained norms have and continue to function as a unique rhetorical exigency. Within such a context, activists must employ discursive strategies in creative and unique ways in order to dislodge the authoritarian constraints.

This study shifts the focus on the Arab Spring communication studies to a movement that did not call for regime change. The study will analyze how the February 20th movement in Morocco deployed a combination of direct and indirect communication strategies to dislodge authoritarian constrains while still acknowledging and sustaining monarchical authority. Further, the study will examine the various interactions between the state and the February 20th movement, demonstrating how the actions of each one prompted reactions by the other. The study will add to the Arab Spring communication scholarship by not only examining a movement that did not call for regime change, but by also examining the communication strategies of the
movement in context to the political context within which it operated. The study will illustrate the continuous hegemonic and counterhegemonic responses and struggle between the state and the monarchy.

**Moving beyond Online/Offline Binaries in Studies of the Arab Spring**

Most studies of communication strategies and Arab Spring movements have also limited their focus to online strategies rather than explore the dialectical, interdependent interactions between online and offline media (e.g. Allagui & Kuebler, 2011; Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Castells, 2012; Cottle, 2011; El Nawawy & Khamis, 2012; Frangonikolopous & Chapsos, 2012; Ghonim, 2012, Howard & Hussain, 2011; Khamis, 2011; Lim, 2012; Stepanova, 2011; Wilson & Dunn, 2011). Yet, some scholars have recognized that because Arab Spring activists wanted to ensure their followers had a continuous flow of content, they constantly shifted from one media platform to the next (Aouragh & Alexander, 2012). Of the few studies that have examined the interdependent relationship between online and offline media, the authors generally relied on anecdotal accounts without indicating if they employed a systematic, empirically-based model to reach their conclusions. These same studies also generally limited their focus to traditional forms of offline media such as face-to-face communication, pamphlets, brochures, public places, and mobile phones (e.g., Comunello & Anzera, 2012; Lim, 2012; Tarkowski, Fathy, Melyantsou, 2011; Wilson & Dunn, 2011). Recognizing that the Egyptian regime used online platforms to monitor, defame, and attack the opposition, for example, Tarkowski, Fathy & Melyantsou (2011) reported that activists widely circulated an Egyptian Arabic pamphlet on how to protest intelligently. It explicitly warned readers not to use social media such as Facebook and Twitter to divert the Egyptian security forces (Lawson, 2012). Further, Khamis, Gold, & Vaughn (2012) reported that Syrian activists used mobile phones, cameras, tapes, and laptops to document state
repression and violence. Aware of state surveillance, activists in both countries relied on traditional offline media to divert security forces and mobilize their targeted public.

A dialectical understanding of Arab Spring movements’ use of online and offline media is important for several reasons. It eschews technological determinism by avoiding fetishization of social media and instead highlights the relationship between technology, political economy, and social relations (Aouragh, 2012; Hirst 2012). Further, it demonstrates that how protest movements can utilize online and offline platforms as extensions of one another. It highlights the complex interrelationships and negotiations between the two mediums, as well as highlighting the activists’ reasons for deploying message strategies across various channels within the communication mosaic.

This study systematically examines how and why the online and offline media strategies converged, interacted, or prevailed within various socioeconomic and political contexts. The study maps the full terrain of communication strategies that February 20th activists utilized to accomplish social change. It expands the definition of social media to include nontraditional forms of offline communication strategies. It looks at aesthetic offline practices of the February 20th movement, such as music, story telling, street theater, slogans, movies, and film. It addresses the reasons behind the activist’s choice of adopting particular media channels, the various emerging contexts of particular technologies, and the domestication of the Internet to address local issues (e.g., use of local dialects). By discussing a fuller range of media channels that the movement’s senior strategies utilized, it provides a more holistic approach for understanding the dialectical relationship between online and offline media, and how those interactions functioned and competed within local contexts.
Moving beyond Educated, and Wired Populations in Studies of the Arab Spring

Previous studies examining the Arab Spring and social media have primarily featured the impact of movement strategies on urban, wired, young, and educated segments of the populations (e.g., El Nawawy & Khamis, 2012; Khamis, Gold & Vaughn, 2012; Lim, 2012; Salime 2012; Valeriani, 2011). As an example, Wilson & Dunn (2011) interviewed respondents from Tahir who were predominantly male (75.5%), young (under the age of thirty), well educated (77% reported some kind of college degree) and had wide access to Internet (80.4% access in their homes and 50.1% in their phones). Regional surveys examining social media in the Arab Spring have also concluded that the majority of the online social media sites users were under the age of thirty, urban, and relatively educated (e.g. Dubai School of Government, 2011; “Profils des utilisateurs de Reseaux Sociaux au Maroc,” 2012; Wilson & Dunn, 2011).

Despite the obvious value of this previous work, such studies risk ignoring the region’s high illiteracy rates, its digital divide, and the fact that the majority of the population in the Arab world is neither wired nor urban. As Tarkowski, Fathy & Melyantsou (2011) argued, communication studies generally ignore the poor and unwired people that risked their lives and fought the police and military troops to enable the opening of Tahrir Square. The example of Egyptian Facebook activists is instructive as, despite their influence in public political discourse, these activists still represent only a small fraction of the population (Khamis, Gold & Vaughn, 2012). Outside of Tahrir Square, Casablanca, and Tunis, the field of communication studies does not yet know how movement strategists interacted with citizens from rural, less cosmopolitan segments of society and what form of media were most popular in those areas.

Even though previous studies of social media in the Arab Spring map out contextual social media usage, they have not examined the different sociopolitical and cultural inclusions
and exclusions that arose within the protest movements. High fragmentation and internal civil strife make a broader perspective particularly important in a post-revolutionary context. By focusing on dominant audiences in high profile national and transnational events, scholars can misrepresent or ignore non-dominant publics or the subaltern class altogether. The inclusion of strategies designed to target broader segments of the population in the Arab Spring movements is needed to address adequately the cultural and political impact the media environment has on the different publics. In her analysis of the Egypt protest movement, Rabab El Mahdi explained the need to include subaltern groups:

[T]he underlying message here is that it these “middle-class” educated youth (read: modern) are not “terrorists,” they hold the same values as “us” (the democratic West), and finally use the same tools (Facebook and twitter) that “we” invented and use in our daily-lives. They are just like “us” and hence they deserve celebration. These constructions are clear from a quick look the CNN, Time, Vanity Fair and others representations of the so-called leaders or icons of this revolution. They are all middle (upper) class Egyptians under the age of thirty. Most of them have one or more connection to the West, either by virtue of education (Time’s cover feature of seven “youth,” included three students from the American University in Cairo), work (e.g. Wael Ghoneim, sales manager at Google), or training . . . Thus the class composition of dissent has been cloaked by a new imaginary homogenous construct called “youth.” In this construct, the media and academic analysts lump together the contradictory and often conflictual interests of “yuppies” (young, urban, professionals of the aforementioned connections and backgrounds) with those of the unemployed, who live under the poverty line in rural areas and slum-areas. Under this banner of “youth” the “yuppies” and upper
middle-class young people are portrayed as the quintessential representative of this uprising (2011, par, 2).

Amin (2008) and Kraidy (2008) agreed, arguing that more theoretical and empirically grounded research on Arab audiences is necessary to capture the viewing habits and preferences of lower income segments that make up the vast majority of the population. By taking a broader look at the communication strategies targeting particular audiences, scholars can more adequately address the cultural impact of changing media environment on the different publics.

Studies of social media and the Arab Spring should not ignore the political reality of poor urban and rural populations, as democracy frequently most often cannot take root without the participation of these groups. Many studies of the Arab Spring presuppose a homogenous populace that serves as the target population for the movement. However, cultures are polyvocal, multilayered, fractured, and decentered. By taking a broader look at how communication strategies target particular audiences, communication scholars can more adequately address the cultural impact of changing media environment on the different, and often disparate, publics.

This study adds to the Arab Spring communication literature by exploring how the February 20th movement’s senior strategies targeted marginalized publics. No previous study has systematically analyzed how the February 20th movement deployed communication media or message strategies to reach the diverse segments of the population. This study does not treat the Moroccan public as one homogenous public and places emphasis on strategies that targeted the marginalized poor and urban publics. It examines the localized context of the struggle and their effect on imbalanced flows of communication, identifying factors that led to participatory gaps.
This study adds to the current literature on the Arab Spring and social media by examining activists’ media strategies towards these marginalized segments of the population.

Moving beyond the Current Studies of the February 20th Movement

Most previous studies that analyze the February 20th movement in particular have focused on political openings that gave rise to collective action, changes within formal state institutions, and the 2011 constitutional reforms. Drawing on structural theories of movement mobilization, each of these efforts has concentrated on political opportunities, resource availability, and state structures (e.g., Daadaoui, 2011; Dalmasso, 2010; Dalmasso & Cavarorta, 2011; Maghraoui, 2012; Molina, 2011). Dalmasso (2012), for example, highlighted the electoral victory of the Islamist party Justice and Development (PJD) as a meaningful first step toward successful Moroccan political reform, as the King retreated from the political sphere, allowed the parliamentary elections to take place, and accepted a restructuring of the political parties. Molina (2011), however, characterized the resulting constitutional reforms as cosmetic, concluding that no substantial change would be forthcoming. Maghraoui (2011) argued that the lack of a genuine constituent assembly demonstrated the weakness of the current fragmentation of political parties and the hegemonic control the King still had over the political process. All of these studies assessed the genuineness of the country’s political reforms, stressing how the Moroccan regime worked to defeat the opposition. None of these studies examined the communication strategies and specific historical and cultural contexts within which the movements produced and circulated their messages. Further, these studies did not examine how the communication approaches worked to mobilize, build collectivity, or counter hegemonic forces.
Four previous studies have examined the February 20th movement from a non-structural perspective, emphasizing cultural modes of expression and culture. One (Salime, 2012) focused on gender dynamics exclusively while two others (Salime, 2011; Abadi, 2013) analyzed underground hip-hop as form of resistance. To date, Hoffmann & Kong (2013) conducted perhaps the most comprehensive study of the movement’s communication strategies. They identified four frames to encompass the movement’s demands: individual freedoms, freedom from repression, social and economic justice, and political rights. While an excellent first step towards understanding the movement’s overarching goals, Hoffman and Kong’s analysis ignored other key aspects of the communication process such as target audiences, communication channels, and message strategies.

This study augments these previous findings by examining the February 20th movement from a strategic communication perspective. The study’s multi-qualitative method approach examines the February 20th movement multiple forms of protests and resistance, with particular emphasis on how each interacted with particular political and cultural contexts. Further, the study analyzes the movement’s message strategies for particular, target audiences. It explores various communication channels and how they complemented one another to maximize the reach of the movement. Finally, it explores how the movement’s communication approaches functioned within the historical, cultural, and socio-political context of Morocco in the present day. Such an approach not only allows for greater understanding of the historical roots of the February 20th movement; it provides insights that have use for future movements seeking non-violent approaches to political reform.
Research Questions

To gain further insights into non-regime change movements of the Arab Spring and how they operated within the monarchical context of the February 20th movement, this study specifically addresses the following:

1. What historical, socio-political, and cultural factors situated the rise of the February 20th movement?
2. What online and offline mediums did activists in the February 20th movement use to reach different segments of the Moroccan population?
3. Did the February 20th movement’s activists use online and offline communication messaging strategies to mobilize the subaltern? If so, how?
4. Did a dialectical relationship exist between the activists' use of online and offline mediums? If so, how did the interactions function within local contexts?

Method of Analysis

To explore these questions, this study focuses on the first five months of the February 20th movement, as most of the movement’s major milestones occurred during this period. Beginning in February 2011, the movement first distributed videos outlining their grievances, made demands, organized protests, and held massive demonstrations across the country. On March 9, 2011, the King Mohammed VI responded by addressing the nation through a historic televised speech announcing his plan for constitutional reform. He spoke to the nation a second time on June 17, 2011 to announce a national referendum. During that same month, the movement released another video calling for a boycott of the national referendum and mass protests throughout the Moroccan kingdom. On July 1, Morocco held a national referendum and the
citizens overwhelmingly adopted a new constitution. As such, the study’s focus on the February to June 2011 period covers the rise and early impact of the movement.

To examine the communication strategies of the February 20th movement, the study utilizes a multi-method approach. It includes a contextual analysis of the historical, socio-political, and cultural factors operating in Morocco during the rise of the February 20th movement, interviews with the movement’s senior communication strategists and key activists that brought attention to the movement, public event observations, and an analysis of the movement’s communication strategies as they appeared on the movement’s main website, Mamfakinch.

Examining the genealogy of multimodal discourses and the power constellations that shaped them, this study explores the complex flow of images, narratives, languages, and symbols within the socio-political Moroccan context. This study relies on Foucault’s (1977; 1989; 2000) notions of power and knowledge to map the February 20th movement communication strategies and how the activists used them to disrupt hegemonic discourses and practices. Foucault’s unique conceptualization of power enabled an accounting of the ordinary diffusion, enactment, and contestation of power (Golob & Gilles, 2013; Keller, 2005). For Foucault (2010), events and discourses functioned as vehicles of economies of power to create new networks and regimes of knowledge that is supported by funding agencies and institutions of power. Such forms of social production occurred by constructing “truths” about the natural and social worlds, which eventually citizens receive and begin to take for granted. Truth has a circular relationship with systems of power, which becomes an object of diffusion and consumption. This study applies Foucault’s concept of discursive practices to map out the February 20th movement’s communication strategies to the state’s responses. The study examines how language and
discursive social practices express power relationships, placing an emphasis on the social contexts in which systems of knowledge and practices emerged as permissible or changed. Specifically, I will attend to the ways in which power both inhibits and enables February 20th movement participants.

**Contextualizing the February 20th Movement**

To better understand the context for the February 20th movement’s communication strategies and discursive practices, the study examines both local and regional elements. The study identifies key historical, governmental, sociopolitical, cultural and economic factors that gave rise to the movement. The study analyzes previous scholarly examinations of Moroccan contexts, state-run media coverage of the movement during its first five months, and the King’s first address to the nation after the mass protests. The rich context is helpful to assess the goals of the movement, the significance of the challenges mounted on the February 20th movement, and the mobilization strategies the movement deployed in response.

**Interviews with Key Actors in the February 20th Movement**

To identify respondents willing to participate in the study’s interviews, a Moroccan journalist, who had followed the movement since its inception, provided a contact number for activists to call to participate in the study. During these initial interviews, respondents identified other activists that played a major role within the movement and functioned as the group’s most senior political and communication strategists. After completing their own interviews, the initial interviewees left and subsequently provided the contact number to the senior strategists and key activists they identified or knew, who in turn often participated in interviews themselves. Each
respondent received a consent form that assured the individual of the confidentiality of their identity to minimize risks associated with study participation.

Twenty-four senior ranking activists participated in the interview portion of the study. The activists’ ages ranged from 21 to 60, with the majority in their late twenties to early thirties. Six female activists and 18 male activists participated. The activists represented a wide spectrum of vocations, including journalists, professors, bankers, businessmen, college students, and artists. The interviewed activists played lead roles in constructing the messages and strategies of the movement, including two activists who were responsible for writing most of the slogans, a filmmaker, and two major artists.

The interviews took place in Casablanca, Rabat, and Tangiers (see Appendix A). Thirteen interviews occurred in Casablanca, including 10 with male and 3 with female activists. Seven interviews occurred in Rabat, all who were male activists. Four interviews occurred in Tangier, including 1 male and 3 female activists. Together, these three cities represented the largest number of people who demonstrated in the February 20th movement. Each of these cities also have large shantytowns on their peripheries that serve as the home to the two major Islamist parties in Morocco, Adl wa Ihsane and Adala wa Tanmiya.

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to examine the different types of online and offline mediums and message strategies that activists in the February 20th movement used to mobilize target audiences. Each interview lasted between 2 and 3 hours. The general interview questions revolved around three major themes: the activists’ communication strategies, the relationship between online and offline media, and the movement’s strategies and cultural markers for mobilizing a collective that invited participatory politics from below. The study compared the interview responses and activists’ self-reflection of the movement with the
February 20th movement online platforms. Further, the interviews also provided insights on how activists coordinated, negotiated, and created meaning. In the analysis stage of the interview transcripts, the study followed Crang and Cook’s (2004) approach of examining the patterns and categories that arise within the interviews and coded for them. For a complete list of questions and the study’s treatment of interview subjects, see Appendix B.

Public Event Observations

In addition, the study includes direct observations of four public events organized by the movement in May 2014. These included protests, one in Casablanca that included around 100 protesters and one in Rabat that attracted about 200 protesters. The study also included two observations of the movement-sponsored cultural activities, which specifically targeted youth and used popular education to raise social consciousness and awareness. These were entitled “Philosophy in the Street” (Felsafa fi Zanka) and “Reading for All” (lecture Pour Tous). The Philosophy on the Street event took place in the public square garden in Rabat with attendance of approximately 40 young people, 15 women and 35 men. Some people that joined the event were bystanders that were curious and decided to stop in to listen. Lecture Pour Tous was in one of the main Boulevard in downtown Casablanca. Around 55 attendees participated in Lecture Pour Tous, and were equally divided between male and female participants. Many bystanders stopped and inquired about the event. Important to note that these events took place 3 years after the February 20th movement’s initial protest.

Analysis of Online and Offline Communication

To better understand the February 20th movement’s online communication strategies, this study examines the group’s three digital campaign videos (I am Moroccan, I will Protest, and
Who We Are) as they first appeared on YouTube. It also analyzes postings from February 2011 to June 2011 on the February 20th movement’s official website, Mamfakinch.com, as well as the online digital campaign videos appearing on that site. The February 20th activists in the study’s interviews identified mamfakinch.com as the most important official alternative online platform of the February 20th movement. During the time period of the study, 180 entries in English, French, and Arabic appeared on the movement’s website. Website entries included archive protest videos, interviews with activists and independent journalists, protest maps, live streamed tweets, selected blog posts, and recirculated commentaries. The study examined what mamfakinch highlighted as important information. In particular, the study analyzes how the February 20th online and offline communication challenged institutions, regimes of knowledge, and contributed to emancipatory knowledge of discourse and social justice (Madison, 2005). Finally, the study also examines 20 images of movement activities that one female activist from Casablanca provided during the interview phase of the study.

Situating interviews within the social, political, and historical contexts, this study examines how the February 20th movement reached out to various social networks and webs of power (for other examples of the approach, see Abu Lughod, 1990; Madison, 2005). When analyzing the activists’ communication strategies, the study examines what various actors represented as truth within their social realities. For instance, the study examines the many versions of events activists produced and recounted and how various events differed within the state media and February 20th online communication appeals. Further, following the lead of Keller (2005), the study examines the identities, practices, and actions that the state and the movement negotiated, encouraged or denied. Using textual and visual material, the study looks
at how these systems of knowledge and practices produce, actualize, perform and transform social practices at different social and geographical places.

Beyond the approaches already discussed, the study borrowed Khatib’s (2013) framework of image politics within the Middle East context, Foucault’s concept of power (2010), and Azoulay’s (2008) concept of impaired citizenship to examine how the visual images function as a space of contestation between the different groups. In particular, the study examines how various images function in the sphere of political relations and what types of visual narratives emerged. All these theoretical frameworks look at counter power and possibilities of rupture within the hegemonic system. Analyzing the images as part of a discursive confrontation between state authority and subaltern resistance, the study examines how the images function as a site for negotiation and articulation of values.

**Concluding Remarks and Chapter Overview**

This study works from the premise that to look appropriately into Middle East politics, media, and other forms of discourse, an account of the histories of colonialization and orientalism is necessary. It challenges the assumption that the Middle East is a stagnant, violent, and monolithic region. The Moroccan case study shows the creativity of ordinary people in navigating autocratic political culture. The February 20\(^{th}\) Moroccan pro-democracy movement called for multiple forms of resistance, with the result that Morocco did not degenerate into social anarchy and mass violence. This study will demonstrate how the Moroccan pro-democracy movement created social spaces in which to express discontent through an active online and offline network that challenged the state hegemonic order and control.

To further explain the workings of the February 20\(^{th}\) movement, this study will begin with two chapters that establish context: one that addresses the theoretical context of social
movements and social media theory as they relate to the Arab Spring and one that focuses specifically on the socio-political context of Morocco. The next three chapters will examine the February 20th movement’s communication strategies, by exploring approaches for building collective identity, for maximizing mediums of message dissemination, and for utilizing performative strategies to enact a model of participatory politics. The final chapter will summarize the study’s key findings and explore how they yield important insights for a broader understanding of social movements in the MENA region. Specifically, the chapters will explore the February 20th movement in the following ways.

**Chapter Two. Social Movements and Collective Action**

Chapter two sets the theoretical framework for understanding the February 20th movement. It discusses the trajectory of social movement and media theory literature, emphasizing the shortcomings that led to the cultural turn and how social movements operate within complex systems of social relationships, symbolic production, meaning making, and identity needs. It begins by highlighting how early theorists have hypothesized constructions of identity within social movements and how they have described the role of communication in mobilizing target populations, particularly as society has moved into the information age. It then describes how theorists focusing on social movements in the Middle East and North Africa have explained the interactions of history, culture, and communication operating in those regions, including an examination of collective identity and the role of alternative media. This chapter concludes by suggesting the implications for the study and understanding of social movements in the MENA region.
Chapter Three. Emergence of the February 20th Movement

Chapter three sets out the sociopolitical and historical background context for the February 20th movement. It discusses the way February 20th movement emerged and developed over time. It begins by highlighting the governmental, sociopolitical, and economic factors that gave rise to the movement, and then defining the group’s early goals and organizational structure. It then describes how, after the February 20th movement began to pose a serious challenge to the King, the state apparatus, and the state-run media responded.

Chapter Four. Building a Collective: Towards a Participatory Politics Model

Chapter four analyzes the February 20th movement’s communication strategies for building a unified collective with various target audiences, and concludes with how those strategies allowed the movement to respond effectively to the Moroccan state’s efforts to contain and coopt the group. It begins by examining the February 20th movement’s various challenges of building a collective identity. It then describes the movement’s bottom up approach to building a common national identity, which included linguistic pragmatism and multimodal appeals to national frames. By analyzing various cultural and linguistic practices, this chapter explains how the February 20th movement worked to reformulate traditional concepts of citizenship and envision a new era of participatory politics. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the movement’s intersectional political strategies in building an empowered collective.

Chapter Five. Navigating Between the Online and Offline

The Arab Spring ignited great interest in the democratic potential of new information communication technologies. With the rise in youth activism mediated and enabled through the
Internet, the February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement virtual sphere opened a new space of possibilities that engaged directly with the Moroccan public sphere. This chapter broadly discusses the media context in Morocco. It then examines February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement’s communicative strategies in both the online and offline environment. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the dialectical relationship that existed between the online and offline channels, and how those interaction were context dependent.

**Chapter Six. Navigating Moroccan Aesthetic Resistance**

To constitute an active public, the February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement used cultural production to creatively challenge Morocco’s hegemonic practices and empower the people as a collective to promote civic and social engagement. Through its visual artistic presence, the February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement claimed its existence and identity within the Moroccan political and cultural scene. This chapter examines how the February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement utilized performative strategies to enact a model of participatory politics. It discusses the movement’s varied aesthetic practices to mobilize the subaltern public.

**Chapter Seven. Conclusion**

The final chapter summarizes the study’s key findings and explores how they yield important insights for a broader understanding of social movements in the MENA region. It concludes by looking at the limitations and areas for future study.
Chapter Two

Social Movements: The Role of Identity Culture and Media

This chapter draws on findings from media theories and previous studies of social movements to lay the foundation for analyzing the February 20th movement. Specifically, it examines the intersection of culture, media and identity reformulation. This chapter begins by examining how theorists have understood social movements and how they have described the role of communication in mobilizing target populations, particularly since the onset of the information age. The first part of the chapter provides an historical overview of the literature related to social movements. It emphasizes the shortcomings that led to the cultural turn, as well as the need to move beyond structuralism to understand how social movements operate within complex systems of social relationships, symbolic production, meaning making, and identity constructions. Next, it examines how theorists focusing on social movements in the Middle East and North Africa have explained the interactions of history, culture, and communication operating in those regions, with a particular focus on the concept of collective identity and the role of alternative media. It concludes by suggesting implications for this study and better understandings of social movements in the MENA region.

Mapping Theories of Social Movements

The early, behaviorist approach to social movements has emerged in response to the French revolution. Behaviorists began the study of social movements in an effort to better understand

\[1\] For the purposes of this study, I will utilize Snow, Soule, and Kriesi’s (2008) definition of social movements: “Social movements can be thought of as collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture, or world order of which they are part of” (p.11).
the French revolutionaries, groups of individuals they generally considered to be irrational, angry mobs. Accordingly, the behaviorists initially conceptualized social movements as reactionary, deviant and emotional outbursts by angry crowds, masses, and mobs in reaction to felt grievances and discontent. The behaviorists approached mobilization for movements as a contagion or mob effect, rather than as a rational response to untenable situational conditions (Blumer, 1951; Buechler, 2004; Rule 1988).

In the 1960s, sociologists worked to refute the behaviorist approach. The sociologists considered behaviorist theories as too limiting and disagreed with the perspective that the irrationality of protestors was the chief reason for mass mobilization. Two schools of thought emerged as correctives: resource mobilization and political opportunity. Both models shared their theoretical foundations in structuralism, they both relied on the state as the preferred unit of analysis, and they both emphasized the rationality of the protestors (Carren, 2007).

Resource mobilization models of social movements viewed collective action as a rational response that could only occur when adequate resources for addressing grievances became available. Relying on a top-down approach, the resource mobilization model focused on microelements, such as resource opportunities and social networks. Often describing social movements as business organizations, resource mobilization models looked at how societies managed and allocated resources and how social movements could use resources in pursuit of their groups’ goals. The type and nature of the resources available explained both the tactical choices the movements made and the consequences of collective action on sociopolitical systems (Edwards & McCarthy 2004; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). The resource mobilization model emphasized the extent to which resources linked to the success or failure of social movement mobilization (Davis, 2002; Lind & Stepan-Norris, 2011). Scholars of the model focused on how
collective actors operated, how they acquired resources, and how they mobilized support to solve social problems (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Critics of resource mobilization models argued that such approaches did not sufficiently consider the political conditions that served as the context for resource allocations (Tarrow, 2011). By the 1980s resource mobilization models were a dominant paradigm for explaining social movements, but they were becoming increasingly criticized for not looking at external factors that might better explain differences informs of collective action.

Rooted in analyses of civil rights struggles, political opportunity models of social movement emerged in the 1970s in response to the resource mobilization models. Addressing the resource models’ analytical gaps related to political context, the political opportunity models focused on the effects of the institutional political structure on movement activities and outcomes (Meyer, 2004). The political opportunity approach responded to how “people engage in contentious politics when patterns of political opportunities and constraints change and then, by strategically employing a repertoire of collective action, create new opportunities, which are used by others in widening cycles of contention” (Tarrow, 2011, p. 29). In his 1978 classic, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Charles Tilly put forward a political opportunity model for analyzing collective active where he explicitly identified a necessary set of conditions for mobilization.\(^2\) Tilly’s model stressed interests, organization, and opportunity. These three components of movements examined the potential gains available from participation, the level of unified identity and networks, and the political openings, such as shifts in ruling alignments, which set the conditions for potential mobilization. The model questioned the possibility of repression and vulnerability of the target groups (Caren, 2007). In general, social movements, when analyzed

\(^2\) Tilly referred his approach as a polity model.
according to political opportunity models, placed greater emphasis on economic and political contexts.

A study by Kitschelt (1986) found that a movement’s ability to utilize strategies that were adapted to its current political opportunity structure, rather than its resources, impacted movement success. Nevertheless, critics pointed out that political opportunity models were unable to explain when and why social movements used particular strategies and under what circumstances they chose particular forms of collective action (Bernstein, 1997). In addition, the bulk of studies utilizing the political opportunity models as an analytical framework were limited to a focus on western, democratic countries.

Neither resource mobilization models nor political opportunity models were adequate to explain why some actors decided to mobilize and why others did not, even when political opportunities and resources were available. Critics of both approaches focused on the failure of such models to take into account the dynamic cultural and symbolic processes that underlie collective action (Davis, 2012). As Bernstein (1997) argued,

Resource mobilization and political process theorists have neglected the study of identity movements with their seemingly “nonpolitical,” cultural goals. Even when culture is recognized as an integral part of sustaining activist communities, changing or challenging mainstream culture is rarely considered a goal of activism. Strategies are seen as rationally chosen to optimize the likelihood of policy success (p. 534).

Taken together, the two sociological approaches contributed many factors useful for understanding social movement mobilization. Drawing from the complementary findings of the two perspectives, participation in collective action relates to several factors, including structures,
material resources, political opportunities, and the degree to which each interacts with the target of the mobilization effort (Snow, 2011).

The Rhetorical Turn: Study of Movements

Considered to have pioneered the study of social movements from a rhetorical perspective, Griffin (1952) proposed to broaden conventional examinations of public address to include considerations of the complex set of rhetorical phenomenon within historical movements. For Griffin, the rhetorical components of movements were dynamic, responding to three key moments of a social movement’s lifespan: inception, development, and consummation. Following Griffin’s lead, scholars of rhetoric in the 1960s and 1970s examined recurrent rhetorical patterns of persuasion within social movements not found in other instances of persuasion (Zarefsky, 1980). Such a framework considered social movements as a unique rhetorical problem that generated unique rhetorical strategies in response (Simons, 1970). According to Simons (1970), for example, there are three rhetorical problems facing social movements: attracting, molding, and maintaining followers, securing adoption, and reacting to resistance generated by larger structures. Rhetorical scholars placed a heavy emphasis on the leadership of the social movement and how the leader resolved and reduced rhetorical constraints at hand. Further, protests taking place in the United States during the 1960s prompted rhetorical scholars to reexamine social protests and take into consideration diverse forms of symbols, motives, and the types of rhetoric movements deployed. These early rhetorical studies focused on persuasion as their central function of social movements.

3 Early scholars of rhetoric did not generally use the phrase ‘social movements.’ To distinguish their objects of study from those of sociologists, early scholars of rhetoric described social movements as ‘rhetorical movements.’
Over time, rhetorical scholars roundly criticized their own field’s early work on social movements. Zarefsky (1980), for example, critiqued early work by noting that, “theoretically oriented studies of social movements, since they depend upon establishing the uniqueness of movement rhetoric, have not been very productive” (p. 126). Early studies also relied on an unsustainable, linear approach to social movements, overemphasized cause and effect, prescribed a rigid set of definitions for the phenomenon of study, and overemphasized intentional analysis (Sillars, 1980). Scholars of rhetoric in the United States could not agree on the preferred approach for the study of movements (Lucas, 1980; McGee, 1980; Sillars, 1980; Zarefsky, 1980) and they generally confined their objects of study to America and Great Britain (Lucas, 1980). Lucas (1980), in particular, sounded early warnings against applying a western framework of how discourse works to non-western contexts, as “rhetoricians who study Continental or Third World social movements will face the formidable task of mastering cultures and languages different from their own” (p.142).

By the 1980s, various revisions to the persuasive model of social movements arose. Rhetorical scholars began focusing on problems of meanings, ideology, consciousness, and interpretation in the study of social movements (McGee, 1980). Some rhetorical scholars of social movements began calling for a pluralistic interdisciplinary approach (e.g., Hammerback & Jenson, 1994; Lucas, 1980; Sillars, 1980). Lucas (1980) argued that social movements were both “phenomena and meaning” (p. 137), thereby necessitating a focus on messages of all forms and shapes. Several scholars called for a heightened emphasis on the historical, cultural and local tactics that social movements utilize to mobilize supporters (Hammerback & Jenson, 1994; Lake, 1983). Hammerback and Jenson (1994) argued that in order to understand how any tactic of a social movements functions for internal audiences, “the particular rhetorical form should be
examined in the relation to its rhetorical legacy in its ethnic culture; the role of the specific rhetorical medium in that culture should be considered” (p.317).

**The Cultural Turn in the Study of Social Movements**

As a response to increased human mobility, the rise of globalization, and the effect of ICT’s on social movements, a new approach to the study of social movements again emerged. As Davis (2012) explained, “The new social movement theory in Europe and later the social constructionist approach in the United States have laid new, in part renewed, stress on the role of ideas and identities, the symbolic and expressive, the analysis of social movements” (p. 6).4 Widespread social, cultural, and geopolitical changes on the global scene meant social movement scholars were no longer focused solely on class-based labor movements; instead, they began to address concerns such as the impact of globalization, women’s rights and environmental protection (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Castells (2010) characterized these new forms of social movements as ones “induced by the confrontation between opposing identities” (p. xvii). New social movement scholars argued that identity-based movements seek to alter hegemonic cultural patterns or gain recognition for new social identities by employing strategies that encourage participation and empowerment (Bernstein, 1997; Calhoun, 1995; Castells, 2010; Melucci, 1985; Melucci, 1989). These forms of social movements tend to have a decentralized, diffused power structure (Davis, 2012) and be rooted in communities and networks where information technology plays a central role (Castells, 2010). With the availability of new communication channels, networks of activists in the same movement are less bound to the same place.

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4 See Melucci, 1989; Jasper, 1997; Morris and Meuller 1992; and Johnston and Klandermas 1995 for more on New Social Movements.
The cultural turn in the study of social movements emphasized social and cultural contexts as critical elements of analysis. Adherents to the new social movement model have sought to understand the major factors that have motivated people to participate in a particular social movement, as well as how members have perceived and interpreted socio-political contexts. These theorists have focused on identity, ideology, and culture to better understand the discursive field in which social movements emerge. New social movement scholars have been interested in investigating the complementary roles of identities, symbols, and networks in order to explain how collective action has challenged power relations inscribed in institutional forms of power and cultural practices (Davis, 2012).

The theoretical insights of new social movements have built from the fundamental assumption that the contemporary global environment required a reconceptualization of power relations. As Castells explained (2012), “the transformation of the communication environment directly affects the forms of meaning construction, and therefore the production of power relationships” (p. 6). Drawing on Foucault’s perspective, Castells argued that wherever power exists, a counter power arises. Hence, power relations have become multilayered, constituted both materially and symbolically. New social movement theory has contested the exercise of power and subjectivities particular to postindustrial capitalism (Melucci, 1985). In short, new social movement theory has situated activism in a larger political, economic, and cultural context, and examined how activists seek to establish new identities, networks and strategies from the forms of hegemony within which their movement operates.

**Contextual Processes in Communication Approaches to Social Movements**

New social movement theorists have argued that the social implications of ICTs are embedded in specific historical, cultural and political contexts (e.g. Beinin & Vairel, 2009).
Specifically, communication scholars have emphasized the need to highlight human agency and to contextualize the particularities of the political and media landscape for a more nuanced understanding of how ICTs function in particular regions (Aouragh, 2010; Rodriguez, Ferron & Shamas, 2014; Shamas, 2011; Shami, 2008; Sreberny & Khiaban 2011). By carefully examining both the media and political context, social movement theories overcome several challenges. As Rodriguez, Ferron & Shamas (2014) have argued,

[F]irst, assuming that communication phenomenon are tightly woven with other historical processes, dynamics, and conditions, they avoid the deterritorialization of communication research; second they maintain the epistemological tension between media and mediations; and third, they break away from disciplinary isolation and explore other fields, such as literary studies, social movement studies, and the sociology of journalism to find answers about media use (p. 157).

A focus on the political and media landscape, thus, enables the study of societal transformations without compartmentalizing or homogenizing the unit of analysis (Shami, 2009).

Theoretical models of social movements operating in the MENA region have reinforced the need to focus on the cultural context of social discontent. The context of the MENA region is particularly important because of its semi-closed political and media systems. Shamas’ (2011) research on ICT use in Lebanon, for example, highlighted the importance of the multifaceted historical conditions that gave rise to the prolific outpouring of Lebanese bloggers in 2006. Sreberny & Khiabany (2011) maintained that the sociopolitical importance of blogging in Iran necessitated an understanding of the country’s history of revolutions and earlier democratization attempts, including “the perception and experience of repression by citizens, culturally preferred modes of expressivity as well as the meaning and experience of the Iranian diaspora” (p. xi).
Similarly, Aouragh (2010) insisted that to best understand the importance of the Internet in Palestine, the historical background of the diaspora was necessary, as that particular, contextual factor functioned as a mediating space for globally imagining and shaping Palestine as a nation. Such perspectives address Barbero’s (2006) call to apply “continuous efforts to disentangle the increasingly complex fabric of mediations that articulates the relations between communication, culture and politics” (p. 281). Situating ICTs within their political and cultural contexts enables an understanding of old and new media trajectories and the political struggle within which they operate.

As one noted in chapter one, scholars that have focused on big data have examined social movements and their use of ICTs in an attempt to understand the formation of complex networks. However, such an approach alone does not provide answers to cultural negotiations, local power dynamics, anti-hegemonic resistances, and social interactions that traverse uses of media technologies (Rodriguez, Ferron & Shamas, 2014). For example, Lim’s (2012) research demonstrated how several different social movements joined forces in Tahrir Square, a finding that shattered the general conception that each social network served as a unique data point. The Muslim Brotherhood handled logistics, and soccer fans employed their street tactic savvy-ness to uphold safety. Each played an important, but differentiated role. In order to avoid the erasure of these multifaceted processes, theoretical frameworks attempting to explain how social movements function need to consider the groups’ communications within the local political environment. Highlighting the sociopolitical and historical cultural context enables the examination the possibilities of rupture and enables an understanding of how movements produce power and sharing between networks, how they build affinities, and how they raise awareness necessary for a raised level of consciousness.
Collective Action: Towards Building a Collective Identity

With the cultural turn of social movement theorists, the concept of identity has become increasingly important as a way of understanding and describing the dynamics of collective action and its influence on mobilization. Collective identity is an important component of the movement’s “tactical repertoire” (Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004, p.264), as the sense of connection to the movement is essential in order to achieve social change (Bernstein & Dela Cruz, 2009). Given the centrality of the concept to current understandings of social movements, this study will rely on Polletta and Jasper’s (2001) definition of collective identity, namely “an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which maybe imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it many form part of a personal identity” (p. 285).

Collective identity is located in shared space and explicitly linked to collective action (Melucci, 1995; Snow & Soule, 2011). It tends to work through submerged networks of participation rather than through established institutions (Melucci, 1985). Invoking collective identity in social movements becomes crucial for strengthening solidarity and sustaining commitment (Melucci, 1985; Polletta & Jasper, 2001). It is a form of strategic political action that functions at both the cultural and instrumental levels, particularly for social movements that strive to be widely inclusive in their target populations (Bernstein 1997; Bernstein, 2008; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Bernstein & De La Cruz, 2012).

Activists within social movements strategically deployed identity strategies to further their movements’ goals of increased participation and solidarity (Bernstein, 1999; Bernstein, 2008; Leitz, 2011). Movements implemented collective identity appeals to transform
mainstream culture, including its categories, values, and practices (Leitz, 2011). According to Leitz (2011), identity frames attained important goals when they achieve cultural resonance. When used in relation to the need for change, activists may deploy traditional symbols, identities, and practices in new ways that have oppositional meanings that challenge and subvert the dominant order (Leitz, 2011; Taylor, Van Dyke & Anderson, 2009). Strategies designed to build collectives do not take place apart from political structures and state actors; instead, efforts to build a common identity are in constant reaction and in dialogue with these institutions (Bernstein, 1997). As Bernstein (2008) elaborated, “collective identities are not simply free floating cultural phenomenon but also historically, materially, and organizationally located” (p. 281). Accordingly, the discursive environment that gives rise to a movement may also constrain the success or failure of the identity appeals (Leitz, 2011).

In general, political identity in social movements has three analytical levels: identity for empowerment, identity deployment, and identity as a goal (Bernstein, 1997). Identity strategies function within “the configuration of political access, the structure of social movement organizations and type and extent of opposition” (Bernstein, 1997, p. 539). Because of the close relationship between collective identity and a social movement’s sense of belonging and action, examining how social movements deploy identity as a platform for action, as well as a basis for group solidarity, is instructive. Furthermore, reflecting on the fluidity of identity construction and negotiation processes is a critical perspective to guard against essentializing those identities or presuming the existence of static social relations.

Cultivating emotional bonds and positive affective ties within the movement are key to establishing a collective identity (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Social movements are, by their nature, emotional movements (Castells, 2012). The framing of appeals on behalf of social
movements must therefore take into consideration not only the cognitive but also the affective dimensions (Goodwin, Jasper & Polleta, 2000; 2004). The relational characters of the ties established and reinforced within these networks are critical in supplying tactical expertise, resources and personnel that function as the foundation of mobilization (Polletta, 1999). Social movements strategically deploy national symbols to trigger a variety of meanings and emotions in an audience, which in turn provides them with increased legitimacy (Leitz, 2011). What becomes important here is that actors do not necessarily have to believe in the same ideologies; they can still come together in order to generate collective action and entice bystanders to participate (Roy, 2010). Accordingly, this newly created solidarity is essential for mobilization across different ethnicities and class.

Social Movements: Alternative Media and Culture

While alternative social media forms expand what Tilly (1986) has called a “repertoire of contention” techniques within protests, alternative media has continued to be an under-researched and largely neglected topic in the social sciences (Atton 2002, Fuchs, 2010; Rodriguez, Ferron & Shamas, 2014). As such, competing definitional conceptions of alternative media exist, many of which are very broad and vague. Such forms of media have various names in current social movement literature: radical media, participatory media, grassroots media, and citizen media. Each label deploys a particular framework that puts emphasis on particular elements of autonomous media use (Rodriguez, Ferron & Shamas, 2014). For instance, “Whilst ‘radical’ encourages a definition that is primarily concerned with social change, ‘alternative’ offers a much more looser purchase” (Atton, 2002, p.4). In general, activists deploy alternative social media forms to transform existing social roles and practices through political education,
critiquing dominant ideologies, and challenging power structures (Atkinson & Dougherty, 2006; Atton, 2002; Downing, 2001; Rodriguez, 2001).

For Downing (2001), the main feature of alternative media was its oppositional function to hegemonic practices. As he explained, “By radical media I refer to media, generally small scale and in many different forms, that express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives” (p. v). Referring to alternative media as “the most active form of the active audience” (p.3), Downing recognized that such forms of discourse can function both overtly and covertly within the sphere of popular culture and can work to “disrupt silence, counter lies, and provide an alternative vision” (p.16). Drawing from Gramsci’s analysis of culture and counter hegemony, Downing emphasized the role of alternative media to challenge the ideological frameworks of a culture by providing alternative visions for the community.

Drawing a sharp contrast with mainstream media, radical media is loosely structured, nonhierarchical, creative, and stimulating for public debate (Atton, 2002; Downing, 2001; Fuchs, 2010; Rodriguez, 2003). According to Atton (2002).

[A]lternative media- as a major constituent in the disseminations of the views and opinion formation of subaltern counter publics’- (Fraser, 1992)- have the potential to offer even more than ‘interpretation;’ they provide readers with access to other leaders’ (activists’) lived experiences and on occasion offers these as part of a network of sociocultural and sociopolitical projects (p. 153).

In opposition to state media’s hegemonic practices, alternative media opens the space for access and agency. Rodriguez (2003) argued, “. . . as they disrupt established power relationships and cultural codes, citizens’ media participants exercise their own agency in reshaping their own lives, futures, and cultures” (p. 190). Since alternative media privileges the involved audience,
alternative media is best realized by cultural interrogation (Atton, 2002). Such modalities of resistance provide an alternative to the hegemonic political nature of knowledge formation and production.

Alternative media often takes the form of aesthetic practices. Alternative media’s cultural practices function as strategies of resistance deployed to break away from hegemonic discourse and challenge state ideology. Cultural practices can take the form of rituals that are meaningful, which often include particular choices of language, symbols, and music. A critical lens on culture and creativity will provide a much more nuanced understanding of a social movements’ goals and strategies (Jasper, 1997).

At times, cultural production and aesthetic strategies of resistance connect specifically to subaltern publics. For instance, the Green movement in Iran used the “art of subtleness” by co-opting the rituals and the history of the Islamic republic against the leaders of the Islamic republic (Kurzman, 2011, p. 9). The reappropriated use of cultural codes and practices, whereby culture becomes performed and activated in new ways, mobilizes supporters to challenge and subvert the dominant order. Social movement activists use language and culture already familiar and positively associated with the people to create alternative realities. In Egypt, for example, the appearance of murals and graffiti became a battleground between the Egyptian Security apparatus and the activists. The Egyptian walls became a contested space involving an endless process of erasure, reversal, and replacement of images linked to the competing perspectives (Khatib, 2012). The activists would draw on the murals and the next day the security apparatus would paint over or destroy them. Nevertheless, the Arab Spring movement’s use of hypermedia spaces with different nodal points allowed the activists’ images to elicit affective responses from engaged youth in the region (Khatib, 2012). Cultural and aesthetic productions are a powerful
mode for solidifying commitment and building vision for change for social movements (Roy, 2010). Deployed as strategic tools for action and reaction, question and answer, and expression of struggle, such mediated forms produce a locale culturally shaped discourse of liberation and empowerment.

Cultural production in social movements also evokes a sense of collectiveness and belonging. Such aesthetic practices are not solely a medium for persuasion; they also serve as collective action. According to Roy (2010), “social movements are both a class of actors that use culture and a site where culture is enacted” (p. 20). As Polletta and Jasper (2001) argued, “collective identities are expressed in cultural materials…names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, and clothing…” (p.285). Cultural material artifacts intertwine with meaning making processes to mediate the formation of the movement’s identity (Holland, Fox & Daro, 2008).

Cultural processes also function as tools for challenging hegemonic narratives and political change (Bernstein & De La Cruz, 2009; Taylor, Van Dyke & Anderson, 2009). As such, they act as instruments for superseding the dominant alienated culture (Freire, 2000) and work to become the battleground of freedom struggles with instances of popular culture functioning as politics (Downing, 2001; Khatib, 2012). According to Freire (2000), a cultural revolution is especially important because of its role in the reconstruction and remolding of society as it distances itself from the old system. This process produces what Heise (1998) referred to as “emphathetic solidarity,” which is “a reciprocated sense of merged consciousness and alliance, with faith in others’ commitments to shared purposes” (p. 197). For social movements that have histories of colonization, the move is not only about economic and territorial liberation, but also psychological liberation. Cultural repertoires not only convey powerful political messages and
raise social consciousness, but they also mobilize actors to engage in other forms of political contention (Taylor, Van Dyke & Anderson, 2009).

As culture is entangled in the exercise of power (Bennett, 2008; Khatib, 2012), activists deploy cultural repertoires such as symbols and rituals to mobilize actors and to convey powerful political messages to target audiences (Taylor, Van Dyke, & Anderson, 2009). For instance, citizens during the Arab Spring used images to reclaim political agency, and as such, visual expression was at the heart of the political struggle (Khatib, 2012). As Khatib (2012) argued, “. . . [F]or authoritarian states, political power means having control over visual production and consumption. For political oppositions, democratic representation merges with visual representation. For people, possessing political agency means possessing the ability to be seen, not only heard” (p. 1). Street art became a visible marker of citizen agency and a creative way for activists to provide an alternative narrative (Khatib, 2012). Such activities, perhaps because they contribute alternative perspectives, also increase the likelihood that a movement’s goals will find broad acceptance among the general public (Leitz, 2011).

Shaped by local cultures that frame the parameters of grievances, alternative forms of social media (online and offline) offer ready texts for understanding contentious politics. Aesthetic forms of resistance are particularly important when studying social movements that function in autocratic contexts, given the various constraints on the various forms of communication available to disrupt established hegemonic powers. Contentious collective action has played key role in political trajectories of the Middle East (Bayat, 2010), and as Hoffman and Konig (2013) made clear, “The context on the character and extent of contentious behavior needs to be taken into consideration more systematically in order to adjust social movement theory to non-western polities.” In a contentious space, actors “share the idea that
changing politics by mobilizations and political activism is possible” (Beinin & Vairel, 2009, p.27). Alternative forms of media function within contentious contexts to create new social spaces to challenge state hegemonic order and control. They not only provide information to publics, but they also invite participation into the development of creative ways to question hegemonic practices.

Concluding Remarks

Studying social movements that take into account the wider historical, sociopolitical and cultural context will inform our understanding of meaning making, nation building, vernacular political aesthetics, media practices, and pop culture in anti-authoritarian movements in MENA. Such an approach will pay particular emphasis on discursive practices and at the same time provide a rich and nuanced understanding of social movements communication strategies to undermine hegemonic power. Studies that take context seriously do not place social movement’s media repertoires in a social vacuum. Such studies look at how social movement’s use of media technologies are influenced by a combination of factors such as historical and political conditions, activist networks, interaction between mainstream and alternative media, and local culture (Rodriguez, Ferron & Shamas, 2014).

The processes of communication strategies within social movements need to take into account a broader conception of social media. Communication processes take place in the virtual, electronic, and physical space. Moving beyond ICTs and traditional media, social movements use of aesthetic practices such as staged action in public spaces, music, clothing, and alternative forums for traditional media can help unmask how culture, politics, and media combine and function within a particular geographical space. Such an expanded model moves away from technological determinism and places emphasis on individual agency, as participants
choose not only if they will attend to a message, but also what form that message will take. Similarly, it looks at how different mediums and forms of media function, negotiate, and circulate.

Furthermore, examining how social movements deploy collective identity to subvert hegemonic order is important for understanding contentious politics and long-term structures, both cultural and societal. It enables understandings of cultural forces that construct the social networks (online and offline) through culturally meaningful strategies and tactics. Examining dissemination of messages and the performance and enactment of yields more insights into how social movements position themselves within society and responds to a multifaceted response environment.

Many studies of the Arab Spring presuppose a homogeneous view of the region’s cultures. Yet, cultures are polyvocal, multilayered, fractured, and decentered. Studies on social media and the Arab Spring have largely ignored the political reality of poor urban and rural populations, yet democracy cannot take root without their participation. Scholars will be able to understand other cultures without imposing their own paradigm and will be better equipped to look at the spaces of affinity and examine possibilities of rupture.

In sum, deploying a framework that is politically, historically, and culturally grounded privileges local knowledge and the micro politics of context. Such a framework moves beyond the ideological hegemonic framework of “us” versus “them”. It requires a more holistic approach to social media and social movements, with a heavy emphasis on the political realities affecting social relations within the movement, between the movement and its target audience, and between the public and governing bodies as they occur over time. Such an approach allows for an examination of contentious politics in its various forms within the complex and shifting
relations of power. Such an approach privileges a multiplicity of forms of communication, from performative communication of bodies to disembodied bodies behind computer screens.

Chapter Three

Emergence of the February 20th Movement

This chapter sets out the sociopolitical and historical context in which the February 20th movement emerged. It begins by highlighting key governmental, sociopolitical, and economic factors that gave rise to the movement and by providing a description of the February 20th movement’s early goals and organizational structure in response. It will demonstrate that the unique set of challenges the February 20th movement faced both internally within its organization and externally within the Moroccan public sphere prompted the movement to adapt its goals and strategies. The chapter will describe how, over time, the February 20th movement began to pose a serious challenge to the state, which led to a changing situational environment characterized by various reactions of the regime and the broader state apparatus.

M6- A New Era for Morocco

After King Hassan II died after serving as the monarch of Morocco for thirty-eight years, Crown Prince Mohammed VI took over the throne on July 23, 1999 and was crowned a week later in Rabat, Morocco. Morocco’s national RTM and 2M television channels showed King Mohammed VI greeting members of the royal family, Islamic scholars, and high-level officials from around the country as they claimed respect and allegiance to him. This highly symbolic annual rite, known as bay‘aa, has been part of Morocco’s rituals and traditions for over 300 years (Daadaouï, 2011). The Moroccan king, who claims direct descendancy from the Prophet
Mohammad, holds the title of *Amir al Mouminine*, or commander of the faithful. Accordingly, he is both the spiritual and temporal leader of the Moroccan people (Howe, 2005; Linn, 2011).

The newly crowned King appeared determined to lead the country to a modern democracy. He sought to distinguish himself from the rule of his father, a dark period in Moroccan history characterized by repression, arbitrary detentions, torture, and forced disappearances of political opponents (Hazan, 2006; Slyomovics, 2005). Many of the nation’s citizens believed that the thirty-five year old King would break from his father’s oppressive rule and forge a new era of reform and open command (Campbell 2003; Howe, 2005; Willis 2007). Bolstering such perceptions, the young monarch defined his role as “arbiter” and pledging to “adhere to the system of constitutional monarchy, political pluralism, economic liberalism, regional and decentralized policy, the establishment of the state of rights and law, preserving human rights and individual and collective liberties, protecting security and stability for everyone” (“Excerpts from King Mohammed VI’s Address,” 1999). At the same time, he spoke of his commitment to easing the plight of the rural poor, reducing unemployment, and advancing equal rights for women. The new King’s emphasis on expanding economic and political rights offered hope to his nation’s citizenry worn down by years of oppressive rule.

Further distancing himself from his father’s rule, King Mohammed VI also adopted a more accessible, public image. The new monarch exhibited a unique style that positioned him alongside Moroccan youth (Hegassy, 2012; Sandberg & Aqertit 2014). He was athletic and an avid jet skier who, at times, dressed in traditional garments, but did not shy away from modern youthful attire at others. The young unmarried monarch appeared in public areas with few or no

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5 All quotations from King Mohammed VI’s first national address will be cited from BBC News due to the lack of an available authenticated recording of the address. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, all references to the King’s words will be indicated in the preface to the quotation, but will be drawn from the media’s record and translation of the speech.
bodyguards, making him even more accessible to his followers. Unlike the aloof, autocratic persona of late King Hassan II, King Mohammed VI enacted populist tendencies, seemingly enjoying his presence among the people in crowded areas as he repeatedly presided over charitable works. In 2003-2004, a survey of 622 young Moroccans revealed the success of the new King’s efforts to distance himself from his father by finding that “traditional sources of legitimacy are declining whereas modern rationales and a ‘youthful spirit’ rise as reasons for accepting the king’s authority” (Hegasy, 2007, p. 19). All these elements brought a new style of authority that initially gave him legitimacy and secured a popular basis for his rule, especially among Moroccan youth.

Early on, the young monarch also signaled his interest in bridging the gender divide in Morocco. He announced that he would hold a public wedding ceremony for the first time in Moroccan history. A leading Morocco’s Socialist Press labeled the public wedding “a real revolution” in palace traditions, which served as a sign to many that he was modernizing traditional practices (as rpt. in Howe, 2005, p. 22). Photos of his beautiful, red haired fiancée circulated both online and offline. For the first time, the new bride held an official title of Her Royal Highness. Princess Lalla Selma abandoned the traditional title of the Mother of the Princes, which allowed her to be involved in state affairs (Sandberg & Aqertit, 2014). Activists in women’s movements were excited about who the new King chose to marry (Howe, 2005). Selma Bennani was a well-educated middle class woman who worked in the computer science field, who had a strong personality, and who was a strong ally in the fight for women’s rights. King Mohammed VI’s reputation as a reformer also arose from his advocacy for human rights and the fact that he championed women’s rights in his push for a new family law known as Moudawana (Maghraoui, 2011). Women’s movements welcomed these changes and saw them
as a progressive, encouraging move forward (Howe, 2005). Mohammed VI’s approach to women’s rights was an enlightening sign for the country, providing a genuine space for women to be equal partners in Moroccan society.

In another symbolically important move, the young monarch focused on the northern regions of the country, previously forgotten and ignored by the late King Hassan II. Under the prior monarchy, King Hassan II refrained from visiting the northern regions and Rif Mountains because of a tribal rebellion in those areas that had raged since 1956 (Howe, 2005; Mezran, 2000). He disliked the northern region and referred to the Rifian people of the north as “savages and thieves” (Errazzouki, 2012). The populations located in northern regions were appreciative of King Mohammed’s new approach. They heralded him as a national hero at his first highly publicized visit to their homelands (“Morocco’s Brave New King,” 1999). The streets filled with crowds of happy fans who wanted to see him in person (Howe, 2005; “Morocco’s Brave New King,” 1999). The King shook the outstretched hands of the crowds, in spite of his secret service’s hesitation. His trip to the northern region signaled his desire to break from the past by unifying all of the Moroccan people and reconciling the monarchy with the previously ignored region.

In another move designed to dissociate his rule from that of his father, one of the new monarch’s most important acts was the removal of the powerful Minister of Interior Driss Basri. Reputed as the most powerful man after Hassan II, Basri was very close to the late King, and was believed by many to be responsible for the repressive regime (Howe, 2005; Laskier, 2003). King Mohammed rewarded the minister with his kingdom’s highest award, removed the senior officials that were part of Basri’s network and security system, and then dismissed Basri himself. Throughout the removal process, the nation avoided protests or a revolution, even though the
Moroccan government did not prosecute people close to Basri for war crimes (Howe, 2005). The nonviolent form in which the King stripped Basri of his power was swift and hailed as a positive step towards liberalization.

As part of his political liberalization program, the monarch also attempted to improve the human rights record of his father. Mohammed VI allowed monitors to visit the notorious Tazmamart secret prison and promised to compensate some of its victims (Campbell, 2003). He called for the creation of the Moroccan Forum for Truth and Justice based on the South African model, the first such institution in the Muslim and Arab world (Linn, 2011). The commission’s responsibilities included examination of the period from Moroccan independence in 1956 to the year of Hassan II’s death in 1999. It investigated arbitrary detention, forced disappearances, and accounts of torture (Linn, 2011). The Moroccan Forum for Truth and Justice Commission gave torture victims the opportunity to testify publicly and receive promises of financial compensation for their suffering (Hazan, 2006). Moreover, the King released Abdsalem Yassine from house arrest, despite the fact that he had functioned as his father’s foremost adversary and he had served as the Islamist leader of the Justice and Spirituality movement (Laskier, 2003; Mezran, 2000). The King also allowed some political exiles to return to the country, including Marxist activist Abraham Serfaty and the family of the late Mehdi Ben Barka, both long time opponents of Hassan II (Laskier, 2003; Mezran, 2000). These public steps served to distance the new King from Hassan II’s records of human rights abuses and led the country to a potentially more democratic future.

Such actions during the early years of King Mohammed’s rule raised expectations and instilled hope, especially among the younger generation. During his first few years in power, the

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6 During the time of his father’s rule (Hassan II), Yassine had questioned the King’s title and legitimacy as commander of the faithful. After Mohammed VI assumed the crown, Yassine also pushed the young monarch to use his inheritance of Hassan II’s fortune to pay Morocco’s national debt.
King took meaningful steps to democratize the country and to implement an ambitious political liberalization program. The years of the late King Hassan II’s reign, characterized by repeated acts of state-sponsored violence against dissidents and repression of political opposition, seemed to have ended. King Mohammed signaled a new vision of the Moroccan state, leading many to anticipate the emergence of a parliamentary monarchy, one that would have less executive power and more power for the parliament and legislative bodies (Campbell 2003; Howe 2005; Laskier 2003; Linn 2011; Mezran, 2000). A new political era emerged, with a generation of “M6” that promised empowerment and hope for a brighter future.

During the King’s first few years on the throne, the national and international media coverage of the young monarch was very positive. Perhaps appreciative of the King’s promise to allow the Moroccan media to flourish, the domestic and international media referred to the young monarch as “the King of the poor,” “the royal jet-skier,” “King Charming,” “the modern monarch,” and “the M6 generation” (as qtd. in Howe, 2005, p. 5). According to Time reporter Scott Macleod (2000), the King was “confident yet modest, part regal, part ordinary guy . . . . Combining a common touch with strategic vision, he may be the most impressive of the new generation coming to power in the Middle East” (p. 27-28). The excitement and energy the King’s new initiatives generated should not be underestimated; they brought a significant amount of legitimacy to the King on both the domestic and international scenes.

M6- A Return to a Moroccan Winter?

Despite the King’s relatively progressive, public agenda, Morocco’s structural problems threatened the country’s successful path towards open democracy. Socio-economic, political, and security issues prevented the King from fulfilling the public’s raised expectations. Over

\[7\] M6 is a youth’s way of mentioning the King Mohammed VI.
time, the King’s reforms increasingly failed to answer the expectations of those who hoped for more substantial change.

One chief impediment towards achieving the King’s publicly stated goals was that the regime’s security system (makhzen) remained problematic and corrupt. As Willis (1999) surmised, the makhzen was “made up of a patchwork of clientelist networks which although historically centered on and supportive of the person of the monarch, have their own interests which may be disturbed and even threatened by the arrival of the new monarch” (p.116). Indeed, the makhzen had difficulties adapting to the monarch’s new changes that threatened its long-standing, safeguarded interests. According to Campbell (2003), the ruling elite did not accept a loss of control over economic and political decisions. Further, King Mohammed VI could not control the makhzen without resorting to his father’s tactics. As a consequence King Mohammed VI exercised power (executive, legislative, and judicial) in the same fashion as before, only with a new appealing façade. While many Moroccans considered the King and the regime’s elite as distinct actors, the powerful makhzen continued to be a major challenge, undermining the monarch’s attempts to achieve democratization and respect for human rights (Mezran, 2000).

Prior to the rise of the February 20th movement, Moroccan civil society struggled to maintain their independence in the face of the makhzen’s constant attempt at cooptation or repression (Jacobs, 2014; Laachir, 2013). In general, human rights activists remained concerned about the makhzen’s presence and its political influence, given its use of repression at many peaceful protests and its continued beatings and arrests of demonstrators (Campbell, 2003). To avoid the stifling response of the makhzen, civil society groups attempted to depoliticize their demands and even their own organizational structures in an effort to obtain desired reforms (Delmasso, 2012; Delmasso & Cavatorta, 2011).
Furthermore, the fragmented political opposition fighting to diffuse the King’s executive powers ironically strengthened the King’s position as supreme arbitrator (Delmasso, 2012). With minimal oppositional power of their own and weakness *vis-a-vis* the state, the highly fragmented, political groups who had divergent interests and priorities were heavily reliant on the King to obtain their desired reforms. In one case, for example, the monarch arbitrated a conflict between the women’s movement and the Islamists. The women’s movement had called for a change in the family law code in an effort to enhance women’s rights, while the other group, primarily made up of the Islamists, was opposed to the new proposed legal reform on religious grounds. Grateful that the King had supported the liberal feminist position in the outcome of that dispute, the women’s movement felt obligated to limit their critiques and broader agenda for social change (Salime, 2012). In short, the dominance of the monarchy and *makhzen*’s control over the political system continued to influence both the state and civil society framework, which led to cooptation and influence over the political reform agenda of Morocco.

Another factor that rendered the reform agenda unrealized was the attitude of the monarch in regards to limiting his own executive powers. According to the Moroccan constitution, the King has the power to appoint state officials and ministers, direct state policies, and establish new laws without interference from the media, who face imprisonment if they are caught criticizing the monarchy. Further, the monarch has the authority to dissolve parliament, call for new elections, terminate the tenure of any minister, and change the constitution by referendum without parliamentary consent (Laskier, 2003; Linn, 2011). As such, the political framework assumed allegiance rather than encouraging genuine public participation.

Security concerns from the threat of terrorism further set back the King’s promised reforms. The 2003 terrorist attacks in Casablanca, which resulted in 33 victim deaths, shook the
nation and solidified the executive powers of the monarchy. The King faced the decision of whether to return to his father’s harsh security policies to strengthen the country’s stability or to pursue genuine democratic reforms. Within weeks of the Casablanca terrorist attacks, the Moroccan authorities arrested 1000 people, incarcerated 50 to serve life terms in prison, and sentenced 16 others to death. Many Moroccans, including members of the news media, supported the King’s response and saw it as a necessary step to deter any further attacks (Kalpakian, 2005; Sandberg & Aqertit, 2014). Nevertheless, human rights groups protested the ruling. They described the trials as lacking in legitimacy and transparency based on their fears that Morocco might backtrack on its path to a stronger democratic state (Sandberg & Aqertit, 2014).

The King’s philosophical approach to good governance further dampened the reform agenda, resulting in an ineffective response to the high level corruption and clientelism. The country pursued a technocratic, apolitical approach to economic development (Maghraoui, 2001; Tozy, 2009). In other words, the regime prioritized advancement of socioeconomic reforms ahead of reforms necessary to ensure expansion of political rights. As such, the Moroccan government exempted the political status quo from becoming an issue of public debate with the result that the high-level corruption and clientelism continued to plague the country (Maghraoui, 2012). The lack of checks and balances on the state apparatus (which remained immune to regulations and procedures governing the populace) enabled the ruling family to control the major national shares of the economy through all sectors. The King’s estimated fortune is $2 billion, making him the wealthiest African monarch (Nsehe, 2014). Hence, problems of corruption became intimately intertwined with the political environment and could not be addressed independently from it. As long as Morocco’s governing apparatus put political reform
on hold, the high level of corruption and clientelism prevented fulfillment of the populace’s rising expectations.

Another divisive issue that dominated the Moroccan political landscape was the Western Sahara conflict. As one of the longest standing, unresolved conflicts in the region, its origins trace back to the 1884 Berlin Conference, which divided up Africa among the colonial powers. The disputed territory was occupied by Spain until 1976. Both Morocco and Mauritania affirmed their claim to the territory. The Polisario Front, a separatist group seeking independence that is financially and materially supported by Algeria, opposed such claims. From 1975 until the 1991 ceasefire and deployment of UN peacekeeping forces known as MINURSO, Moroccan and Polisario forces fought to claim the territory of the Western Sahara (Ohaegbulam, 2002). The sovereignty of the Western Sahara has remained the subject of dispute between the government of Morocco and the Polisario Front.

No discussion of human rights and democratization in Morocco would be complete without an examination of the Western Sahara conflict. Even though the prospects of the negotiated peace hold the promise of socio-political and economic benefits and stability for the region, the settlement has, to date, been unsuccessful in resolving this dispute. The long planned UN sponsored referendum to resolve the Western Sahara conflict has suffered frequent postponements due to disagreements over who should be entitled to vote in the referendum (Conti, 2008; Ohaegbulam, 2002). Further, the refugee problem resulting from the continuing conflict has remained a chief concern both for Morocco and the international community (Dunbar, 2000). Most importantly, the ongoing deadlock has hampered the formation of the Arab Maghreb Union, forestalled Morocco becoming a member of the African Union, and

Echoing the reign of King Hassan II, King Mohammed VI has consistently refused to relinquish Morocco’s sovereignty over the Western Sahara. He claimed territorial integrity as a public strategy to maintain control and stability in the region. King Hassan II publicly announced, “I have always said that, in this country, the rights of man stopped at the question of the Sahara. Anyone who said that Sahara was not Moroccan could not benefit from the rights of Man” (as qtd. in Mundy, 2008, para. 1). The monarch’s argument was grounded in the closeness in culture, language, tradition and history between the Moroccan and the Sahrawi people (Maghraoui, 2003). In his 2014 Throne speech, the King purposefully mentioned the cost and the sacrifice that Moroccans had to endure to develop and maintain their southern territories, sending a clear signal that the topic of the Western Sahara was not open for negotiation.

Consistent with the King’s views, the Moroccan government continued to place heavy censorship on civil society and news agencies that covered the events in the Western Sahara. The Moroccan government deployed restrictive press code clauses that were subject to arbitrary court interpretations that had significant flexibility to rule in favor of officials (Denouex, 2011). Clauses that might lead to jail terms included “malicious,” “harmful to the public order,” “offensive” to the royal family, and dissemination of “false information” (as qtd. in Denouex, 2011, p. 4). For example, the Moroccan courts charged Le Journal a $380,000 fine for defamation for its 2006 report on the Western Sahara, forcing the editor to step down and the magazine to shutdown due to bankruptcy (Denouex, 2011). Another example involved an independent journalist, Ali Lmrabet, who was sentenced to a 10-year ban on his practice of journalism in 2005 (Freedom of the Press, 2006). His offense was writing an article in El
Mundo, where he referred to the people in Tindouf, Algeria as refugees (Freedom of the Press, 2006). Such a sentiment contradicted state rhetoric, which claimed the Polisario held the Sahrawis in Tindouf against their will. In sum, international and domestic news agencies faced heavy restrictions from a government-pressured judiciary when they covered Western Sahara.

The Moroccan state apparatus’ use of its territorial claim to the Western Sahara effectively silenced or neutralized political opposition. According to the 2014 World Press Freedom Index, Morocco ranked 136th out of 180 countries on media pluralism and independence, respect for the safety and freedom of journalists, and the legislative, institutional and infrastructural environment in which the media operate. According to the 2011 Freedom of Press Index, Morocco scored 68 out of 100 on press freedom score, with 0 as optimal score and 100 as the worst score. Reporters without Borders highlighted the urgent need for Morocco to protect independent media and eliminate the government’s red line on coverage related to territorial integrity and monarchy (Deloire, 2014). Facing the risk that the state media would taint activists as Algerian spies or as disloyal citizens, pacifist movements, peaceful demonstrations, and public criticism related to the Western Sahara issue became very limited.

A third challenge leading to the rise of the February 20th movement was the continued lags in socio-economic development under the King’s leadership. Morocco faced severe political and economic challenges, including a poverty rate of 9 percent, an illiteracy rate of 35 percent, and an unemployment rate of 9.1 percent (International Monetary Fund, 2013). According to the United Nations Human Development Report (2013), Morocco trailed most Arab countries on the three major factors related to human development: life expectancy, educational attainment, and a decent standard of living. Morocco ranked 130th among the

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8 The illiteracy rate of Morocco is a highly contested figure. Nevertheless, members of the February 20th movement generally cite the figure at 47 percent. The most conservative figure that the same movement’s activists cited was 33 percent.
Countries of the world, 15th in the Arab world, and 4th in the Maghreb region behind Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia. Morocco scored medium on the human development index along with Jordan, the occupied Palestinian territory, Egypt, Syrian Arab Republic, and Iraq. Three other countries of the Maghreb region (Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria) fared better than Morocco. The liberalization programs that the World Bank and International Monetary Fund funded also widened the gap between the wealthy and the working poor in Morocco (Magroui, D., 2011). While international development programs provided opportunities for some, the number of individuals falling within the marginalized social groups in Morocco’s major cities still increased.

A fourth topic of concern that gave rise to the February 20th movement was the status of gender equity. While Morocco did pass laws designed to promote more gender equality, those measures failed to have a substantial impact on the ground. The Gender Equality Index (GII) examined the gap between men and women in three fundamental categories: reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity. According to the 2013 Gender Equality Index, the rate of female unemployment was higher than that of men in Morocco. Morocco ranked 92nd out of 149 countries around the globe, and scored worse than its regional neighbors, Tunisia and Libya, which ranked 48th and 40th respectively (United Nations Development Programme, 2014). Gender disparities in education exacerbated women’s problems. According to a United Nation’s national illiteracy survey in Morocco, 38.5 percent of the population was illiterate, with a rate of 46.8 percent for women and 31.4 percent for men (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2011). Further, low literacy rates in Morocco, particularly among women, were a major barrier to the socioeconomic reforms.
With rising public expectations for genuine reform and a regional context that frustrated realizations of reform, a desire for radical change grew within the Moroccan kingdom. The internal historical and political contexts of Morocco, as well as the regional context of other youth-inspired movements sweeping across the Middle East and North Africa, gave rise to the February 20th movement. Within such a dynamic context, the February 20th movement led nationwide protests to speed political changes, including constitutional reform.

The Rise of the February 20th Movement

On February 20th 2011, between 150,000 and 300,000 citizens in 53 cities across Morocco marched in the streets, calling for democracy and change (Hoffmann & Konig, 2013; Maghraoui, 2011; Molina, 2011). While Moroccan youth initiated the movement, members from other age groups also joined (Maghraoui, 2011). The movement's members implored the Moroccan government to reform the nation’s political system and to fight governmental corruption. For the first nine months, the members of the February 20th movement held weekly demonstrations in various cities around the country and monthly marches nationwide in support of its cause.

Unlike counterparts in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Libya, the Moroccan activists did not demand a regime change. Instead, they called for a constitutional monarchy that would restrict the judicial and executive powers of the King. They also called for constitutional reform, chanting the popular slogan “Al shaab uridou dusturan jadid” (the people want a new constitution). The February 20th movement denounced the lack of citizen power in relation to the state and encouraged the reformulation of these power relations. At first, the movement activists described their goals as focused on more democracy and an end of corruption, as well as
improved infrastructure for education, healthcare, quality of life, and jobs. Following the subsequent regime’s violent clampdown, activists added the release of political prisoners to their central demands. As one film student activist from Rabat stated, “We don’t want just to remove a system or to remove a regime, but we want to see our fellow citizen able to claim their rights and to have their plight heard.” A male activist from Casablanca agreed: “We want to see our fellow citizens able to claim their rights and to have their grievances heard.” On the whole, the movement’s main goals revolved around removing fear, fighting hogra (oppression), and contesting the Moroccan status quo.

While the social and political protests the February 20th movement sparked in Morocco were not new, the appeal of the movement on the streets signaled a major shift in popular attitudes regarding the monarchy and the country’s sociopolitical situation. Unlike any other previous Moroccan political movements, the February 20th movement took more risks and was more audacious in attempting to achieve its goals and in generating new ways of challenging the regime (Hoffmann & Konig, 2013; Maghraoui, 2011; Molina, 2011). The movement confronted the state with specific political and economic demands. One of the major issues it continuously raised was the relationship between the business elites and the makhzen. It critiqued the makhzen’s corruption and unchecked power (Maghraoui, 2011). During the movement’s first few months, its members also called for freedom and socioeconomic justice for all Moroccans. As time passed the movement’s slogans became much more politicized and focused on individual members of the government and the King’s entourage. In particular, the membership

9 Interviews with activists will be cited throughout the dissertation without reference to the names of individuals to protect the identity, safety, and confidentiality agreements of those who participated in this study; instead, information such as location of the interview, role of the individual in the movement, or other general information will be provided. Interviews are cited only when research participant agreed to go on the record.
targeted Prime Minister Abbas El Fassi. Finally, the movement condemned Morocco’s record of human rights violations (Maghraoui, 2011).

Activists in the February 20th movement maintained that the best approach for achieving their goals was through raising consciousness through heightened literacy, education and critical analysis. To make its messages audible, meaningful, and unifying, the movement used different media platforms, such as music, promotional videos, films, protest signs and street theater. Most of their activities revolved around raising awareness and transforming consciousness through cultural education that included street performances and art. All together, the movement’s activities invited open reflection in an effort to redefine both self and nation. As such, many activists characterized the movement as a civic call to citizenship that would serve as a direct response to the status quo.

Organization of the February 20th Movement

The February 20th movement was a decentralized movement with no unified command structure. It functioned as a horizontally organized and nonhierarchical movement. However, the movement had key activists within each city that attended all of the meetings and played a key role with the movement’s communication strategies. As a semi-structured social movement, the February 20th movement had different committees, including a general assembly that voted on issues related to the movement’s central goals. Local committees, known as tansikiyat, were responsible for coordinating political actions and protests (Maghraoui, 2011). The local committees were located in all Moroccan regions, but the most powerful branches were in Tangier, Casablanca, Rabat, and the historical marginal areas of the Rif mountains (Hoffman & Konig, 2013). According to a female February 20th activist from Rabat, the four main committees were creativity (art and culture), logistics, media, and finance. Each city had its own
general assembly and committees, with each local branch directing their own governance based on regional differences and needs. Each locality had a general assembly that decided its own structure and agenda (Hoffman & Konig, 2013). Within such an organizational template, codes of conduct and communication strategies varied from one region to the next.

To maximize the number of individuals who could relate to the movement’s demands, the February 20th activists used a decentralized model to reach all key constituents. In this study’s interviews, all of the activists identified decentralization as one of the key strengths of the movement. A youth activist from Rabat, who played a key role in the movement’s inception, explained that the decentralized nature of the movement helped foster inclusion of diverse voices and a means to ensure the activists took major regional demands into consideration. He stressed:

A person from down south in a small city near Marrakesh doesn’t necessarily have the same priorities as someone who lives in the center of Casablanca. For example in Casablanca you may talk about freedom of expression and freedom of press. It’s something that is urgent while in other cities they might not see it as a priority and if you approach them with this demand, as something that is critical, you will lose some of your credibility because they will say it just doesn’t concern me. They have other demands.

Nationwide inclusion served as an overarching principle of the movement’s choices.

The activists purposely designed the February 20th movement as a movement without a recognizable leading figure. By doing so, the movement avoided selecting a single leader from any one of its special interest subgroups; instead, its local heads emerged from secularists, trade unions, Marxists, socialists, atheists, Islamists, and members of various political parties. The breadth of the coalition and its internal diversity inoculated against simple characterizations of the movement. Political Furthermore, the decentralization of the movement made it more
difficult for the regime to co-opt or target a ‘leader’ of the movement. The lack of a single, guiding ideology also had the benefit of attracting a significant number of people with different socio-economic and political backgrounds (Cavatorta, 2007; Hoffmann & Konig, 2013). In short, rather than rise in response to a single charismatic figure, what united the movement was “opposition to authoritarian rule in all its different manifestations” (Maghraoui, 2011, p. 687).

Many political groups that joined the February 20th movement, such as the labor unions, exploited the unrest in the country to strategically advance their own interests and increase their bargaining power (Buehler, 2015). By joining a larger movement operating within a national level, labor unions succeeded in securing some of their demands. In a series of negotiations with the state, for example, the labor unions succeeded in acquiring a 70 percent increase in retirement pensions and a $80 increase in wages for all public employees regardless of their civil service ranking (Buehler, 2015).

While the heterogeneity of the movement was beneficial in the short term, in long term, the structure had serious drawbacks. The movement encompassed different people who held different beliefs and believed in different ideologies. As one female activist from Tangier remembered:

It is kind of good because everyone can feel that it is their movement, but this also has great drawbacks . . .. The movement was composed of different people who are convinced by very different things and different ideologies. We have the Islamists of al-Adl wal-Ihsan and from the other side you have the Democratic Party. They had to come together and agree on a vision and build a common ground to what they could see as a future in Morocco.
The movement’s members strived to unite behind a common vision regarding Morocco’s future. The main internal challenge was consensus building. A young male activist from Casablanca recounted the resulting tension that occurred at times in the general assembly. He stated,

It wasn’t always smooth because sometimes we would differ on many important points, especially in Casablanca and Rabat where the number of activists from the left wing part or neutral activists are almost the same in number with al-Adl wal-Ihsan. But during demonstrations I think they would try hard as possible to not impose their ideas.

Torn by conflicting ideologies, the February 20 movement activists had to agree on a common vision that maintained group cohesion and commitment without losing sight of their original, fundamental purpose.

Taken as a whole, the activists’ were divided on whether the heterogeneity of the February 20th movement was predominately advantageous or a drawback for the movement. Responses ranged from some who thought that the movement somewhat failed because of the diversity to others who thought it enriched the movement. The ones who believed that the movement was constrained by its different ideologies cited gender and secular tensions. Examples they referenced included the internal organizational disagreements over whether female activists should smoke in conservative neighborhoods and whether application of religious inspired texts was permissible. Others believed that the Islamist party specifically added value to the movement, and blamed the “laique” (secular) members of harming the organization by not wanting Islamist party members to be part of the movement. To this group of activists, the Islamist movement al-Adl wal-Ihsane brought organization to the movement and exponentially increased its size. One female activist questioned about these tensions stressed
that an activist becomes willingly or unwillingly a representative of the movement. In her own words:

When you describe yourself as someone who carries a message and someone who convinces another person who may not be as privileged as you, and may not have received the same education as you, or might not have had parents who are tolerant as yours, you just have to sacrifice your small liberties . . . Your goal is not to affirm yourself or your personal will, but the goal is to convince that person and to do whatever it takes to convince a person. Wanting to smoke or to do any other things (deemed liberal) may shock. I think those things should have been sacrificed or postponed to another time when we are strong enough to do whatever we want.

The State’s Response to the February 20th Movement

To fully understand the context that influenced the strategies of the February 20th movement, three Moroccan institutions emerge as pivotal. These include King Mohammed VI, the state media, and the state-security apparatus. In short, the movement had to respond effectively to each of these actors to ensure its survival. Although some argue that the Mohammed VI’s responses to the February 20th movement demands were essentially cosmetic (e.g. Maghraoui, 2011; Molina, 2011), his proposed reforms did garner sufficient internal consensus and international support to push back calls for more radical and deeper reform (Benchemsi, 2012). Nonetheless, as Moroccan journalist Ahmed Benchemsi (2011) opined, “. . . one thing is certain: the democratic Pandora’s box is open, and will not be closed again” (para.11). To more fully understand how the February 20th movement prompted certain, if incremental, changes to Morocco’s socio-political landscape, exploring how the various
components of the monarchy worked to constrain the advances of the movement is a necessary step for understanding the movement’s broader context.

**King’s Response**

After February 20th demonstrations developed within each major city of its kingdom, King Mohammed VI responded to the movement’s demands with a national televised speech. Even though he did not mention the pro-democracy movement or the massive protests that were sweeping the region, the March 9th speech was notable because it was the first time a Moroccan king had ever responded to street protests by addressing a national audience. King Mohamed VI delivered his historical speech in classical Arabic and promised to take steps to speed up the democratization process. He also called for major constitutional reforms aimed specifically at democratizing the political system. The promised reforms included respect for human rights and the rule of law, comprehensive constitutional reforms, independence of the judicial system, and an elected government more reflective of the will of the people.

Mohammed VI seized the opportune moment to maximize the potential impact of his words, because, unlike the other Arab rulers who waited to publicly respond to massive Arab Spring demonstrations, the King responded to the Moroccan people in short order. By doing so, he distanced himself from the political trajectory of other Arab rulers who relied upon violent responses to internal protests that detached the rulers from their people and shifted public demands towards dismantling entire political systems. As such, the timing of the King’s speech functioned as a useful rhetorical device to expand the conditions of possibility.

In the speech itself, King Mohammed VI differentiated himself from his father by reiterating acts of democratic reform he had initiated since his assumption of the monarchy. In the King’s words,
Many significant accomplishments have been made thanks to an innovative concept of
authority, far-reaching political reforms, major development projects and ground breaking
historical reconciliations . . . . Ever since my accession to the Throne, I have sought to
bring about the right conditions for thorough institutional reform” (“King Mohammed VI

To emphasize his commitment and will for political change, the King characterized his efforts as
“comprehensive reforms,” “wide ranging,” “constructive national debate” and “profoundly deep
reform.” The speech was strategically framed to focus on his positive reforms and deflect
attention from the failures of past Moroccan monarchies or the burgeoning revolutions in
neighboring countries.

Throughout his address to the nation, the King argued that the timing was now ripe for
Morocco to undertake even more meaningful reforms. He stated, “Morocco has matured” and
“Morocco is ready for change.” By placing reform in a temporal context, he rhetorically
distanced himself from other Nation’s experiences in the Arab Spring. Drawing a contrast with
other Arab leaders in the region, he insisted that reforms have been underway since he became
the King, while noting that only now was the country ready to take further steps to develop a
new constitution. Placed within such a context, reasons for the slow reforms within the kingdom
were not attributable to his personal failure, but were, instead, a necessary step to prepare the
country for the proper moment to undertake substantial, historical reforms.

Having situated the timing of the speech strategically, his speech unveiled a series of
unprecedented, democratic changes for Moroccans. For the first time in Moroccan history, the
King named the Amazigh people and culture as central to the Moroccan identity and recognized

10 All quotations from the King’s national speech on March 9th 2011 will be directly quoted from the video file
found in YouTube. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, all references to the King’s words will be indicated in
the preface to the quotation.
the Tamazigh language within the constitution. He rhetorically shifted the Moroccans from his subjects to citizens, and called for a national referendum to change the constitution.

Furthermore, he positioned the audience to participate in the proposed reforms. He stated,

I call on everyone to be mobilized in order to ensure the success of this crucial constitutional undertaking, to show determination, commitment and a keen sense of purpose, and to put the nation’s best interest above all other considerations. I should like to say how proud I am of the sincere patriotism shown by my loyal people across the kingdom, by committed political parties and trade unions and by our ambitious youth. I hope the broad national debate will cover issues that are of crucial importance for the nations and the citizens.

This statement from Mohammed VI was the first time in the nation’s history that the nation’s monarch referred to the Moroccan people as “citizens” rather than “subjects” or “loyal people”. He did not attempt to persuade the Moroccan people to support the monarchy, as their support was already inherent in his subject position. Instead, the King’s strategic word choice interpellated the public into a collective of active Moroccan citizens prepared to take action.11

The King’s speech also offered no action alternative for Moroccans but to mobilize for constitutional reform. Interestingly, the monarch merged the topics of his loyal people, patriotism, citizens, and a call for action throughout his address. From the King’s perspective, to be patriotic required the nation’s citizens to put the nation’s best interests first, which in turn translated into giving the monarch another opportunity to implement his proposed reforms.

Together, audience constitution and the strategy of limiting the audience actions dissolved any conflict between the continuation of the monarchy and achieving democracy.

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11 For more on how rhetoric performs its constitutive function, see Charland (1987) and Leff & Utley (2004).
While Mohammed VI explicitly called for a participatory democracy, he retained the use of his religious standing to maintain his state of exception. Daadoui (2011) noted that the Moroccan monarchy banked on religious capital and based its legitimacy on socio-religious concepts and practices of Baraka, *amir al mu'minin*, *ba'yaa*, and *sharaf* in order to maintain monarchical stability and political survival. So, while the King’s arguments in the 2011 speech were based on representation and participation, his speech was also filled with religious references that elevated his status and solidified his demand for sacred recognition.

Taking on a prophetic persona in the speech, the King emerged as a messenger of God on a mission to deliver his new promise. He started his speech by quoting a religious statement: “Praise to be God; May peace and blessings be upon the prophet, his kith, and kin.” Similarly, he ended with a symbolic Quranic verse without reference to the chapter or verse in the Quran: “I only intend reform as much as I am able. And my success is not but through Allah. Upon him I have relied and to Him I return.” Through such religious referents, King Mohammed VI characterized the values of the kingdom and the people as first and foremost sacred. By evoking his role as Prince of the Believers, a caliphate title that traces his family lineage to the Prophet Mohammed, the King reminded the audience of his sacred authority. His choice of Quranic verses reaffirmed his special title and reinforced the sacred traditions. This rhetorical authority of “sacredness” elevated him to a protected status above the public sphere.

A more full understanding the rhetorical strategy that the King deployed also requires attention to what he did not say. In the conclusion to the Throne speech, the King cited only half of the Quranic verse in context, namely the part where he embodied a prophetic persona. He stated, “I only desire (your) betterment to the best of my power; and my success (in my task) can only come from Allah. In Him I trust, and unto Him I look.” The omitted first part of the same
Quranic verse reads, “O my people, have you considered: if I am upon clear evidence from my Lord and He has provided me with a good provision from Him…? And I do not intend to differ from you in that which I have forbidden you [...].” Through such an omission, the King chose not only to invite the public to further question his actions, but also to blur the public’s realization that he was quoting from the Quran and adopting a prophetic persona.

In the speech the King also invoked Moroccan cultural and historical references to frame particular symbols and rituals that institutionalized the government’s legitimacy. He emphasized the special relationship between the Moroccan monarchy and the people by reiterating the phrase, “Commemorating the revolution of the King and the people.” Furthermore, his references to “the unity of the state, the nation and the territory” and “territorial integrity” reinforced the importance of the monarchy, as it historically functioned as the sole institution responsible for safeguarding Morocco’s territorial integrity and national stability. The appeal throughout the speech to particular symbols of Moroccan social identity diffused some of the February 20th pro-democracy claims and further legitimized the monarchy and its slow path to reform.

The monarchy responded in ways that, at least on the surface, appeared to allow for genuine political reforms within the Moroccan political system. He promised an “independent judiciary,” “the rule of law,” and an “elected government that reflects the will of the people, through the ballot box.” He appointed a constitutional commission made up of 18 local experts.12 The King instructed the commission to “listen to political parties, trade unions, youth organizations and qualified civil society groups intellectuals and scholars, to work closely with them and to seek their views.” On April 16, 2015, the royal commission also invited members of

12 According to Benchemsi (2011), the make up of the constitutional commission was very problematic because the King appointed the members, who were all loyal civil servants with little independence.
the February 20th movement to participate in the discussions. Many in Morocco felt that the King has finally heard them and were encouraged by the King’s direct response to the people, especially the recognition of the Tamazight language and his call for a referendum (Errazouki, 2012). A pro-regime March 9th counter-movement arose to applaud the King’s efforts. Moroccan public opinion moved towards seeing what the new constitution would look like and supported the King in his outlined reform agenda (Errazoukki, 2012).

However, to members of the February 20th movement, the concentration of power still remained with the monarch without sufficient checks and balances. The February 20th movement boycotted the talks and rejected the invitation. Instead of attending, they demanded material proof of the King’s commitment rather than solely symbolic acts (Karam, 2011). The February 20 activists challenged the sacredness of the King and his title of Commander of the Faithful. A male activist from Rabat asserted that without genuine reform, “a written constitution will not bring real changes.” Some in the February 20th movement and their supporters conceded that the content of the speech was not without merit, but all agreed that it did not go far enough and fell short of their demands for an immediate dissolution of both the existing parliament and government.

Simultaneously, those who opposed the King’s process for developing the new constitution cited the lack of an independent constituent assembly and lack of governmental transparency. They dubbed the final document “the given constitution” (*al destour al mamnuh*) (Hoffmann & Konig, 2013, p.15), because while the King’s advisors consulted political parties about constitutional reform, the palace managers (rather than the constituent assembly) prepared the final text over a short, three-month period (Maghraoui, 2011). One frequently circulated online image during the protests captured these activists’ sentiments (see figure 3.1). The slogan
in the picture translates to “The given constitution is thrown in the garbage.” Activists used this image during the protest to rally people to mobilize and called on the people to question the process of the proposed reforms. One of the activists summarized the feelings of many in the movement: “What we wanted was a constituent assembly to write the constitution, like what just happened in Tunisia.” As the monarchy only allowed a two-week period for comment between the announcement of the new constitutional changes and the referendum, the Moroccan people had little opportunity for meaningful public debate. For these activists, the referendum call was simply a way for the regime to co-opt the movement. Their June 29, 2011 communiqué stated:

If the makhzen insists on citizen’s participation in the referendum, this is not out of concern for democracy and citizenship, but rather to be able to attest the following: that the majority of the people support the regime and that only a small minority supports the February 20th movement (“Communiqué Mamfakinch/Mamsawtinch,” 2011).

From the perspective of these activists, nothing had really changed; the regime was simply using different methods to continue to reaffirm its power and authority.

Despite shortcomings, many local and international articles praised the Moroccan state’s response to protests as a model of peaceful reform. Internationally, political figures such as Secretary of State Clinton and French president Sarkozy lauded the speech as a “profound change,” “impressive,” “courageous,” and “a regional model to learn from” (“Mideast uprising: Is Morocco a Regional Model,” 2011, p. 1). The national media and the political and religious institutions called on the Moroccan people to support the new reforms that the monarch proposed. Media outlets, religious institutions, and different government institutions backed the referendum and supported the King. One activist stated, “After the speech, all you heard is how
the reform will be.” After the constitutional referendum, the movement dwindled in numbers and the Islamist faction, al-Adl wal-Ihsan, quit the February 20th movement.

**State Media’s Response**

Since the political challenges that the February 20th movement posed to the state were serious, media outlets and forums close to the regime carried out an intense campaign to discredit and delegitimize the movement (Kinani, 2011, “Revue de Presse Marocaine Ecrite,” 2011). National media outlets portrayed the activists as delinquents and uneducated youth who were interested in creating national instability and public disorder (Errazoukki, 2012). February 20th movement activists accused the Moroccan state-sanctioned media of falsely claiming the movement barely existed and that it had cancelled planned protests. When such press efforts failed, the media then accused the involved youth of being disloyal to the King, as working for Algerian national interests, and as having jeopardized the Western Sahara issue (Errazoukki, 2012; Lalami, 2011). For example, Moncef Belkhayet, Morocco’s Youth Minister used online platforms to portray the movement organizers as working for Algerian foreign agents. He stated: “My personal position, as a Moroccan citizen who lives in Casablanca, and not in Paris or Barcelona, is that this march is today manipulated by the Polisario, with the goal of creating street clashes that will weaken the position of our country in the United Nations regarding the human rights situations in Sahara” (as qtd. in Lalami, 2011, par. 3). Furthermore, to bolster Belkhayat’s accusations, pro-government activists and people close to the makhzen reinforced these allegations by circulating photos of activists inside a church or with Saharan activists (Errazoukki, 2012; Lalami, 2011). The portrayals positioned the February 20 activists as not only traitors to their country, but also as traitors to their faith.
Both the media and the regime also singled out certain February 20th members as leaders of the movement. Many of the activists recounted how the regime tried to break one of the activists, Ousama Al Khlifi, by portraying him both as the leader of the movement and as a member of Party of Modernity and Authenticity (PAM), a collective Moroccans perceive as the Party of the King (Hoffman & Konig, 2013). While both efforts failed, Al Khlifi lost all credibility within the February 20th movement, which led to his public apology and his withdrawal from the movement.

From the perspective of the activists, the national and international media failed in their role as watchdog over the atrocities of governmental authorities. National media RTM and 2M media did not publicly hold the regime accountable for many of its purported crimes. The activists indicated that they had asked members of the press to go and document the regime’s violent acts and otherwise controversial responses to the movement’s activities, but the media writers refused. Further, a state-led media blockade prevented journalists from reporting such issues (Errazoukki, 2012). According to the activists interviewed for this study, the police seized citizen journalist videos and burned documentation of state-led violence. Activists also criticized international journalists for only wanting to go to places where the citizens spoke English. The state media provided little effective check on government responses, leaving activists with a heavy burden of proof.

State Apparatus’s Response

Agencies within the Moroccan state apparatus were the final actors that significantly shaped the movement’s strategies. One of the main challenges to the movement was the regime’s long history of successfully co-opting opposition groups. As one activist questioned, “How can you attack a strong system with its sophisticated means?” Activists shared the
regime’s methods of co-optation, including using money to buy protestors loyal to the King’s cause. They indicated that governmental actors paid poor people to go to the streets and chant, “long live the King.” On a larger scale, the state apparatus would at times try to buy an entire village for its silence. A senior female activist from Casablanca described how the state gave 120 bikes to citizens in the small town of Taza to silence people’s grievances and stop them from joining the protest. She concluded, “The government gives you something really small to live on and buys your silence, but it does not give you your dignity.” The same activist shared her frustration at the movement’s lack of resources to respond to such tactics.

The sometimes-brutal response of the regime also caused serious problems within the movement. According to activist accounts, the police violently clamped down on public demonstrations, detained and incarcerated the most exposed activists, and tortured political prisoners (Hoffman & Konig, 2013; Jacobs, 2014). One online February 20th movement statement posted on March 13, 2011 reported the regime’s clampdown on demonstrations by stating:

Hunt the nature of the ‘makhzen,’ it comes back galloping! Even if the makhzen, through the king’s address to the nation, talks about collective liberties and the holiness of the democratic choice, wild repression has lashed down on the youth of the 20 February this Sunday morning in Casablanca. We have to continue to fight for the fall of tyranny on the 20 March (“Feb 20 Casa Repression Sit-in Dimanche Matin,” 2011).

Prominent examples of police repression and brutality included the beating of Khadija Riyadi, President of Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH), the incarceration of Mouad Belghawat, a young rapper from a poor working class neighborhood in Casablanca, and the
detention of Rachid Niny, the publisher and editor of Morocco’s most popular Arabic newspaper, *Al-Massae*.

Another tactic the state apparatus employed to discredit and undermine the February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement was shaming and slandering the reputation of the activists. The regime accused some of the most outspoken activists of committing illegal activities including extramarital relations, drug possession, drinking alcohol, belonging to a satanic group, and serving foreign agendas (Monjib, 2014). The security apparatus criminalized dissent as police arrested activists simply because of their affiliation with the movement (Errazoukki, 2012). A female activist shared her personal story of when the police knocked on the door of her home and stated to her family members and neighbors that she was involved in illegal activity. This public shaming tactic exerted pressure on the families to forbid their daughters from joining the movement. As one activist stated, “We are much weaker than the government and the system, so we have to do a lot of effort. There is this whole system that is waiting for you to make the smallest mistake in order to turn your reputation and to prevent people from joining what you are doing right now.” The regime used slandering and shaming tactics to instill fear and silence critical voices of potential and current movement members far beyond that of the specifically targeted individual. Families feared for their sons and daughters and tried to persuade them to not participate in any major protest or movement activity.

All of the interviewed activists recalled that the regime used violence and brutality against the protestors. Some also discussed police brutality that resulted in the deaths of many, especially in the northern region of the Rif. Lawyers for some detained activists described the violent nature of the activists’ confinement and lack of medical assistance (Errazoukki, 2012). Furthermore, one female activist from Tangier shared the story of an activist who passed away
while in the custody of the authorities. She stated, “In Asfi, there was a young man called Kamal el Amari. He passed away under the violations of authorities and things used to get very violent and bloody at times.” Activists who sought medical help at local hospitals were arrested and questioned (Errazoukki, 2012). The places that the police mostly targeted were the small towns in the south and the small cities in the north, especially the Nador and Rif areas.

Fear was the main tactic the state apparatus deployed to dissuade the Moroccan populace from joining the movement. The state apparatus emphasized that Morocco was on the right path, focusing on all the new infrastructure projects headed by the National Initiative for Human Development. By focusing on the economic development and political reforms, it warned against the February 20th movement and accused the activists of leading the nation to chaos, or fitna. During the first major demonstration in Tangier, for example, the police and security system were absent even when violence erupted. The state apparatus accused the members of February 20 movement as perpetrators of the violence. The February 20th activists denied such allegations and accused groups loyal to the regime (baltajiyya) as being the main instigators. According to the activists, the state bribed baltajiyya groups to create chaos in the streets with the end goal of creating a negative image of the movement. Activists recounted instances when the police distributed papers that authorities had signed ordering people not to demonstrate because such actions were illegal. The authorities also arrested some of the activists for disturbing the public order (Errazoukki, 2012; Lalami, 2011).

With the possibility of being sentenced for participating in a protest activity, the stakes for movement involvement were high for the activists and the general Moroccan public. According to the Human Rights Watch Report (2011), “Authorities have over the years charged hundreds of Moroccans with participating in ‘illegal’ demonstrations and courts have sentenced
many of them to prison terms of few to several months” (Human Rights Watch Report, 2011, para.8). The high personal costs of the state apparatus’ strategy dissuaded many in the Moroccan populace not to join the protests.

Along with police brutality, slandering, and state cooptation, the police also utilized infiltration as a strategy to undermine the movement. The February 20th movement had no mechanism to vet the people joining their cause. Given the movement’s high recruitment goals, they welcomed all to join. Many of the activists shared stories of when they suspected one of the members to being part of the security services. One of the activists from Casablanca discovered that one of the February 20th members who came and was outspoken against the regime in every meeting was, in actuality, a policeman. The infiltration strategy affected both the trust level and camaraderie within the movement.

As the February 20th movement increased its success over time, activists faced police brutality, state cooptation, slandering and infiltration. These challenges affected both the group cohesion within the movement and the outside perceptions of the movement. This challenging context motivated the members to creatively develop ways to build trust between members and with the broader Moroccan public.

Summary and Conclusions

The lack of connection between the raised expectations of reform under the King Mohamed VI and the ongoing frustrations with conditions on the ground gave rise to the February 20 movement. Given the lack of significant internal progress and the inspiration of the upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt, February 20 movement members called for nationwide protests on February 20, 2011 to speed political change. Unlike the neighboring prodemocracy movements, the February 20th Movement called for genuine constitutional and political reforms,
not the fall of the regime. They called for a constitutional monarchy that would restrict the judicial and executive powers of the King, including a system whereby the legislative, judiciary, and executive branches functioned independently and the government would be accountable to the people. The movement also called for an improved infrastructure that would remove corruption and improve the citizenry’s quality of life. It denounced the constitutional process and outcome initiated by the King and called on Moroccans to boycott the referendum.

The activists were faced with several challenges including a staggering illiteracy rate, strong media censorship, political repression, a ritualized monarchical public sphere, and divided public opinion on political reforms. With police brutality and indiscriminate arrests of political activists on the rise, the movement called for freedom of speech and demanded that the state release of all political prisoners associated with the movement. The lack of an independent media in Morocco prompted the February 20 movement to rely on other means to report acts of state subjugation and disseminate information about the movement. In a context where state rituals and symbolism have long-standing legitimacy, the February 20th movement had to constantly find innovative means in creating and maintaining allegiance to have their messages heard.

The sociopolitical challenges facing the February 20th movement were complex. The movement operated within a highly ritualized public sphere where the monarchy had legitimacy amongst the people. As such, the February 20 movement had to develop response strategies for the King who held sacred status, the corrupt state security apparatus, and the unresponsive state media. Recognizing the complexity of the context, replete with its various actors, creates a lens for examining the various strategies that the February 20 movement used and the reasons for their deployment. Rather than treat the Moroccan government as a homogenous response entity,
the relationships between these different political actors provide space to investigate the mechanisms of power and the resulting action of the February 20th movement. With this multifaceted context, the subsequent chapters will focus on ways in which the February 20 movement attempted to challenge legitimacy of the system in place and encourage participatory politics from below.
Chapter 3: Figures

Figure 3.1 The New Constitution

13 All photos included in this dissertation are courtesy of the activists.
Chapter Four

Building a Collective: Towards a Participatory Politics Model

Faced with a divided Moroccan citizenry and a regime deploying a multifaceted approach to further fractionalize calls for far-reaching reform, the February 20th movement needed sustainable collective strategies to achieve its goals. This chapter focuses on the ways the movement utilized appeals to redefine national identity in ways that could appeal to various target audiences. Through implementation of various cultural and linguistic practices, the movement worked to reformulate traditional concepts of nation and state, create a shared history of oppression and resistance, and envision a new era of participatory politics. I will begin by identifying particular linguistic and ideological challenges the movement had to negotiate to unite the public behind goals of significant political reform. I will then proceed to describe the February 20th movement’s linguistic and cultural strategies for building a unified collective, and conclude with how those strategies allowed the movement to respond effectively to the Moroccan state’s efforts to contain and coopt the group.

Challenges of Building Collective Identity

Given the history of colonialism in Morocco, the February 20th movement faced rampant structural and symbolic marginalization of its potential recruits. In response, the movement embraced at once a policy of redistribution of wealth while also calling for the recognition of identities and cultural practices that were rendered invisible or suppressed by colonialism and its aftermath. The complexity of colonialism, which manifests itself in lasting social inequalities, is at once social and psychological. Moroccan Dutch psychiatrist Said Bellari (2010) described the aftermath of colonialism as “a mental complex deeply rooted in our collective mind and would
take generations to overcome” (para. 3). For the colonized mind to liberate itself, an initial acknowledgement of the past and recognition of the general struggle needed to overcome that past must occur (Fanon, 2011). Individuals need to go through psychological, political and cultural self-transformations (Fanon, 2008). As Freire (2011) explained, “The awakening of critical consciousness leads the way to the expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation” (p. 36). For the February 20th movement, the activists needed to identify, and then respond to, the structural and symbolic marginalization of Moroccan subgroups to achieve the end goals of social justice and liberation.

At the genesis of the February 20th movement, language politics in Morocco was a clearly visible manifestation of such marginalization. Even with more than half of the Moroccan population of Amazigh descent (Tayler & Boulal, 2005) and the majority of Moroccans using Darijia (an Arabic vernacular mixing Tamazight, French, and Spanish words) to communicate (Pennell, 2000; Sadiqi, 2003), the Moroccan government generally repressed, or, in some cases, banned Tamazight (Sadiqi, 2003). The Moroccan government encouraged the use of Amazigh culture and language only during performances and state festivals. The late King Hassan II excused the marginalization of Amazigh by asserting Moroccan identity and insisting he could not accept identity politics within the kingdom (Bahaji, 2011).

Language politics in Morocco functions as a visible manifestation of the inferiority complex of past colonial history. The February 20th activists viewed that many Moroccans positioned themselves to the civilizing language, French. French is the unofficial language of the kingdom and seen as prestigious and the “civilizing” language of choice (Sadiqi, 2003). French plays a significant role in Morocco as it serves as the main language in business and in some of
the government sectors. In big cities, the Moroccan elite speak French or code switch between Daarija and French (Pennell, 2000). As Bellari (2010) explained,

[I]n the matter of language the question does not even beg for an answer: every Moroccan academician, scientist, entrepreneur, artist, writer, doctor, politician or whatever key societal character, will easily admit that French is still the Master of the Moroccan Universe. In more than 50 years France has still succeeded in keeping the illusion in Morocco alive and kicking that we need our historical and cultural ties with it. It is a communal trance-like state of mind that is inhibiting our progress” (para. 3).

The activists held a consensus view that the Moroccan language inferiority complex remnant of the past colonial policy of “divide and conquer” needed to be urgently addressed. To redress the situation, activists chose to elevate the status of Darijaa.

For the February 20th activists, the current political culture and state-based discourse practices were problematic. Formally rejecting Morocco’s linguistic roots in a move that simultaneously elevated Arab influence over the nation’s contemporary culture, the 2010 Moroccan constitution named Modern Standard Arabic as the officially recognized national language. Modern Standard Arabic functioned as the language of choice for Morocco’s official events and for the King’s speeches. More than 80% of the interviewed activists expressed their dissatisfaction with the Moroccan state’s political discourse. To them, the political discourse was elitist and alienating, which encouraged non-participatory politics. The politicians’ use of classical Arabic when speaking to a nation that suffered from a high illiteracy rate was not enabling an active public sphere. Many cited examples of how the Moroccan public could not understand the King’s speech to the nation in response to the protests due to the monarch’s reliance on Modern Standard Arabic. Activists described how they had to construct messages
that various Moroccan publics could understand. The hope for such an endeavor was to build a new political discourse that was all-engaging and all-inclusive.

The use of Modern Standard Arabic also had a strong association with the language of Islam and of the Quran (Pennell, 2000; Sadiqi, 2003). A young male activist from Casablanca recounted the friction and tension that occurred at times between the Islamic contingent and others in the February 20th General Assembly. He stated, “It wasn’t always smooth because sometimes we would differ on many important points, especially in Casablanca and Rabat where the number of activists from the left wing part or neutral activists are almost the same in number with the Islamist party Adl wa Ihsan (Justice and Benevolence).”

**Building of a Collective Identity**

Facing high illiteracy rates, a highly divided public on national reform, and a diverse conglomerate of linguistic and ideological groups, the February 20th movement had to creatively form a solid basis of appeal for people to connect with the goals of the movement. The February 20th movement used a range of strategies to create a new discourse of identity that emphasized the agency of those affected the most by injustice. Language choices, reappropriation of national symbols, slogans, and symbolic rituals were all examples of the variety of strategies the activists deployed as they worked to encourage mobilization and collective action. The movement’s shared values, traditions, language(s), symbols, and ritualized behavior encouraged participatory politics and built unlikely coalitions across various political and religious spectrums. This study defines participatory politics as politics that is interactive, non alienating, inclusive, where individuals and groups can exert pressure for social change.
Linguistic Pragmatism

For many of the February 20th movement senior strategists, language choice was a key component for rendering visible the social and ideological inequalities. A female activist from Casablanca and Tangier stressed the centrality of language strategies for achieving the movement’s goals when she stated, “We focus on language more than anything else.” The movement’s strategic use of linguistic approaches included the use of subaltern vernaculars, simple word choice, cultural codes, multilingual formats, and goals of linguistic inclusion.

Subaltern Vernaculars: Daarīja as the Moroccan Language

The February 20th activists relied on subaltern vernaculars to help mobilize the subaltern publics and avoid perceptions they were building a bourgeois social movement. A male journalist activist from Casablanca stated, “We chose the language that was very close to Moroccans. People do not speak Modern Standard Arabic, so we used language that they used. The things that we want the media to understand and transmit were in English, French, and Modern Standard Arabic.” In general, all of the interviewed activists prioritized the Moroccan language, Daarīja. One female activist from Casablanca and Tangier, for example, recounted the omnipresent use of Daarīja within the movement’s communications: “Whenever there was a call to demonstrate, it would be in Daarīja, Amazigh, and classical Arabic.” Representing the strong sentiment shared by the movement’s senior strategists, one senior businessman who owns a large share of an independent newspaper and participated in all of the February 20th protests and marches, insisted, “Daarīja is not a dialect, its the national language of Morocco… people were expressing themselves in Daarīja.” For the activists, the use of Daarīja played an important role in the formation and construction of a collective Moroccan identity.
The February 20th activists expressed multiple reasons for elevating the status of Daarija in the movement’s communications. A male activist from Rabat remembered that the movement’s activists circulated press releases and pamphlets in marginal neighborhoods written exclusively in Daarija for the purpose of bolstering inclusivity and identification. One young artist who served as a movement activist emphasized that the movement made a conscious decision to use Daarija to distinguish itself from colonizing influences. He stated, “Daarija is not a dialect, it is a language in of itself and has its own rules and it doesn’t have anything to do with Arabic. It is more close to Amazigh than to Arabic actually.” The use of subaltern vernaculars extended to the movement’s use of popular culture. Many of the activists, who were also artists, used their talent to educate the subaltern publics on the latest political developments. The songs utilized simple, memorable lyrics in Daarija, so the people could understand the messages the songs conveyed. By emphasizing Daarija as not only an acceptable, but as a preferred method of communicating, the movement’s senior strategists sought rapprochement with Moroccan cultural and ethnic heritage.

Multiplicity of Languages and Calls for Linguistic Inclusion

Given the vast diversity of the movement’s membership and its potential recruits, the February 20th senior strategists chose to present their messages in multilingual formats. A female activist from Casablanca and Tangier remembered that, “Even slogans used to be written in different languages.” She went on to explain that such an approach “helped the most in the decentralization of the movement because the February 20th movement came first from Rabat and Casablanca.” Through the usage of multilingual formats, the activists wanted to broaden their outreach and unite Moroccans under a common identity.
One language the movement targeted in particular for inclusion in its multi-lingual approach was Amazigh. The Amazigh protest movement, a previously constituted collective who had historically struggled for the state to recognize Amazigh as a national and official language, functioned as a decisive discursive force within the February 20th movement (See figure 4.1). Responding to the Amazigh supporters, the February 20th movement officially called for constitutional recognition of the Amazigh language (Rachidi, 2011). The Amazigh language was visible in most of the February 20th movement’s online and offline communication, including in all of their campaign videos that called for national protests. Similarly, vibrant flags, banners and signs in Amazigh colored the streets during the protests. The February 20th activists’ use of Amazigh marked their affiliations within a collective and enabled the movement to build alliances and relational networks across sites of resistance.

Meaning Making: Slogans and Cultural Codes

To facilitate its target audiences’ broadest level of understanding, the February 20th movement focused on use of message simplicity. All of the interviewed activists provided similar descriptions of the mechanisms they employed to identify with the various segments of the Moroccan population. As one activist insisted, their strategy was to simplify by “removing the fat talk (kelma Ghaleda).” When asked to clarify what the movement’s members meant by that reference, one male activist from Rabat stated,

Ghaleda is the complicated words in the books. It’s good to read but it is not good to speak to people like in the books. One needs to know how to speak to people and reach them with their own language.

He used one example, fasad, to illustrate how attention to particular language choices impacted the movement’s ability to mobilize diverse publics. The word ‘fasad’ in classical Arabic has a
double meaning: corruption and prostitution. As such, when the movement first used the word, the activists found that many citizens from marginal neighborhoods did not respond well to their messages. One elderly man came up to the activist and stated that he had more serious concerns than the problem of prostitution. Through this example, the activist illustrated how the use of a single word, if misunderstood, negatively impacted the February 20th’s mobilization of particular audiences.

In addition to relying on simple messages, the February 20th movement adopted culturally specific frames to achieve resonance of their messaging. A male activist from Casablanca that served as a spokesperson in many of the movement’s media outreach activities stated that the movement wanted to “vulgarize the politics.” In other words the group wanted to use the everyday localized vernacular when discussing politics and the February 20th movement goals. As an illustration, the movement moved away from using the word ‘fasad’ to highlight the corruption of the Moroccan government to a local phrase in Daarija, ‘shetab derbeg,’ which means clean or, literally translated, “broom your neighborhood.” Such local phrases had a higher level of resonance with citizens living in particular neighborhoods the activists targeted for mobilization.

For the February 20th movement activists, emphasizing the local context was a key factor in transmitting successful messages and building identification with target audiences. For example, when the activists were attempting to mobilize supporters in the cities, they focused on questioning why electricity and water were so expensive. Since the King’s family owned both the electric and water companies that served many cities, the approach served to highlight the monopoly the King has over the economic sphere. Activists were also pragmatic in readjusting their linguistic messages to be sensitive to variable local viewpoints. Perhaps the most
illuminating example is how the members of the February 20th movement had to adjust their discourse to accommodate the Islamist party within the movement. When the Islamist party of *Adl wa Ihsan* was part of the movement, some secular activists used religious terms to maximize the chances that the Islamist audience heard and did not dismiss their messages. A student activist from Rabat reported that many activists who were non-religious had to use religious vocabulary to be heard. For example, the activists would start the meeting by saying *bismillah* (in the name of God), *insh’Allah* (God willing), *hamduallah* (Thank God), and *salam wa Alaykum* (Peace be upon you). The student activist stressed that these religious phrases were not part of his everyday discourse. However, he learned from his interactions with the Islamists that when he used these words, his message was more likely to resonate. In his own words,

> When we were having the general assembly, we were always having problems with the Islamists that will not accept someone if he’s not saying *Bismillah*. So at that moment I started saying *Bismillah*. Why not say it if it will make him happy and he will hear me after I say *bismillah* and *Inshallah*. Anyways, these things belong to my culture, so I will use it to mobilize. I will talk more with the language of people.

Sensitivity to religion, cultural heritage, and geographic location all contributed to the movement’s ability to broaden the audience that would listen to its message.

Part of the February 20th movement strategy for building collective identity was its use of slogans. Slogans in the February 20th movement had three functions. First, they promoted inclusivity by empowering disenfranchised groups who were left out of the political discourse. Slogans simplified complex issues and made the information accessible to all target audiences. Second, slogans served as alternative information sharing. With heavy media censorship on relevant political developments, slogans served as an effective way to disseminate news about
the movement’s goals, domestic political developments, and introduce new ideas. Lastly, the February 20th movement’s slogans embodied cultural codes that invited strong commitment to the cause.

The February 20th movement slogans broadened the generational appeal of the message by drawing in young activists. Unlike the previous sociopolitical movements in Morocco, the majority of the February 20th movement members were young people. These young activists wanted to distance themselves from the past and believed that they needed to bring change and creativity to the political activism scene. A male artist and activist who played a lead role in writing slogans for the movement illustrated the perspective:

Young people should go out and not the old. Our society is full of these young people. They have no job and no nothing. They can do it and fight . . . If we want the regime to change, we need to move and speak to these young people.

Willing to abandon many of the ideals of their parents’ generation, the youth activists did not have the same responsibilities as the older generation, such as family obligations. The February 20th slogans greatly differed from the slogans of past public uprisings; they were not recited in Modern Standard Arabic and they were not long and hard to memorize and understand. The February 20th movement activists took pride in their creativity and wanted to appeal to the youth through their witty and easy to remember slogans.

For the February 20th activists, their approach to slogans was similar to their general outlook on language usage. Activists stressed that they wanted marginal publics to understand what the movement was about and not have a slogan turned into a long manifesto that only Moroccan elites would understand. As one male artist and activist explained, “If the movement couldn’t create any new slogans, how can you create a new Morocco? We needed slogans that
people will identify with and like. We needed new slogans.” One slogan that demonstrated the implementation of such a strategy specifically targeted the subaltern publics: “How can you live you poor man when the style of living is sky high.” This slogan, distributed in Daarija, used cultural codes, that when translated to English, loses cultural power. The translation from Daarija to English makes it difficult to capture the entire meaning and cultural reference. Another one of the movement’s slogans targeting young people was “everything is in bribes.” The problem of corruption and bribes were an issue that all Moroccans easily identified with. The activists wanted young, fun, and rhythmic slogans that would be easy to remember.

For the activists responsible for writing slogans, the slogans also had to unite the heterogeneous Moroccan public that held different views on the necessary political reforms for Morocco. For example, a young male activist from Rabat who was responsible for writing slogans stated, “We had to be careful with types of slogans. We could not say down with the regime. People would be scared and they will runaway.” Another senior female activist from Casablanca further elaborated on why the movement could not say “down with the regime.” She indicated that a direct attack on the King would have destabilized the movement and the people would have been too scared to join. Operating within a context where the state was summoning baltagiya in opposition to the February 20th movement,\textsuperscript{14} the February 20th activists had to be extremely careful not to give credibility to the baltagiya slogans, such as "We are with the King," "Yes to the constitution, no to the February 20th Movement," and "The February 20th Movement protesters are traitors" (Lazare, 2011). The baltagiya slogans equated the February

\textsuperscript{14} Officials from local municipalities summoned and paid people from poor, marginalized, and illiterate areas to support their cause. Some of them had criminal records or were drug addicts. They were paid to either vote for a particular party or show support. These baltagiya were present during protests and attacked February 20th movement activists. They are also known as chmakriya. For more, see Lazare, 2011.
20th movement’s actions with a direct attack on the monarchy. As such, support for the new monarch’s constitution meant support for the King himself.

In their communication strategies, the activists differentiated between the makhzen and the King. When it came to the makhzen, slogans did not shy away from direct attacks on the corrupt system. Slogans, for example, unmasked the makhzen’s mismanagement and squandering of public funds. One of the slogans stated, “Hey Corrupt Minister, Everything has an expiration date. See you March 20th” (the next day planned for large February 20th protests). Activists chanted another slogan, “police everywhere and justice nowhere,” during the protests to call out police abuse. This slogan was in direct reference to the police brutality and repression present at previous February 20th protests. Another slogan read, “No to makhzen’s violence, no to oppression, no to terrorism.” The inclusion of terrorism in the slogan functioned to respond directly to state allegations that the participants within the movement were inciting terrorism. In general, slogans did not refrain from targeting the makhzen directly, as perhaps most evident in the movement’s highly circulated slogan “down with the makhzen.”

The movement’s activists utilized culturally coding of the slogans to better identify the movement with its target audience. Activists were adept at adapting slogans and cultural parables that were familiar within certain Moroccan sectors. One of the February 20th main slogan writers, for example, used one of the slogans he created to illustrate how the movement coded its messages in Rabat and Casablanca. His slogan, “We are Moroccans and we belong to it, and Majid should understand” was an indirect reference to the King, as ‘Majid’ did not literally translate to the word ‘King.’ Known to many, however, the oblique referent allowed the movement to avoid shocking the Moroccan people who resisted direct attacks on the sacred
monarch. Without naming the King, the slogan, nevertheless, provided a clear critique of the
King for the target audience who wanted significant change.

Another example of a cultural coded slogan came in response to a senior Moroccan
government official who had publicly stated, “it’s impossible to do democracy in Morocco
because Moroccans are still not ready for it.” According to one of the main communication
senior strategist within the February 20th movement in Rabat, the activists chanted a slogan that
shamed the “boss” for thinking less of the Moroccan people and thinking that they are not
capable of having a democracy. As before, the slogan did not name the King, but used the word
“lmaalem” (boss). As such, the slogan embodied a shared cultural vernacular that was therefore
safe to use during the protests. Through shared cultural codes, the movement challenged
dominant ideologies and worked to transform the political culture.

Multimodal Appeals to National Frames

To inspire others to join the protests, multimodal appeals established national frames that
evoked a new, inclusive type of social contract that rejected token nationalism devoid of full
citizenship rights. The February 20th movement’s campaign videos used three different
languages to call for a new Moroccan collective identity of all ethnicities, languages, religions
and socioeconomic classes. Each of the February 20th movement’s campaign videos commenced
with an overarching identity claim of Moroccanness and then proceeded to articulate various
individual grievances for participating in the upcoming protests. Some videos started with a
dedication that read, “All victims, All oppressed, All Moroccans, for a better Morocco.” The
online campaign videos focus on “Moroccanness” functioned to ground their grievances locally,
to generate a new understanding of politics, and to create identification built on trust and
emotional bonds. Their shared emphasis on cultural commonality and Moroccan identity was
anchored in a process of meaning making that sought to change people’s consciousness and mobilize supporters. With the need to maximize participation in the movement’s national march, the videos aspired to resonate with a broad swath of the Moroccan people.

Challenging hegemonic power relations, the February 20th online campaign videos sent a message of not only what Morocco should look like, but also what constituted a Moroccan. The second video campaign opened with “We are the Moroccan youth. We love this country and are calling for change and Dignity…. We want a government that serves our interests and a parliament that represents us.” By identifying with all Moroccan youth and their love of their country, the video’s introduction invited political action. As such, silence became problematic while taking action signified loyalty and love for the Moroccan nation.

The movement’s videos invited loyalty to the nation through the frequent reiteration of two common phrases: “I am Moroccan” and “We the Moroccan Youth.” The February 20th movement developed a common language of “we” and “us” to position the grievances from the onset as a collective grievance that affected all Moroccans. For instance, in the second online campaign video, a February 20th activist stated in Tamazight, “I am Moroccan and I am joining the protests so that all Moroccans will be equal.” The use of “I am,” however, reinforced the fixity of the subject position by emphasizing a static subject. Activists within the movement did not need to be in complete agreement on ideological frameworks to come together and generate collective action. Regardless of their individual perspectives, the members could articulate the power of their own presence with the national collective.

For the February 20th movement, the process of constituting a broad collective necessitated a revision from the historic perspective of top-down Moroccan citizenry formation. The movement worked to break down existing conceptualizations of national identity to
transform public acceptance of Moroccan social norms and the public’s perception towards the
movement. As a political strategy, the movement used national symbols and historic images for
garnering legitimacy and identification. The movement’s appropriation of national slogans and
images became referential, moving the audience to respond and act as the meaning of the historic
images was malleable. Such images invited empathy and identification where the audience
members were encouraged to participate in the creation of the new collective.

One example of how the movement reappropriated historic images was the use of the
hand of Fatma. After the Casablanca terrorist attacks in 2003, but prior to the February 20th
movement, a particular iteration of the Fatma symbol had emerged to unite the Moroccan people
in their stand against transgressions that threatened the country and its citizens. The hand
symbol incorporated the red and green colors of the Moroccan flag to symbolize nationalism
(See figure 4.2). It also included two messages inscribed on the skin of the hand. One in French
stated, “Ne touch pas a mon pote” which translates to don’t touch my buddy and the one in
Arabic that translates to “Don’t touch my country.” The symbol signified unity of Morocco
during the most difficult times.

During the early stages of the movement, the 2003 version of the hand of Fatma
reappeared. The context of the image’s reemergence was grounded in allegations from state
media and makhzen, which accused activists of being terrorists and supporting the Poliario Front
(Kinani, 2011; Lazare, 2011). Through association with these allegations, the 2003 Fatma
symbols thus became an indirect way to create fear within the public and warn them against the
February 20th movement. According to mamfakinch, these bulletin boards were paid for by
Mounir Majidi- an affluent Moroccan businessman and personal secretary of the King (“feb20
Nous aimons notre pays, Monsieur Majidi,” 2011).
As a direct response to the state security apparatus, the movement and its supporters used the highly recognizable and affect-driven 2003 Fatma symbol. The movement reappropriated it with a new message in Darija: “Don’t suffocate our nation’s Children” and “Don’t steal from my Country” (See figure 4.3 & 4.4). By altering the familiar message included in the image, the movement worked to redefine nationalism by shifting the focus to economic social justice and freedom. According to one of the activists from Rabat, the reappropriation of the national image was both an intentional and direct movement response to the regime’s allegations and to critique the King’s title as “King of the Poor”. These simple, yet symbolic, actions diminished the state’s status through what Bayat (2010) characterized as the “quiet encroachment of the ordinary” (p.45). The reappropriated symbol simultaneously affirmed loyalty to the nation while challenging the boundaries of inclusion in the collective.

The February 20\(^{th}\) movement also utilized provocative strategies of representation to challenge official Moroccan societal markers. For example, the Moroccan national anthem ends with the phrase, “God, the Nation, and the King.” The February 20\(^{th}\) movement challenged existing understandings of patriotism by replacing “God, Nation, and the King” with “God, Nation, and the People” in their singing of the national anthem in the protest marches. One of their famous slogans that was chanted in every protest was “Long Live the People.” Another culturally specific symbol the movement targeted was the stop sign, which consists of two Arabic letters. The reversal of the order of the two letters caused the sign’s meaning to change from ‘Stop’ to ‘Wake Up.’ The revised stop sign circulated heavily during the protests and rapidly found its way to the Facebook pages of movement supporters. Such reappropriation of visual and national symbols served to deconstruct conventional views of “Moroccanness”, marking a radical break with the hegemonic discourse of the state.
With the high illiteracy rate and the semi-closed political and media systems, the movement relied heavily on images and videos to influence external audiences. These images highlighted the large number of demonstrators, police violence and atrocities, and the wide socioeconomic disparity between the poor and the rich. Some of the movement circulated photographs depicted Moroccans carrying signs touting affect driven slogans such as: “We are not settling,” “Moroccans are not idiots,” “Where did the money go,” and “We are all Moroccan.” Other slogans, such as “we are all this small village”, focused more on challenging existing relationship between the rural villages and the state. February 20th movement activists also visited and visually documented the socioeconomic disparities of these villages. Most still had no access to running water and electricity. The diverse topics of these photos unmasked the widespread impact of hegemonic and corrupt power and revealed numerous assaults on human dignity. In a sense, these photos functioned as a source of authority and legitimacy to the movement, documenting all that was corrupt with the political system.

Affective appeals were another key component of how the February 20th movement forged its bonds of solidarity through multimodal appeals. In the second campaign video, for example, a young male activist enacted the courage needed to overcome Moroccan oppression by stating: “We are not afraid of the beatings and political detentions do not scare us. On the contrary, they give us strength and credibility.” By showcasing the courage of the activists, the video infused positive emotions in the call for collective action. Such affect-driven appeals of identification emboldened the activists after movement setbacks, helped them overcome the effects of repression, and became a way for people to internalize the February 20th movement claims. However, the use of affective appeals did not come without a risk. One activist from Rabat maintained that the strategy was a “double-edged sword.” On the one hand, it inspired
people from outside and within the movement to see their passion and how fearless and selfless they could be in changing their nation. On the other hand, such appeals might scare away some people from joining (e.g. when they see the police brutality). After weighing the pros and cons of the strategy, the activists decided the potential benefit was worth taking the risk.

Affect driven narratives called on Moroccans to break away from the hegemonic grip of the state. For instance, the first campaign video ended with an older woman who spoke in Darija announcing her right to protest. Her long personal story was the most striking of those including in the movement’s videos, as she stressed her persona as a Moroccan grandmother who had suffered abuse at the hands of Morocco’s corrupt system. She stated,

I am Moroccan and I am going out on February the 20th. I am going to protest . . .. The high food prices are killing me. Every time I tried to protest against the high prices, the authorities abused me. I don't understand why I am afraid and abused in my own country. I was in a peaceful protest, and was beaten and harassed by the police (‘‘Morocco campaign #feb20 #morocco,’’ 2011).

Her narrative was affect-driven, as Moroccan viewers would not have expected the police to beat and abuse an older woman speaking for her right to protest. Unlike others in the video who called for concrete material changes, she called for the right and freedom to peacefully protest and assemble. The use of an older woman invited her audience to mobilize and engage in political action. Her image functioned both as that of a nurturing mother and of a militant for freedom. The use of the woman was halting, as elderly, soft-spoken Moroccan women typically did not represent activists within movement populations. Yet, this women’s voice portrayed a strong sense of involvement, commitment, and strength. The video’s subject confounded existing cultural codes, thereby solidifying the challenge to the cultural state of fear and inaction.
The woman’s story served as a direct appeal to the Moroccan people to join her in the protest movement and national march.

**Concluding Remarks**

In response to the challenges of a highly diverse, differentially disenfranchised, target audience, the February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement developed a creative repertoire of intersectional political strategies. The February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement’s ability to mobilize different target audiences relied on language and cultural strategies that directly responded to the localized realities on the ground. This diversified approach enabled the February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement to avoid fragmentation and allowed strong alliances to cross political and religious divides to champion a discourse of democratization and social change for all Moroccans.

The February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement developed and deployed strategies that responded directly to a multifaceted set of contextual obstacles. The many challenges included the sometimes-brutal response of the regime, the public’s high illiteracy rate, the unsympathetic, if not hostile, state media, and a diverse and divided public. To address these problems and build consensus, the February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement created a new collective identity that used national frames to invite participation of all Moroccans. The pluralism that constituted the new collective identity helped protect the movement from societal cleavages and from the allegations of the regime. At the same time, it fostered as a new sense of belonging bound in mutual trust.

The movement’s interpolation of Moroccan subjects as empowered, political citizens enabled the movement to challenge the regime’s political, social, and economic norms. By articulating a new, inclusive national identity, the movement cultivated public legitimacy across localities, a move necessary to counter state allegations of treason and foreign involvement. The movement’s vision of the national collective avoided forcing the public to position themselves
against the nation or the King. Instead, it reimagined the Moroccan citizenry as individuals with the necessary agency to question the inadequacies of the Moroccan political and social status through an affirmation of love for their nation. The use of such a citizenship discourse blunted the impact of the security system’s accusations that members of the movement were anti-Moroccan. It also enabled the movement to engage with diverse segments of the population who might have opposing views on the monarchy, but agreed on the need for genuine reform. Finally, it helped the movement deflect media accusations that members of the movement belonged to one particular subgroup of the Moroccan population.

The February 20th movement’s particular attention to language demonstrated how language has intimate linkages to social change and concepts of citizenship. Language choices can both alienate or empower citizens in the political process. For the February 20th activists, language was key to ensure participation of all Moroccans. The return to indigenous languages in a region that had embraced the language of a former colonizing power highlighted the dehumanizing nature of colonialism, helped resolve the citizenry’s sense of inferiority, and built a path towards self and national liberation.

The movement’s decision to target different audiences through the use of Daarija and Amazigh, instead of classical Arabic, in its communication strategies worked as a key factor of mobilization. The movement’s use of Amazigh helped mark affiliations within the collective to bolster the call for institutionalized recognition of Amazigh as one of the official Moroccan languages. The February 20th movement’s decision to join the previously existing Amazigh movement helped build lasting networks and alliances to foster constitutional reform.

The historical persistence of the Amazigh movement, coupled with the support of the February 20th movement for the Amazigh national struggle, pushed the state to eventually
acknowledge the power and strength of the Amazigh national discourse. In response to the February 20th movement’s demand, the 2011-revised constitution recognized Tamazigh as an official language. The new 2011 amended constitution placed the new language within the context of the broader Moroccan national identity by stating:

The Kingdom of Morocco is a sovereign Muslim State that is attached to its national unity and it territorial integrity, and committed to preserve in its fullness and diversity its national identity, one and indivisible. Its unity is forged by the convergence of its Arab-Islamist, Amazigh and Saharan-Hassanic components, nourished and enriched by its African, Andalusian, Hebraic, and Mediterranean influences (Constitution 2011 of Moroccan Kingdom, 2011, para. 2).

The constitutional change marked a notable advance for the Amazigh movement and was a stepping-stone toward equal rights for Moroccans of Amazigh descent (Mulderig, 2014; Sadiqi, 2014). It also implied that Arabism and Arab nationalism could no longer be the state’s sole political ideology. The discursive force of the Amazigh movement within the February 20th movement forced the state to reconcile with its multicultural and multilingual communities. The new linguistic recognition purportedly elevates the Tamazight to the hegemonic Moroccan public sphere, advancing Morocco as the first North African country to constitutionally recognize Tamazight as a national language.

Despite the new constitutional linguistic rights, however, questions of integration and implementation continue to undermine the efficacy of the new law. The degree to which this change will actually fulfill the demand of the Amazigh activists depends largely on implementation of these new reforms. The constitution lacks a coherent plan for linguistic integration and inclusion of Tamazight. For February 20th activists committed to the Amazigh
cause in the present day, two serious gaps in Article Five of the new constitution might still curtail the efforts of the Amazigh movement: “the explicit conditioning of the official status of Berber by the elaboration of ‘organic laws,’ and the implicit conditioning of this status by the elaboration of a law creating the National Council of the Moroccan Languages and Cultures” (Sadiqi, 2014, p.25). While the February 20th movement’s various coalitions offer hope of a positive, political model for coexistence of multiple political discourses and different social groups, political will and a new legislature committed to full implementation of the new identity framework will be necessary to realize the benefits of the February 20th/Amazigh alliance.

15 Berber refers to Amazigh. However there is a negative connotation for the use of Berber. Berber is derived from the Spanish word barbaric. The Spanish called the people it colonized as such. Amazigh activists refuse to identify with such word and use instead Amazigh to refer to the people and Tamamzight to refer the Amazigh language. For this study, Amazigh and Tamazight will be used.
Chapter 4 Figures

Figure 4.1 Flags

Figure 4.2 StateSymbol Against Terrorism

Figure 4.3 Appropriated Symbol "Don’t Suffocate my nation’s children"

Figure 4.4 Appropriated Symbol "Don’t Steal my homeland"
Chapter Five
Navigating Between the Online and Offline

To achieve the goal of mobilizing diverse groups of Moroccans into a unified collective, the February 20th movement activists recognized that their target audiences relied on various channels of communication to stay abreast of current events and information about the movement’s activities. Accordingly, the senior strategists for the movement considered whether offline, online, or some combination of the two would maximize the chances that particular target audiences would receive their messages. This chapter examines how the activists interacted with the diverse media landscape, with a particular focus on local issues that guided the movement’s decisions on channel selection. It will begin by providing a brief overview of the media context in Moroccan context in relation to the broader MENA region. It will then turn to examination of the message strategies the movement utilized in both the online and offline environment. It will conclude with a discussion of the dialectical relationship that existed between the online and offline channels, and how those interactions were context-dependent.

The Moroccan Media Context in Brief

Chapter one has already detailed the level of Internet connectivity throughout the Arab Spring region. The February 20th activists, however, identified particular social media forums that were particularly active regarding the movement’s activities: namely, the movement’s website mamfakinch, Facebook, and Lakome. Further, movement followers began utilizing Twitter in the later stages of this study’s time period. Each of these sites was a major source for
citizens to learn about the February 20th movement, and they served as a central platform for the February 20th activists to distribute information.

Previous studies have begun to document social media usage in the MENA region. One study completed the year after the rise of the February 20th movement showed that the Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf region had 3,203,440 Facebook users, with Morocco having 12 percent of those users (“Profils des utilisateurs de Reseaux Sociaux au Maroc,” 2012). Of those who used Facebook, 80 percent were below the age of 30 (Dubai School of Government, 2012). The top reason for joining online social media in the region was to express some sort of dissent, followed by the desire to mobilize and express themselves, to initiate and reinforce networks, to adhere and identify, and to stay informed. More than 75 percent have more than 500 friends and only 17 percent have a twitter account with more than 50 followers. As for access, 29 percent used a common computer and 17 percent used their individual computer. With the rise of 3G and cell-phones, 50 percent of the people connect to Facebook and other social sites via their cell phones (“Profils des utilisateurs de Reseaux Sociaux au Maroc,” 2012). While these numbers identify potential followers of the movement, the social and political implications of the online and offline media usage depend on other material realities of the communities.

**February 20th Online Communication Strategies**

The senior strategists in the February 20th movement viewed the online environment as the appropriate channel to respond to state allegations against the movement, to counter hegemonic practices of the state, and to mobilize followers both locally and internationally. The following sections will describe the online strategies the movement used to accomplish these objectives and how the strategies functioned within the broader Moroccan context.
Countering State Allegations against the February 20th Movement

A primary way the February 20th movement deployed online communication platforms was to respond to state allegations designed to discredit the movement. As previously discussed in chapter two, the state’s allegations against the movement included accusations that activists were thugs, members of the radical left, Algerian agents, and traitors working with the Polisario to create instability within the Kingdom (“Taoujni Continue d’Accuser”, 2011). To respond, the February 20th movement disseminated alternative information about the movement and its members to the Moroccan population. The activists posted personalized videos, such as the ones entitled “We are Moroccan and are Protesting” and “Who we are,” to explain who the activists were, introduce the February 20th movement to the public, outline the goals of the movement, and contest the varied state allegations.

Mamfakinch functioned as the movement’s main online platform for information. Moroccan bloggers and activists created mamfakinch during the inception of the February 20th movement, but the founders did not pretend to be the voice of the movement. Instead, they wanted to provide free and transparent information to the Moroccan citizenry (Mamfakinch, 2014 Feb. 18). Members of mamfakinch staff came from diverse backgrounds but agreed on the following principles: “dignity, democracy, liberty, social justice, and respect for human rights” (“About Mamfakinch,” 2011). Many of the members of mamfakinch lived abroad and traveled back and forth between their respective countries. The site emphasized repeatedly that its content was neutral and transparent.
The need to create the Mamafakinch website spawned from the need to open the closed media infrastructure of Morocco (Mamfakinch, 2014 Feb.18). As the website’s content stated: Mamfakinch.com does not pretend to be an online newspaper but a citizen media that believes in the citizens’ right to access information. Information that is often ignored or misrepresented in official mass media . . . . We have the conviction that the existence of our website as well as the desire of Moroccans to have access to alternative media stems from the fact that traditional media does not do its duty and responsibility. These traditional media are either domesticated by state power, or they practice auto-censorship out of fear of state sanctions” (“About Mamfakinch,” 2011).

The online traffic of mamfakinch during the first six months of the movement reached one million unique visitors, with the majority of their visits between the months of February and April of 2011. For its robust coverage of Morocco during the rise of the February 20th movement, mamfakinch won the Breaking Borders Award from Google and Global Voices online, an award that recognizes “courage, energy, and ingenuity of those who advance freedom of expression on the Internet” (“Breaking Borders,” 2015).

To expose state media, mamfakinch functioned as a fact-checker, reviewing all of the Moroccan press coverage of the February 20th movement (Mamfakinch, 2011, February 18; Mamfakinch, 2011, March 5). To differentiate the coverage posted on the website from that appearing in the state controlled media, the movement quoted the various articles directly, supplied dates of the original articles, posted hyperlinks to those articles, and named the journalists and the publication outlets responsible for the initial story. Mamfakinch staffers then critiqued the stories by highlighting misrepresentations of facts on the ground. By way of illustration, the movement copied and pasted the Moroccan National Media Agency’s (MAP)
reports that stated the February 20th movement had cancelled the protests taking place on February 20, 2011. Their efforts to provide authentic, alternative information functioned to augment the credibility of the movement in relation to other media sources.

Mamfakinch worked to build its own comparative standing by asserting the alterity of state controlled media. The movement issued a press release entitled “The Lies of the National Moroccan Media Agency” (“Mensonge de la MAP”, 2011). In another example mamfakinch critiqued the Arabic newspaper Assabah both for not reporting accurately on the movement and for focusing on the Islamist factions within the movements instead of the movement’s goals and activities (Revue de Presse Marocaine Ecrite, 2011). In addition, they also published frequent online press releases that contradicted the state allegations and identified by name the people close to the regime who were behind the accusations. In one example the activists wrote a press release shaming Ahmmed Taoujni, the President of the Moroccan Sahara Association (ASM), who accused the youth participating in February 20th movement of working as Algerian agents (“Taoujni Continue d’Accuser”, 2011).

In a response to state allegations that the activists were terrorists wanting to create chaos, mamfakinch responded directly to the accusations and used the opportunity to underscore its vision of a renewed collective identity. The staffers released a press statement that stated, “#feb 20-We love our country Mounir Majidi. February 20th supports democracy and the rule of law. Therefore, we are going to protest in a civilized and a peaceful way” (“Nous Aimons Notre Pays,” 2011). The February 20th movement morocanized the online sphere through its use of various languages, cultural and national symbols, and coverage of localized issues. The February 20th online presence focused on Morocco and localized concerns.
In addition to checking state run media articles, the February 20th movement also highlighted the lack of coverage by some national media that chose to remain silent. The movement listed all of the newspapers and media agencies that did not cover the February 20th movement. For instance, the website posted that, as of February 18 2011, the Moroccan French newspapers L’economiste and Aujoud’hui “chose to simply just ignore the #feb20” (“Revue de Presse Marocaine Ecrite,” 2011). By highlighting the media’s failure to cover a burgeoning national movement, the movement questioned the state media’s legitimacy and neutrality.

The February 20th activists also used humor to critique the state media. One of the movement’s circulated cartoons featured a Moroccan citizenry watching state run media. The individual who is watching the television has his normal head replaced with that of a donkey’s head. Within the Moroccan cultural context, the connotation of the donkey head is that someone is being stupid. In other words, the cartoon implies that if one watches the state run media, they become stupid and backwards in their thinking.

The February 20th movement online platforms engaged directly with state-run media and, in doing so, sidestepped state run media and delegitimized it. For instance, on March 20th, February 20th activists along with journalists from the public television channel 2M gathered inside and out the 2M building, calling for the firing of the Director of Information for public channel 2M, Samira Sitail, due to her erroneous coverage of the February 20th movement from March 13-20, 2011 (“Rassemblement a l’interieur et a l’exterieur de 2M,” 2011). Protestors held signs in Arabic that read, “The people want the fall of a makhzen media,” and “For a free public media,” and “Journalists be aware, the demands are the same.” Through such actions the movement pressured the state media to function more as a neutral reporter.
In short, rather than allow the state’s media to function as the Morocco’s dominant source of news, the February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement’s website acted as a credible watchdog. The semi-open digital media environment in Morocco allowed activists to present their communication messages. The February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement’s online platforms troubled the state’s monopoly over the production and flow of information. The state no longer functioned as the sole producer of information. The February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement introduced a new level of accountability that forced both the state run media and security state apparatus to justify their positions and actions if they did not want to risk losing their public legitimacy. The online Moroccan sphere, as a result, became an arena of contestation. By employing multiple strategies to ensure the Moroccan public of the authenticity of the movement’s reporting, February 20\textsuperscript{th} online communication platforms functioned to raise the credibility of the entire movement. As trust and credibility were necessary to mobilize the collective, the movement’s key strategists recognized and reinforced the urgent and sustained need to convey accurate and exhaustive reporting of the movement’s activities.

**Unmasking the Hegemonic Practices of the State**

For the February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement, the online platforms also functioned to unmask the hegemonic practices of the state, such as state violence, corruption, and rampant inequality rampant in particular geographical areas. The February 20\textsuperscript{th} online platforms uncovered abuses by the makhzen and other institutions loyal to the regime. The mamfakinch online platform documented police and state repression through press releases, hospital records documenting the victims, extensive circulation of photos, video captures, and open online letters to officials demanding open investigations. In a formal and open letter to the Minister of Communications, for example, the February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement exposed the brutality of the police and security
apparatus in the region of Houceima. The state apparatus had beaten and threatened journalists for covering the protests, as well as confiscated and burned documentation of the events (Mamfakinch, 2011, Feb. 27). In the letter the February 20th movement demanded the minister to open an investigation and protect journalists, since Moroccans deserved to have an open and transparent media culture with informed citizens. The northern Rif regions, such as Houceima, were among the places facing the most police brutality and the locations that had no state media coverage. Being geographically distant from the Moroccan major cities, the people in those regions heavily depended on the online platforms to expose state brutality and their calls for justice.

To maintain accountability and accuracy of the reports, the February 20th movement published the names of each activist targeted and violently beaten up, the location and timing of the incident, and hospitalizations that took place. For instance, during a protest in Rabat, the police and security services dressed as civilians beat Khadija Riyadhi, the President of the Moroccan Human Rights Association (AMDH), along with other activists (“Communiqué de l’AMDH”, 2011, February 21). A joint press release of the February 20th movement and the Moroccan Human Rights Association described the incident in detail, denounced the violence, and published the names of all the victims. The joint press release co-authored with one of the oldest and most respectable human rights organization in Morocco further legitimized the February 20th movement through association. The naming of all the activists personalized the story in a way that built identification with the Moroccan public. The release also sent a message to the Moroccan public that their struggles were not in vain. The victims were recognized and honored for their sacrifices.
The spread of mobile phone cameras also helped document and archive the hegemonic practices of the state. Videotaped and photographed realities on the ground circulated in the online environment. These images included ones of political prisoners, police brutality and repression, and images of shantytowns. The visual images functioned for the movement in a number of ways. First, the images served as additional evidence to the written text recounting the incidents of violence. The photos amplified the known incidents of state violence and set up a visual binary between the acts of state violence and the movement’s peaceful and artful aesthetic practices. Second, the photos invited various segments of the subaltern population who might not have the necessary literacy level to understand the movement’s online public discourse. As Dauber and Winkler (2014) noted, “Humans process images more quickly than text, making images more emotionally visceral and responses to images frequently more immediate and powerful than responses to text” (p. 9). Further, the photographed images reduce complex situations into simpler abstractions and do not require as high a literacy level as textual arguments. In this case the message was simple: the state was violent and oppressive. By presenting the visual evidence, the movement positioned the public as direct eyewitnesses to the acts of state repression, and as such, citizenry became implicated in the struggle against oppression. Third, the images personalized stories by placing faces to the victim’s names. Serving as a counterpart to the state media that ignored the harmed citizens, the February 20th online platform gave voice to those who had suffered.

The extensive circulation of videos also positioned the viewer into the scene and the acts of the February 20th movement. The videos increased the credibility of the movement’s accusation that the state was conducting violent acts by placing the subject position of the viewer into the scene. For instance, the February 20th movement used the online videos and photos to expose
makhzen bribing young men to protest against the February 20th movement and to shout slogans in favor of the King. The organization of the pro-monarchy marches occurred around the same time as the February 20th protests were taking place. The videos showed the majority of the pro-monarchy protests consisted of impoverished males that had clearly come from the nation’s marginalized neighborhoods. Wrapped in Moroccan flags, these men carried long knives that were very visible as a tactic to instill fear in those considering participating in the February 20th movement. The posted article accompanying these photos on mamfakinch warned that these makhzani strategies would harm the monarch’s image and credibility. Further, it warned that the proposed political reforms could transform from a referendum on the constitution to a referendum on the King himself (“Après D’état Makhzanien Arrive d’état Chmakri,” 2011).

Another illuminating example of the movement’s use of subject position emerged regarding a video posted on mamfakinch showing a police car attempting to crush protestors in Tangier (“Feb. 20 Police Car attempting to Crush a protestor,” 2011). After the viewers watch the video, the website asks its visitors to form their own judgments about the presented evidence. Rather than assume viewers will reach their own conclusions, the website explicitly asks for an interactive response to an affect-driven scenario.

The videos in the movement’s main online platform worked to bridge together the various regions of Morocco. By demonstrating a stunning amount of visual evidence showing repression and state violence in various Moroccan cities and remote towns, the online environment functioned to unify the collective based on shared grievances. The repetitive acts of violence worked to gain empathy across demographic and geographically dissimilar groups of citizens. At the same time, the use of visual images prompted a collective sense of social responsibility as viewers became witnesses to the rampant state violence.
The February 20th movement not only competed with the state media to produce information about current events, it also sought to participate in the archiving of the movement’s history. The state was no longer the sole site of institutionalized knowledge. The documentary activities of the activists and their supporters would contest state erasures and misrepresentations. The images and videos that recorded offline events continue to circulate to this day in the online environment as historical reference material and testimonial evidence (Mamfakinch, 2011 February 20). The direct experience of citizens archived by dates and geographical location documents various aspects of the February 20th movement and calls into question the state’s narrative. As Scott (1999) eloquently puts it, “When the evidence offered is the evidence of ‘experience,’ the claim for referentiality is further buttressed—what could be truer, after all, then a subject’s own account of what he or she has lived through?” (p. 777).

Mobilizing Political Reformers

The February 20th activists deployed online social media to attract the tactical expertise, resources, and personnel necessary to mobilize the national collective. With the Internet’s ability to transport individuals through time and space, the online environment also functioned as a link between the local and the global supply of resources and tactical expertise. For instance, the February 20th activists translated Jillian York, article on how activists could protect themselves on Facebook, with advice such as having a strong password, using https, and having a secondary email to confirm login (“Quelque Conseils pour vous proteger sur Facebook,” 2011). She is an American journalist and Director of International Freedom of Expression at the Electronic Frontier Foundation. Mamfakinch included numerous posts that advised activists on how to safely use various online social platforms, as activists’ Facebook pages experienced pirating and, in some cases, shutdown. Further, activists posted the pirated sites on mamfakinch as a warning
to other activists (“Quelque Conseils pour vous proteger sur Facebook,” 2011) in an effort to create sustainable virtual communities that coalesced around the movement’s issues and concerns.

The online environment also functioned as a site for building relational networks with activists across the Moroccan kingdom. For example, each city had its own Facebook page and activists from the city were responsible for reporting on the movement’s activities, updating the page, and loading photos and videos of the various protests. Facebook was the most important online broadcasting tool among the activists to broadcast their messages to their personal networks. According to a female activist from Tangier, “activists dedicated their personal accounts to the movement.” The online portal mamfakinch served as a national platform for the February 20th movement, and, as such, the site relied on a gatekeeping process for content production and information sharing. Individual activists wanting to post on the website had to email the administrators for mamfakinch. The site had an interactive map of the movement’s protests, where a viewer could click on any part of the map and they would receive an update on the details of that protest. The map included live tweets, report of incidents, photos, videos of the protests, and any relevant safety information.

Moreover, online platforms served to promote deliberation and debate. According to the activists, Facebook was a site of contestation and deemed the most popular platform for discussion. The online platforms enabled participants to become active in the public sphere. The online platforms were dynamic, provided information on current events, and invited deliberation. Participants in online forums critiqued the consultative commission that the King appointed to draft the new constitution. They identified committee members and questioned the actual power that the consultative members possessed (Mamfakinch, 2011, June 25). An online discussion
board on the movement’s central platform discussed the boycott of the referendum (Mamfakinch, 2011, June 29). Such online discussions challenged the public to question the Moroccan political status quo and brought to the forefront active issues of shared concern. The online participatory media increased opportunities for engagement in the process of discursive citizenship. It allowed a large number of activists to participate as contributors to the public discourse and potential influencers of public opinion.

The online strategies of the February 20th movement functioned in unique ways for various target audiences. According to the personal interviews with senior activists, the February 20th movement did not target rural areas with their online strategies. All of the interviewed activists stated that the February 20th movement was an urban movement and, in hindsight, regretted that the movement had not prioritized rural areas. Nonetheless, the rural areas joined the February 20th movement and protested each week ("FEB20 122730 manifestants dans 53 provinces du Maroc le dimanche 20 Fevrier," 2011). Unlike in the cities, however, entire villages in the rural areas would mobilize and protest. According to a female activist from the north:

There was a part of the movement present in every part of Morocco, especially the north, but no one targeted enough the rural areas. The activities of the movement were broadcasted online and in some national newspapers and that was the only way these people would have access to the information; but at the same time they don’t have the means to stay up to date with the activities of the movement online because they don’t necessarily have the internet and the money to buy newspapers, or even the will to buy these newspapers because they are just occupied with their everyday lives.

Other activists added that many of the February 20th activists in the cities had families in rural areas. As one activist from Casablanca recalled, “We won’t say that the movement
communicated with people from rural areas. But people communicated with people. The movement reached the rural areas. Some of those places don’t even have streets but they still go out and protest.” Because the movement communication strategies were grounded in local issues, the rural areas were able to identify with the movement (“Feb20 Imzouren: Le Peuple veut mettre fin a la corruption,” 2011). Having families divided between rural and urban areas further broadened the reach of the movement. Activists from the cities were able to learn about rural protests via Facebook pages. A male activist from Casablanca recalled, “Bou-Ayash, Taza, Houceima and many more areas [were] where the entire village went out and protested. The people from big cities stopped manifesting but they [people from rural areas] are still manifesting. We see them and learn about them only via Facebook.” Despite the admission by movement strategists that they failed to mobilize the rural communities sufficiently, the online environment nevertheless facilitated interactions between urban and rural supporters on behalf of the common cause.

The online technologies also strengthened the national awareness of the movement’s goals and activities in the Moroccan diaspora. Mamfakinch most often focused on the diaspora from France, as Morocco is a formal colony in close geographical proximity to that nation. The Moroccan diaspora in France remained very active in Moroccan politics during the rise of the February 20th movement. Based on various mamfakinch Communiqué, the French Moroccan diaspora called on the EU to pressure the Moroccan government to end the violence and repression of its own people (“#Feb20 Communiqué Voie democratique-France,” 2011) and frequently protested in solidarity with the February 20th movement in Morocco (“Appel a manifester et a se rassembler le 26 et 27 Fevrier sur Paris,” 2011).
The online platforms also included direct appeals to the publics around the globe. At times, protest signs appeared in English, which led to photographs of them circulating in the various online social networks. The online videos included English subtitles so that the non-French and non-Arabic speaking publics could also participate. The February 20th activists conducted interviews with foreign international newspapers to bring greater attention the February 20th movement. During an interview with Mohammed Elbouliki, member of the administrative commission of the Moroccan human rights organization AMDH and a political prisoner from 1985-1994 under Hassan II, one activist asked the international media to support the movement and offered suggestions for how international supporters could stand in solidarity. He stated:

There is a media war on the movement. Tell people about the February 20th demands. Collect signatures to show support. If you want to support, give us media support. Make known this movement and its claims. Let people know that it is not directed by Islamist groups. There are many other groups, sections and individuals (Lazare, 2011).

During the same time period, mamfakinch dedicated a page on its site written in English. The page included links and articles on the February 20th movement in English. On the page, the site read, “We present in this post a list of links about the recent development in Morocco to our readers who are looking for pieces in English” (“Links and articles related to Feb. 20 Movement,” 2011). The main online platform also included a page showing the protests occurring all over Europe in support of the February 20th movement (“Manifestation 20 Fevrier en Europe…,” 2011).

In sum, the activists strategically used online social platforms to counter the state’s accusations against the movement, unveil abuses of state power, and mobilize a wide net of
supporters for the movement. However, the online also came with some state surveillance. While infrequent, the security state apparatus did arrest some identified bloggers and activists and threatened or accused others (Mamfakinch, 2011). According to the activists, state surveillance technologies tapped phones and email accounts, as well as used cab drivers to spy on the movement. Accordingly, the activists used mobile phones to divert the police by calling to say that they were meeting in a particular location but never showing.

**February 20th Offline Communication Strategies**

The online social platforms alone were insufficient to build a national collective representative of the Moroccan public in its entirety. The online marginalized subaltern publics were often unable to participate because of high rates of illiteracy and limited access to organized movement activities. Additionally, while the online environment helped set the agenda for political discussion, it was also unable, on its own, to mobilize the Moroccan people to come to the streets. Operating within a local context steeped in political apathy and fear, the online simply could not substitute for traditional offline communication. This section will provide a brief, generalized overview of the February 20th movement’s offline activities; the next chapter will continue the discussion of offline strategies singling out the substantial array of aesthetic and performance approaches of the movement.

In an effort to build their outreach through offline channels, the activists did not work alone. They partnered with various civil society organizations at both the national and local levels. The activists tapped into the networks of the coalitions and organizations. The activists worked with the local neighborhood committees and other civil society groups to organize protests, write slogans, and get their messages across. An activist from Casablanca who was active in mobilizing subaltern neighborhoods stated, “We had to coordinate between the
neighborhood committees and the movement to get the message across.” He further explained that by holding discussions with neighborhood committees the activists understood better the local grievances and priorities of that particular neighborhood. Offline communication strategies included face-to-face meetings, gatherings in neighborhoods, knocking door-to-door, distributing of pamphlets, holding protest rallies, and conducting other aesthetic practices. The cooperation with local civil society associations helped fostered trust among the local communities for building momentum toward positive political action.

From the perspective of the activists, offline communication strategies were the most effective communication channel for reaching publics living in the marginalized areas. According to a female activist from Tangier,

Face-to-face communication in marginalized areas was the most effective communication strategy in getting ideas across. The national television was completely absent. Face-to-face communication enabled activists to get their ideas across and explain to the people with any means possible. It also enabled us to adapt the type of communication used to that particular individual.

Activists working in these areas were often dependent on face-to-face communication to recruit members and secure their commitment. An important function of the face-to-face method was building trust and identification with the people. As the young female activist from Tangier went on to explain, face-to-face communications enabled the activists to adapt their messages to the different neighborhoods and regions.

To build the movement’s offline presence, the activists began by focusing on mobilizing people within their personal, inner circles. They subsequently expanded to people acquaintances outside their local neighborhoods. According to a female activist in Tangier,
We were very personal. Every person would convince a friend. People used to be convinced easily because our networks were very personal: friends, neighbors, and family. Activists were very passionate about what they were doing and very persuasive. They used to convince friends, family, and other people to just come and see.

The determination and sustained action of the activists played a major factor in offline recruitment.

To have real impact, activists gathered in neighborhoods to distribute their messages in ways that would win “the hearts and minds” of the people. The activists combined face-to-face interaction, storytelling, music, and other social and cultural activities to explain to the people the goals of the movement and details of the planned protests. During these gatherings, activists disseminated flyers and pamphlets to raise awareness. The flyers were simple and contained minimal information. According to a female activist in Casablanca, “in order to communicate with the people that don’t necessarily have the means or access to the Internet, activists distributed flyers with just the date of the protest and concise description of the goals.”

However, activists stressed that offline communication strategies that included direct contact and interaction with potential members were much more helpful than distributing flyers and pamphlets. In these personal moments, the activists discussed the members’ daily lives, which served as the foundation for appeals about the movement’s goals pertinent to the local grievances.

To further build trust and collective identification, the location of the protests was crucial. Distancing the February 20th movement from the perception of it as a bourgeois social movement, activists changed the locale of the protests from the central cities to the marginalized neighborhoods. According to the activists, the decision to relocate was a controversial and
stirred many emotions during the general assembly. According to an activist from Rabat who was part of these deliberations,

The working class neighborhoods are composed of the poor class. This was a big decision in the movement to take the protests to these neighborhoods. We were confronted by many people in the February 20th movement who claimed that this is a middle class movement and for the middle class—not from low levels and societal low class. We were adamant to change this. If we didn’t go to the streets, the people will not have the price of the bus ticket to go downtown and protest.

Another senior male activist from Rabat who played a leading role in writing slogans recalled the evolution of the movement’s decision to move its activities:

The movement has one huge goal of explaining democracy and its benefits. At the beginning the movement, it used to be in the center city. Then it went to poor neighborhoods to mobilize and convince people. When you go to this poor neighborhood, you should relate his life to the concept of democracy as in the food he eats, the work he has, healthcare, his kids, studies, etc. . . . The protests are always a way to communicate and relate with the people.

It was much easier for Casablanca and Tangier to move their protests to the subaltern neighborhoods. However, it proved much more difficult for the activists in Rabat. One major factor was the demographic constituency of the activists. Many of the activists coming from Casablanca and Tangier identified with the subaltern publics and came from those same neighborhoods. As such, activists built on the already established trust and networks. For instance, an activist and artist from Casablanca who comes from one of those poor neighborhoods stated, “When the February 20th movement came to my neighborhood, I already
spoke to the people and explained to them the movement. They trust me.” According to this same activist, when the police targeted the neighborhood and repressed the protestors, the people from that neighborhood opened their doors to provide safety and welcomed them in. Trust was already established and the subaltern publics from that neighborhood identified with the activists and provided protection.

**The Dialectical Online and Offline Media Relationship**

According to all the interviews with senior communication and political strategists of the movement, the activists had to rely on both online and offline communication platforms. They did not manifest as an oppositional binary. Instead, they functioned as an organic hybrid that combined face-to-face interactions and communicative practices on the ground, with online mobilization and exchange of information.

In several ways the February 20th activists used complementary communication strategies for both the online and offline environments. In both spheres, the activists emphasized a Moroccan collective identity that was all-inclusive through the use of diverse languages, national and cultural symbols, music, and a prioritization of the local issues and grievances. Each of these communication strategies facilitated grass roots outreach. Further, the movement employed both the online and offline channels to critique the makhzen and the national state media, while both spheres refrained from directly critiquing the King. By digitally transmitting documentation of the February 20th movement offline strategies, the February 20th movement strengthened its online presence and legitimacy. The frequent circulation of photos and videos built the case for a united populace behind the movement’s goals. From the perspective of the activists, the public needed to see the movement grounded in their Moroccan realities.
However, the precise nature of this dialectical relationship differed across the movement’s various target audiences due to differing demographics, as well as the subgroups’ unique historical, cultural and political contexts. By way of illustration, the northern and southern cities were different in their usage of Internet technologies and offline communication strategies. According to the interviews with activists, the northern city of Rabat substantially relied on Internet technologies, as activists there were mainly youth. Video technology was particularly a focus for activists in Rabat. All of the campaign videos of the February 20th movement originated from Rabat. Further, the same city’s activists produced the film that documented the February 20th protests. On the other hand, the southern cities of Casablanca and Tangier relied more on a combination of offline and online platforms. As both of these cities contain large shantytowns on their outskirts where poverty is most visible, the movement had to incorporate more offline activities. The heavier reliance on the offline also emerged in these southern cities because a large segment of activists from Casablanca and Tangier came from marginal neighborhoods and identified with the subaltern.

The unique political contexts of the various cities also played a major role in the movement’s targeted choices of communication platforms. The biggest difference between the three cities was the ratio of Islamists to leftist activists. In Casablanca, Islamists and leftists were almost divided equally. In Rabat, the percentage of Islamist participants was minimal, while in Tangier, the Adl wa Ihsan outnumbered the leftists to a large degree. An activist from northern Morocco remembered, “Adl wa Ihsan was a major force in Tangier. And when Adl wa Ihsan was no longer present in Feb. 20th movement, the movement in Tangier dwindled.” Many of the Adl wa Ihsan members from Tangier and Casablanca came from poor neighborhoods. As such, activists in those cities were able to mobilize a large segment of the subaltern publics and had
greater success with their message. In Casablanca, hip-hop artist and activist Al Haqedd, in particular, played a key role in mobilizing the people from marginal neighborhoods. Seen as one of them, the hip-hop artists spoke in the vernacular language and discussed issues that were pertinent to the marginalized publics.

Not surprisingly, Casablanca and Tangier differed from Rabat in their approach to mobilizing the subaltern neighborhoods. The movement’s decision to relocate the protest rallies from downtown to marginalized neighborhoods was problematic in Rabat, as the activists were not as well connected to the subaltern publics as the activists from Casablanca and Tangier. In Casablanca and Tangier, the subaltern publics played major roles in the protests and mobilization of the movement. An academic and female activist from Casablanca remembered,

In Sbatta [a marginal neighborhood in Casablanca], protesters were getting hit and were welcomed to the people’s house. People literally opened their homes to the February 20th movement. When this was happening, I was there. The movement of Adl wa Ihsan was organized and had good structure and support in those streets. (“FEB20-Urgent-marche des bidonvillois a Casablanca,” 2011).

The national media’s lack of attention to the subaltern made them less visible to the public. As a result, the makhzen tactics differed substantially when the protests occurred in these neighborhoods rather than at downtown locales.

Due to the demographic and cultural contexts of the cities, the February 20th movement used aesthetic practices, such as body performances and street theater, more frequently in Rabat and Casablanca then in Tangier. On the whole, northern Morocco is much more conservative than the southern portions of the country. As such, nontraditional forms of art, such as performances emphasizing the body and western appropriated art, were less likely to prompt
identification with the movement. According to an activist located in Casablanca responsible for incorporating art into the movement’s protests, “In Rabat and Casablanca, art was used more than in Tangier. We had a theater troop that is based in Casablanca, called ‘Masrah al Mehgor’, that used to rely on art.” Even within the offline platforms, cultural considerations influenced the movement’s selections of how to deliver its messages to target audiences.

The February 20th movement communication strategies clearly demonstrate that the movement did not rely on a single, homogenous online and offline approach to reach the Moroccan people. Regional differences and cultural contexts influenced the types of communication strategies the activists deployed. Viewed from a holistic perspective, however, the movement used the online environment for communication between core activists and to strengthen those networks throughout the country, while the offline communication strategies were key to building trust and collective identification with various segments of the population, such as the subaltern.
Chapter Six

Navigating Moroccan Aesthetic Resistance

“Morocco is a big prison and the prison is a small one. I met people and I found my music in prison before I even went to prison”

Male activist and artist from Casablanca

The Arab Spring unmasked the centrality of aesthetic practices to the processes of cultural struggle and modes of contestation (Abadi, 2013; Khatib, 2012; Salime, 2012). Through various aesthetic forms and strategies of protest, the Arab Spring brought human rights, politics, and social issues back into the public sphere, breaking decades of fear and censorship. States and political institutions no longer functioned as the only sites of control for the production and consumption of cultural processes. Activists used a multitude of cultural and artistic expressions to engage their constituencies in critical discussions on politics, religion, culture, corruption, citizenship, and identity.

Like other movements in the MENA region, the February 20th movement relied on a wide range of aesthetic practices to convey its key messages. The movement’s use of music, street theater, performances, and film helped mobilize the public as a politicized citizenry. The February 20th activists’ use of aesthetic forms of resistance questioned the hegemonic constructions and provided an alternative narrative that was readily consumable and widely diffused. This chapter explores how the February 20th movement’s strategies of cultural production engaged with the state’s hegemonic discourse. Applying Foucault’s (2001) concept
of culture as “a hierarchical organization of values, accessible to everybody, but at the same time the occasion of a mechanism of selection and exclusion,” (p. 173), it recognizes that the hegemonic aesthetic practices of the state reflect the political conditions in which they emerge and function in the community’s unconsciousness (Bruner, 2012). This chapter argues that the Moroccan cultural landscape constituted a crucial site of struggle between the February 20th movement and the state.

The chapter begins by briefly contextualizing the Moroccan cultural scene, providing a critical overview of the relationship between state and cultural production. It then examines the reasons that led the February 20th activists to place a heavy emphasis on cultural activism and how the February 20th movement used various aesthetic strategies to provide alternative spaces for dissent free from the hegemonic discourse of the state apparatus. The chapter concludes with the implications of the movement’s cultural and artistic activism, reflecting on opportunities and challenges of art and culture in Morocco.

**Cultural Context of Morocco**

In Morocco, the state governs cultural institutions. The Ministry of Cultural Affairs dictates what constitutes art and what does not. To have work qualify as art, artists must align their cultural productions with the goals and mission of the state. The Film Fund Commission, Aid Fund for Theater on Music, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs all provide funds for cultural organizations and events if they are aligned with their mission statement (Graiouid & Belghazi, 2013). The Royal patronage is the most prestigious, which provides direct support from the King (Graiouid & Belghazi, 2013).

As state institutions formally provide material and financial support for culture and art, Moroccan artists struggle to maintain their independence in the face of regime’s constant attempt
to co-opt dissent (Graioudi & Belghazi, 2013; Laachir, 2013). The Moroccan state uses culture and arts to “promote its image as reformist liberal state” (Laachir, 2013, p. 257) and to enhance Morocco’s image by showing the country as modern yet still authentic, cultured, tolerant, and diverse (Graiouid & Belghazi, 2013). Graiouid & Belghazi (2013) have noted, “It should be emphasized that royal patronage and its cronies provide financial backing on condition that artistic production meets their vision of society, that is to say, they clearly co-opt these forms of production” (p. 263).

In practice, the cultural scene within Morocco operates as a complex power struggle. Cultural production functions as a site of ideological struggle between the King, the makhzen, key political figures from various religious parties, and a wide spectrum of activists who oppose the state and Islamists when they perceive them as a threat to individual liberties, democracy and freedom (Graiouid & Belghazi, 2013). At times, activists and state political actors align for the purpose of allowing space for “liberal” art within the Moroccan cultural scene to exist, for as Bruner (2012) has observed, “In any given aesthetic/political configuration, however, there will always be networks of divergent interests and experiences, where ruptures, inconsistencies, and contradictions emerge, triggering battles between those supporting different interpretive strategies competing for dominance” (p. 2).

The competitive struggles over Moroccan cultural productions, for example, became evident in a 2003 case involving the Islamist Party of Justice and Development (PJD). The PJD had been instrumental in the arrests of 14 young hard rock musicians, accusing them of belonging to a satanic cult and endangering Islamic values (Belghazi, 2009). During their trial, the prosecution portrayed the youth as having practiced Satanism and questioned them on why they killed and drank the blood of cats (Langendonck, 2010). The arrest of these young artists,
however, created public outrage and mobilized activists, lawyers, and journalists. Acting in his role as arbitrator, the King mediated between the activists who demanded the immediate release of the young people and the PJD who wanted them convicted. The King supported the activists’ claims and demanded their immediate release.

On occasion, the activists and the Islamists form pragmatic alliances against the state, albeit for drastically different reasons. One recent example involved the Mawazine Festival. Since 2001, a major annual music festival, Mawazine, has taken place in the city of Rabat. Mawazine had become a controversial festival because it features local and international artists such as Shakira, Elton John, Joe Cocker, and Kenye West (Almiraat, 2011 April 17). Activists in the February 20th movement critiqued Mawazine as being part of the festivilization of Morocco (i.e., the trend towards commodification of Morocco’s culture into festivals). On April 10th, 2011, Mamfakinch.com released an open letter to the artists slated to appear at the festival asking them to cancel their appearances. It stated, “By refusing to attend, you will contribute to reforming Morocco and paving way for its transition to democracy” (as qtd. in Almiraat, 2011 April 17). In their national campaign to cancel the Mawazine Music Festival, the online group was explicit about the motivations behind the movement’s opposition: “the priorities for spending public funds in Morocco should be the infrastructure, the promotion of basic services and the provision of jobs for youth” (as qtd. in Almiraat, 2011 April 17). The PJD, by contrast, opposed the Mawazine festival because it did not represent Islamic and other Moroccan traditional values. The two groups, who on other issues disagreed about the appropriate direction for the country’s future, came together to oppose the state-run festival.16

16 Since the Islamist party PJD came to power in 2012, the PJD party has been less vocal with its criticism of state sponsored cultural events, especially those directly endorsed by the King (Graioud & Belghazi, 2013).
The February 20th Movement’s Aesthetic Strategies of Resistance

The February 20 movement worked to embed its message within pop culture. One of the February 20th movement’s four committees was the Committee of Art and Creativity. The goal of the committee was to use artful practices to mobilize people across the sociopolitical and cultural divides. The use of pop culture for the February 20 movement functioned to serve four complementary purposes: mobilization and participation, message diffusion and circulation, attitudinal conversion of potential constituencies, and to challenge the state” (Abadi, 2012). According to a male artist and activist from Rabat, “Art is important to resistance. It’s a way to show a different narrative from the official narrative, the propaganda of the state.” All of the interviewed activists agreed that art was a powerful tool for resistance that could be creatively deployed in direct opposition to the state while at the same time enacting sites of learning.

The February 20th activists perceived their desired changes for Morocco as part and parcel of a long process. For them, meaningful change necessitated a change in Moroccan culture. According to one male activist in Casablanca who wrote on the February 20th movement, “Change in mentality needs to be done before anything else. What the February 20th activists are doing is focusing on cultural change before concentrating on changing the regime.” Another activist from Casablanca metaphorically referred to removing the culture of fear that is pervasive in Morocco: “Every Moroccan has a policeman in his mind and tells him don’t do this. If he doesn’t take him out, he won’t succeed.” Deploying art as a form of aesthetic resistance is a bottom up, cultural reform approach to provide youth a space where they can exchange ideas and opinions, and encourage people to critique their social realities.
The usage of the various aesthetic practices served as a gateway for public understanding of complex issues. In the face of pressing social and political issues, aesthetic practices enabled activists to approach issues of corruption, marginalization, and oppression. Through performance and the public’s participation in the process, the movement worked to build solidarity around the struggles of the marginalized and create a fissure within the political hegemonic system. Marginalized groups voiced their opinions, shared their stories, and inspired other young people to join the cause. According to a male activist in Casablanca, “Artistic and cultural discourse reaches people quickly. People are tired of the traditional discourse. All protests that included art succeeded.” The movement invited the public to participate in their own liberation through a form of cultural revolution and self-expression (Abadi, 2012). The next section will discuss the different modes of alternative aesthetics practices and strategies activists employed and the functions that each played.

**Resistance Through Sound**

With the majority of the Moroccan population under the age of 35, music became a key strategy of the movement. The February 20th movement deployed music as a strategic tool to contest state power and call for collective action (Abadi, 2012). The music functioned as a vehicle for empowerment, self-expression, and mobilization (See figure 6.2). According to the February 20th activists, music served as a powerful tool for deploying a counter hegemonic narrative. The lyrics mapped various facets of oppression, marginalization, and corruption, which produced a discourse of liberation that empowered listeners to call for structural changes.

One particular singer, Al Haqed, became and continues to be the movement’s iconic music artist. All of the activists spoke of Al Haqed’s songs and the symbolic role he played within the movement. One of the male activists from Rabat stated, “Al Haqed is very down to
earth, he does not know how important he is to the movement. In Casablanca, Al Haqed is the symbol of the movement. He mobilized the people.” Coming from a very poor neighborhood in Casablanca, Al Haqed represented the authenticity of the struggle, positioning him to serve as one of their rallying forces for the subaltern publics. His critical lyrics were grounded in the struggles and materiality of life in poor neighborhoods. Passionate and fearless, Al Haqed was arrested and imprisoned three times for his daring lyrics. However, his popularity did not recede. The regime’s direct attack on Al Haqed only strengthened his public standing. Citizens in Casablanca wrote graffiti on the cities’ walls to demand the immediate release of Al Haked side by side with the slogan, written in Arabic, “Long Live the People” (See figure 6.1).

Al Haqed’s music functioned to inspire the new Moroccan collective. In one of the mass protests, Al Haqed rapped about the new constitution and highlighted that the document mentioned the King sixty-six times while touching on the people only once (“Long Live the People,” 2011). He engaged with the people and asked why they had to tolerate such continued humiliation. He concluded with “long live the people,” “power to the people,” the “decision to the people,” and may “God bless the people” (“Long Live the People,” 2011). The people responded back, stating “Long live the people, Long live the people.” The protest video undeniably demonstrated the power the music had on the crowd to build solidarity. Thousands of people in the streets repeated his lyrics while cheering and clapping. The music’s appeal and the social relationships it reinforced are very visible within these videos. Al Haqed’s repetition of the phrase “the people” challenged traditional, hegemonic notions of role of individuals living in the monarchy by envisioning a new collective identity (Abadi, 2012). Further, his daring lyrics explicitly countered and disrupted the state’s discourse of “Long live the King” (Salime,
Al Haqed’s use of the Moroccan dialect (darija) to call forth the new collective blurred any distinction between the artist and activist.

Al Haked challenged the state’s hegemonic powers by recounting the impact of state actions on the populace. Al Haked’s music shed light on the everyday struggle of most Moroccans. It articulated how poverty left many Moroccans unprotected from economic and political violence. In his song, *Bladi* (My country), for example, Al Hakked’s lyrics read:

> My country who is red and has a green star . . . . Long live the people. Long live my country. For the Free Moroccan who do not accept the abuse. My country, who ever comes wants to rape you and does what they want with you . . . . Remember the people. You sold out to the west. In every city a new castle is built. The children of the nation have nothing. My country I love you. My country I watered you with my tears. Give us our share. They made housing more expensive and everyday living more expensive too.

Al Haqed’s lyrics are preoccupied with Morocco and serve to unmask the hegemonic state practices that leave the Moroccan populace at a disadvantage.

Unlike other artists who cautiously avoid attacking the monarchy, Al Hakked was fearless. He ironically positioned himself as King to draw attention to questionable monarchical practices. For instance, the lyrics of one of his songs read,

> The cars are approaching. I am coming. Close and clear the streets. Let me pass. I am not like you . . . . Hang my photos in every shop and house. Don’t forget to hang them in the bar as well. Take my photos, take my photos. My photos are not like your photos . . . . My people are with no dignity. They are under my shoes . . . . I am the one who is pictured in the Dirham bill [Moroccan currency, photos of the King depicted on the bills]. Tell me Long Live. Long Live. But you live in the problems. I am coming, get out of
the street. This is my street not your street. Clean the streets because I am coming. I have allergies and am sick . . . . Kiss my hands.

While not stating directly he is the King, he hinted to the people that he was the one who was pictured in the Dirham bill and asked for his hand to be kissed. Using humor, Al Haked ridiculed the practice of having the King’s photo hanged in every store or place of business, even the bar! By mentioning the bar, he critiqued the hypocrisy of the King’s title, *Prince of the Believers.* Deemed as unislamic practice, the bar is in direct contradiction with the King’s title of *Prince of the Believer.* By using irony and sarcasm, he questioned the meaning of real citizenship and bolstered the case for more rights for the people. In the lyrics, the King asks to have the roads cleared, closed and cleaned so that he and his entourage can pass. This King’s request highlights the inequality and position of his “subjects.” Through the use of his daring lyrics, Al Haqed supported the citizens’ right to public space and to their country.

**Performing Resistance and the Politics of Public Space**

When strategizing what aesthetic forms of resistance the movement would utilize, the February 20th activists relied on participatory and interactive processes in an effort to involve the public. In particular, the movement used street theatre, philosophy in the street, literary programs, and music. The movement’s goal was to empower the Moroccan public and encourage participation of the various populations. For many of the February 20th activists, encouraging critical thinking and enacting active citizenship through aesthetic practices was a safe way to bolster participation.
Street Theater

A key strategy designed to bolster audience participation was the use of *Masrah Al Mehgour* (i.e., the theater of the oppressed). One of the February 20th activists who founded *Masrah Al Mehgour* revealed how the movement adapted the Brazilian-born Theater of the Oppressed into the Moroccan context. Founded by Brazilian theater director Augusto Boal, Theater of the Oppressed aims to achieve active participation by allowing the audience to select material for inquiry, respond, and perform stories of problems and oppressions in their own communities (Lee, 2015).

For the February 20th activists, the theater of the oppressed was a form in which the activists activated participatory politics for political action. Mainly performed in the streets, participants discussed an oppressive situation with both a protagonist and an antagonist. The activists asked the audience to find a resolution and perform an alternative way of responding to the situation, thus transforming the spectator into a spect-actor. An activist and artist from Casablanca shared an example from one of the Theater of the Oppressed tours that was performed throughout all major cities. The topic was a discussion of the problems of corruption and state violence. With no script, activists and artists acted out common everyday scenes of corruption and invited bystanders to comment on what they would change in their own reenactments. From the perspective of the activist, the performances made concrete what each individual could do to change the status quo, but they also empowered the people to feel that they were active agents. The Theater of the Oppressed served to help build emotional investments to encourage audience members to become part of the solution.
**Philosophy in the Street**

Similar to street theater, the February 20 activists tried to find other creative ways to normalize taboo topics and encourage critical and respectful debate. One such activity was the *Felsafa fe Zanka* (Philosophy in the Street). Across Rabat and Casablanca, young activists met every Saturday for two hours to discuss a taboo topic and to encourage debate. According to one of the founders of this group, “the goal for *felsafa fe zanka* was to raise social and political consciousness.” He recalled how Philosophy in the Street arose as a movement strategy:

This philosophy in the street came about one day when we were sitting down in Ramadan in a coffee shop. We were having a meeting and one of our group members liked a French philosopher, Michel Onfray, who gave philosophy lessons for free. So A. [name removed for safety of activist] suggested to do like Michel Onfrey . . . . We want to see philosophical debates in the streets and people abiding to the rules of the debate. We spoke about religion, love, sexual orientation, and many other taboo subjects . . . . What we want to do is make these subjects normal in our society. We want people to talk about anything and to not leave anything taboo in our talk.

The Philosophy in the Street that I observed directly for this study was held on May 2014 in Rabat. At the start of the meeting there were 5 male and 3 female college students. However, as time passed, more people came and the total of people in attendance rose to around 40. People walking by the event (that occurred in a public square in front of a main street) were curious and stopped to listen to the young people who were participating. Some bystanders shook their heads in disapproval, while others were captivated and decided to sit in the circle and join the conversation. The event observed for the study was on the role and status of religion in a Muslim country. Questions ranged from whether God exists, to the role of minorities, to respect
for the believers and nonbelievers. The participants in the debate spoke Darijaa and French. While conducted in a respectful, calm manner, the discussion was lively with people challenging each other’s views. The participants enacted an active form of citizenship that was based on agency and a vision for a future Morocco.

Let’s Read

Recognizing the high illiteracy rate of their target audience, the activists conducted a national campaign to raise awareness about illiteracy and the need to read. The Lecture Pour Tous (Reading for all) goal was to instill in the young people the love of reading. A female activist in Rabat concluded, “If the reading culture becomes entrenched in our daily lives, then we will as a nation move ahead.” To change cultural views about the value of reading, activists organized various activities that targeted different locations and various groups of people.

To mobilize and unite the public around the necessity of reading, activists organized major online campaigns in which they called on the public to participate in raising awareness. Activists pointed to a YouTube video where a young male activist started by identifying himself by name. Speaking energetically in Daarija, this young man looked straight at the camera and asked the people of Morocco to participate in a Reading for All campaign on June 17-19, 2013. He stated, “The goal for this initiative is to bring back the love of books and normalize reading in our daily lives. We need to elevate the status of reading” (“Initiative La Lecture Pour Tous,” 2013). Using social media to unite all the of the cities and major towns of Morocco, the young activist asked the public to take photos of the book of their choice, ride public transportation, and take out the book and start reading. He called on those with the books to discuss what they were reading with the people around them and the importance of reading. The activist then asked the future participants to use the hashtag #initiativeLLPT (LLPT) and archive their experiences by
loading the photo of their book and sharing their story in the national Facebook page highlighting the initiative.

Activists also organized sit-ins in public streets and parks in cities and towns throughout Morocco to highlight reading. The activists discussed the books they were reading with others, who, in turn, focused on the books of their choice. In the Lecture Pour Tous event in Casablanca in May 2014 observed for this study, the books were written in many languages and covered many subjects. The audience was equally divided between males and females. The sit-ins transformed the streets into a powerful visual image where books had an elevated status of respect and importance. Participants in this event discussed the need to bring back the value of books, given the rise of technology, books had receded to secondary status. These activities further legitimized the movement by directly addressing the national crisis of illiteracy and by also appearing to care for its subaltern publics.

**Protests and Rallies**

The senior strategies of the February 20th movement saw the protests as important for building collectivities and mobilizing the people to join the movement (see figure 6.4). As such, the activists spent ample amounts of time and energy organizing successful protests that would motivate people to come to the streets. Staying true to the local grievances and sensitivities of the people, the protests differed in format from city to city. Accounts by the interviewed activists and photographic documentation on the February 20th movement’s online platform, mamfakinch, support the conclusion that Rabat and Casablanca deployed the most artful practices for their rallies.

The activists across the different cities and small towns emphasized their loyalty to the nation. The streets were filled with the colors of the Moroccan flag. Activists wrapped their
bodies in the Moroccan flag or dressed in the flag’s red and green palate. The Amazigh flag, rather than project an alternative to national emblem, frequently flew side-by-side with the Moroccan flag. In one of the photos an activist supplied, for example, two small boys held a sign that stated, “the People want a new Morocco.” Visually representing the new generation and hope for the future, these little boys were demanding change while still showing loyalty to the monarchy by standing behind the monarchical crown emblem (see figure 6.5). The use of the national symbols and colors branded the movement’s identity. The members of the February 20th movement were loyal and patriotic.

The movement also had to minimize protest fatigue. To sustain the mobilization of active, young people, the protests included free festivals. The breadth of creative expressions displayed in the streets during the protests was an identifying characteristic of the February 20th movement. The activists transformed the streets into performing stage that invited public participation. During the protest rallies, the movement incorporated combinations of music, the spoken word, paintings, body performances, and recitation of poetry to attract public attention and participation. In one of the protests held in March 2011, the activists joined together, using their bodies to spell the word “freedom” in Arabic (see figure 6.3). Through this collective effort, the movement created a visual moment that provided a simplified, resonant reminder of who had the power to contest hegemonic practices of the state. The movement also revived old Moroccan traditions, such as story telling and poetry. These oral traditions were part of Morocco’s rich heritage but, given colonialism and globalization, had lost their popularity. All political in nature, these activities functioned to intertwine the public and the February 20th movement’s goals for political progress. By participating in the various forms of aesthetic practices, the public enacted, and therefore had a participatory stake in, the goals of the movement.
To generate newness and identify with the youth, the February 20th movement in Rabat organized a performative act in front of the Rabat parliament entitled, “Freeze for Democracy” ("Contester Differemment: flashmob & Freeze ce Dimanche,” 2011). The young female and male activists used their bodies to “perform” their message of absolute silence, a strategy never seen before in the Maghreb region. The movement’s members called the approach “Freeze for Democracy” because their bodies were frozen in time and space. As they occupied public space, pedestrians and bystanders walking by had to walk through or consciously avoid the protestors as they walked or crossed the streets. In this way movement strategists made even the skeptical or curious participate in the demonstration.

The activists used creative uniqueness to sustain the public’s involvement with the movement. As one activist opined, “If we continue to do the same type of protests, it loses its impact” (as qtd. in “Morocco: The Youth Rise Up,” 2011). The activists concluded after a long debate they needed to reenergize the sit-ins and rallies after their initial public gatherings (“FEB20 Infos manifs dimanche,” 2011). They called for artistic and cultural contestation. A revealing illustration involved how the originators of the freeze strategy posted two online videos of global protests, both where movement’s deployed the approach. One was in New York’s Grand Central train station and the other was in Europe. The activists asked the public to examine what successful protest freeze performances looked like and how the movement could localize the freeze strategy within the Moroccan context. The February 20th movement activists appropriated global aesthetic practices to local contexts to generate newness and creativity. The activists stated: “We are young, and we are capable of innovation. The activists in Rabat decided to diversify their forms of contestations…. We will do a freeze and followed by poetry and music” ("Contester Differemment: flashmob & Freeze ce Dimanche,” 2011).
Taken together, such performative forms of resistance functioned not only to raise political and social consciousness, but also to reclaim the Moroccan public space. These simple, but meaningful acts diminished the state’s govermentality and become a steppingstone for further claims for legitimacy, socio-economic justice, and human rights. One of the activists shared a story of how difficult the performative approach was when they first started Felsafa *fe Zanka* (Philosophy in the Streets). When the activists first met in a public space to discuss controversial topics deemed important, the police used to stop them by insisting they had to get a permit. One activist who organized this event stated,

You have a public place and when police comes, the people no longer care. We cannot understand human rights without understanding the abuse. Now we have a special place in the street and no one [the police] comes to us. We freed it. No rules apply to us during those two hours. It’s an exercise of democracy we do every Saturday everywhere in Morocco.

One activist present at the same discussion reminded the others that some activists were previously jailed and risked their lives for enabling this change. Another activist from Rabat shared the same sentiment stating, “If we speak about Morocco, public spaces are the government’s property and we have to get a permit to do something. The February 20th broke this….“ The activists considered the ability to assemble without fear of retribution one of the movement’s key successes.

**Alternative to State-Driven Cultural Productions**

As an alternative to the state sponsored festivals, the February 20th movement launched *Festival de Resistance et d’Alternatives* (Festival of Resistance and Alternatives). Composed mainly of a young group of activists ranging in age from 22 to 32, the Festival of Resistance and
Alternatives included art workshops, independent film screenings, music, poetry, public debate, conferences, spoken word, photo exhibitions, and dance performances (see figure 6.1). These events did and currently take place in different locations, such as the headquarters of the Moroccan Labor Union, the Association of Human Rights’ building, high schools, universities and public spaces (Festival de Resistance et d’Alternatives, 2014). According to the official online website of Festival of Resistance and Alternatives,

The Festival of Resistance and Alternatives (FRA) offers a place dedicated to innovation, exchange and participation, where every individual can express themselves freely. The festival is an independent Moroccan initiative to create a space where people share their ideas, their principles, their talents and their artistic creations about sociocultural subjects such as economy, politics, art, education and others. (Festival de Resistance et d’Alternatives, 2014).

During the interview with one of the main organizers and founder of the Festival of Resistance and Alternatives, the young artist/activist focused on the third edition of the yearly festival (2014) as a way to understand the goals and strategies of the festival aesthetic practices. The third edition of the festival created an alternative city, with a parliament, police station, market, hospital, and other places essential to public life. The Festival of Resistance and Alternatives’ website (2014) explained the purpose of the approach:

In these different locations, workshop, discussions, and artistic happenings will be held with the aim to look critically and creatively at the current social and institutional practices. The participants are invited to debate and explore alternatives to the current practices in these locations. The website provided a map of the Alternative city that listed all the locations.
along with their different functions. The ultimate goal was to “stimulate creative and critical thinking” (“Festival de Resistance et d’Alternatives Maroc”, 2014).

In a similar way, Guerilla Cinema offers an alternative to the state controlled Cinematographic Center. The mission of Guerilla Cinema (2012) is:

We are an artistic resistance for freedom of expression in Morocco. We don't believe in censorship & Moroccan filmmaking laws. We believe that the Centre Cinematographique Marocain is a corporatist institution designed, under tyranny, to control Moroccan films and contain or censor any critique against the makhzen. In the spirit of peaceful disobedience, we shoot films and encourage others to shoot films without authorization as a form of protest. Cameras are our weapons. Guerrilla Cinema is an @artivistes' campaign.

Through this statement the Guerilla Cinema clearly articulated its objectives and stance in opposition to the hegemonic, state-funded, cultural organizations.

The Guerilla Cinema offered a vehicle of self-expression for artists throughout Morocco. In an interview with a February 20th male activist and filmmaker, he described how an independent film he created on the February 20th movement enabled him to archive history and give a voice to the voiceless. The independent film, My Makhzen and Me, documented the protests and movement’s activities through the first year its life. According to the filmmaker, the film attempted to break the state’s sole monopoly to write history and gave a voice to the protestors and activists of the movement to archive their own history. He stated:

What I really hoped to do was to not allow the regime 10 to 20 years from now to hide the facts like it did in the 1982 uprisings in Morocco . . . You wouldn’t be able to tell the people this did not happen or tell them a different story of what has happened . . .
long run, the regime will write the story in textbooks and basically in our history. Our film is way to document and stop that. It shows people what really happened from the perspective of the protestors.

For the activists, film was not only a mode of self-expression and critique but also a creative strategy to archive and break the state’s monopoly of historization.

Both the Festival of Resistance and Guerilla Cinema have a similar fundraising approach. Refusing to take funding from the state to lower their risk of co-optation, the activists relied on social sites to fundraise for their cultural events and products. In an effort to have credibility with online funders, they use full transparency when outlining their budget. Further, they both work to keep the budgets for the production of these festivals and films relatively low.

**Summary and Conclusions**

This chapter has examined how the February 20th movement used cultural production to creatively deconstruct Morocco’s hegemonic narrative. It also demonstrated how the movement constructed the same practices to empower the Moroccan people as a collective to promote participatory politics, as well as civic and social engagement. The February 20th movement deployed various artistic strategies to critically address the regime’s mechanisms for quelling citizen participation in the political process. The activists’ engagement with culture in their political struggle showcased a new era of performed dissent on the public stage. According to a female activist from Tangier, “the new forms of art redefined activism in in Morocco.” Pop culture catalyzed a style of politics marked by cultural codes and enabled by creativity. In other words, it contested regime narratives to reclaim political and social agency by engaging directly with the ideologies of society.
The February 20th aesthetic practices critiqued both the corrupt state apparatus and the state-censored media, while generally refraining from directly critiquing the King. The primary focus of the movement’s use of cultural production was to bring attention to actions of the corrupt makhzen system. A male activist from the Rabat Committee of Communication and Media of the February 20th movement stated, “We focused on educating the people not politically but through culture and art.”

Through its visual artistic presence, the February 20th movement claimed its existence and identity within the Moroccan political and cultural scene. Aesthetic practices were important not only in the form they took, but also in the process of simply undertaking the freedom to do art. This communal function of bringing people together to produce cultural practices functioned to build collective trust between members of the people and the movement.
Figure 6.1 Street art

Figure 6.2 Al Haked Slogan
Figure 6.3 Music and Protests

Figure 6.4 Enacting Freedom
Figure 6.5 Participation
Figure 6.6 The New Generation
Chapter Seven

Conclusion

While scholars and pundits have often dubbed Morocco the exception to the Arab Spring, the February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement serves as a reminder that Morocco has not been immune to the revolutionary waves of protests shaking the Arab political regimes. Although the Moroccan monarchy has historically enjoyed legitimacy, the country currently shares similar sociopolitical and economic problems with its neighboring countries. Such ongoing frustrations with conditions on the ground, coupled with the public’s rising expectations of political reform accompanying King Mohammed VI’s assumption of the throne and the inspiration derived from upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt, gave rise to the February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement.

The activists of the February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement called for nationwide protests on February 20, 2011 to speed political change. They called for a new constitution that would restrict the monarchy’s executive powers, the removal of corrupt practices in the Kingdom, and an improved infrastructure that would improve the citizenry’s quality of life. Facing the King’s historic public acquiescence of the nation’s citizenry, activists in the movement urged Moroccans to boycott the referendum on the new constitution that the King supported. The February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement mobilized members across fifty towns and cities, demonstrating the dispersed nature of public’s discontent in the Moroccan Kingdom.

Core February 20\textsuperscript{th} activists consider their movement highly successful in instilling the spirit of fearlessness and political activism. One activist referred to the effort as the “mother of all movements,” while another equated the February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement with the Egyptian April 6 protest movement. The movement created the biggest grass-root mobilization in the history of Morocco. It resulted in the King’s acceptance of a constitutional referendum that led to the
official recognition of the Amazigh as one of Morocco’s official languages. It succeeded in uniting people across the religious and political spectrums through its demands for more democracy and meaningful citizenship.

All of the activists interviewed for this study agreed that the biggest success of the February 20th movement was the elevated spirit the movement instilled in the Moroccan public. An activist from Casablanca summed up the sentiment of his fellow activists by stating, “By classical definition of what a social movement is, it’s dead - but the spirit of the movement is strong and alive.” When asked to explain further, activists described how the February 20th movement inspired young people to become politically active, broke down the wall of the public’s fear, and built a strong national network of Moroccan activists that remain ready to mobilize. From the activists’ perspective, the February 20th movement set the stage for future political activism. Young organizers had learned the important lessons of organizing, mobilizing and, navigating the politics of protests which they could again rely upon in the future.

Nonetheless, the February 20th movement failed to realize its main political goals. Corruption, repression of political activists, and lack of real political and social reforms still continue to plague the country. The Moroccan economy is still afflicted with high unemployment and the gap between rich and poor has not decreased. The constitutional changes in 2011 did not lead to a parliamentary monarchy. Further, the constitution lacks a coherent plan for linguistic integration of Tamazight. Despite the new constitutional linguistic rights, however, questions of integration and implementation continue to undermine the efficacy of the new law. The degree to which this change will actually fulfill the demand of the Amazigh activists depends largely on implementation of these new reforms. Internally, the withdrawal of the
Islamist party of Al Adl wa Ihsan from the February 20th movement weakened the movement’s strength and capacity to mobilize within the streets.

Whether the February 20th movement has had or will have any real long-term impact on the Moroccan political scene remains unknown. One thing, however, is for certain: the King and the makhzen now have to answer to an active, energized public sphere which has created a new political culture of accountability which has destabilized longstanding balance of power relationships in Morocco. For instance, in August 2013, when Spanish pedophile Daniel Galvan was freed in Morocco through a royal pardon, hundreds of outraged activists mobilized quickly across different cities pressuring the King to revoke his royal pardon. In another historic move, the King responded to the national outcry and rescinded the royal pardon. The February 20th movement’s capacity to build a network that can be mobilized to the streets in a click of a button cannot be underestimated. The February 20th movement future strength will lay in its ability to retain its online and offline members that are readily available to mobilize.

**Insights into the Communication Strategies of the February 20th Movement**

This study contributes to ongoing debates about the role of social media and the Arab Spring by analyzing Morocco’s February 20th movement’s online and offline communication strategies. It examines the historical, sociopolitical, and cultural factors that situated the rise of the February 20th movement, the online and offline mediums that activists deployed to reach different segments of the Moroccan population, the online and offline communication strategies deployed to mobilize the subaltern, and how interactions between the online and offline approaches functioned within local contexts.

While the overwhelming majority of studies on the Arab Spring and social media have focused on particular practices of online or offline media, this study examines the February 20th
movement’s broad-based use of media practices. This study uses a qualitative, multi-method approach that includes interviews with senior strategists of the February 20th movement, onsite observations of movement events, a rhetorical and cultural analysis of the movement’s use of online and offline communications, and a critical analysis of the political, historical, and cultural context that spawned the movement. The study’s examination of the February 20th movement’s full media ecology highlights the complex interrelationships, negotiations, and convergences among online and offline media. It looks at the aggregated media environment that activists used, and the ways the movement capitalized on various mediums in relation to local contexts. Further, the study examines cultural symbols, identity appeals, and ideological frameworks to understand the discursive and non-discursive fields of the February 20th movement. Such an approach moves beyond the singular medium bias that characterizes most of social movement literature on the Arab Spring and social media.

Operating within a context of high illiteracy rates, a highly divided public on national reforms, and a diverse conglomerate of linguistic and ideologically based Moroccan subgroups, the February 20th movement had to use creative strategies to build a broad-based collective inspired by the movement’s goals. In response, the February 20th movement embraced the diversity of its membership, including the most disenfranchised groups in the status quo. The February 20th movement emphasized the agency of those most affected by injustice and positioned participants to enact engaged citizenship. To encourage mobilization and collective action, the February 20th movement developed a repertoire of communicative strategies, which spoke directly to their varied political, economic, and social target audiences. The movement’s strategies included language choices, reappropriation of national symbols, culturally coded slogans, and symbolic rituals. This intersectional approach enabled the February 20th movement
to avoid fragmentation, allowed strong alliances and affinities to build across political and religious divides, and championed a discourse of democratization, unity, and social change. Further, through the implementation of various cultural and linguistic practices, the movement worked to reformulate traditional concepts of nation and state, create a shared history of oppression and resistance, empower voices previously unheard in the public sphere, and envision a new era of participatory politics.

The February 20th movement’s use of Internet platforms was very much connected to the everyday realities of Morocco. The sentiments expressed online were often an extension of the offline in an effort to extend the Moroccan public space to broader communities. The online environment created a semi-safe space for dissent, organizing, negotiating, gathering, and recruiting. However, the online platforms alone were insufficient to build a national collective representative of the Moroccan public in its entirety. Marginalized publics in Morocco were often unable to participate online because of their high rates of illiteracy and their limited access to Internet. Given local contexts filled with both political apathy and fear of state authorities, the activists had to develop communication approaches that utilized various combinations of offline and online platforms to reach targeted Moroccan subgroups.

To constitute an active public, the February 20th movement used cultural production to creatively deconstruct Morocco’s hegemonic practices and empower the people towards participatory politics. The activists’ engagement with culture in their political struggle showcased a new era of performative dissent on the public stage in Morocco. Through both image and sound-based artistic activities, the February 20th movement functioned within the Moroccan political and cultural scene.
Towards a Holistic Study of Social Movements and Social Media

This February 20th movement study adds rich and new findings to the debate of the Arab Spring and social media. It shifts the focus of the Arab Spring communication studies to a movement that did not call for regime change to demonstrate how a combination of direct and indirect communication strategies become necessary to dislodge authoritarian powers in monarchical public spheres. It demonstrates how and why the online and offline media strategies had to converge, interact, and prevail in a variety of ways to reach specific groups of citizens from various socioeconomic and political backgrounds. It documents how the movement strategically targeted the subaltern populations by emphasizing offline activities and aesthetic practices to frame participatory politics from below. Lastly, it expands on previous studies of the February 20th movement by examining how the social activists’ use of multimodal communication approaches helped challenge the hegemonic system without dissolving the society into sectarianism and social anarchy.

The study stresses the need for theories of social movements and social media to take into account two key factors: the localized sociopolitical, cultural, and historical contexts of the movement, and an expanded definition of social media that includes both online and offline media platforms. Situating social movements within their social, cultural, and historical contexts fosters needed understandings about how social movements are implicated in broader social networks and webs of power. Such a process enables an awareness of how those contexts influence both the inner dynamics of a social movement that, in turn, helps explain the messaging strategies the activists deem appropriate for use. Understanding the historical, political, and cultural environment is also crucial to any evaluation of how and why the movement is responding. Social movement theorists should not discuss media ecology without
Expanding the definition of social media to include traditional and nontraditional forms of offline communication strategies is also a critical step for scholars interested in studying social movements and social media. The approach used here highlights the interrelations between old and new technologies. It enables an examination of how and why the online and offline media strategies converged, interacted, or prevailed within various socioeconomic and political contexts. Finally, by not privileging the online platform, the more expansive method helps avoid drawing too narrow, or even mistaken, conclusions about the full terrain of communication strategies that activists employed.

Including aesthetic forms of media practices used to encourage participation and inclusion of various targeted audiences is also an important element in more holistic understanding of the social movement’s ecology. Here, nontraditional forms of communication, such as music, storytelling, slogans, street theater, and film were prevalent. By not reducing aesthetic forms of media practices to only alternative media or radical media, a more holistic approach examines how the movement produces, actualizes, performs and transforms social practices and geographical places through aesthetic forms of media practice. By discussing a fuller range of media channels that a movement utilizes, the broader approach allows for a greater understanding of the dialectical relationship between online and offline media, and how those interactions function and compete within the local contexts.

Taken together, a broader focus on context and various forms of social media reveals that social movement scholars who fail to adopt the more holistic approach will risk misleading or overgeneralizing their conclusion about how communication operates within the national social movements. As discussed below, this study of the February 20th movement demonstrates that the
geographical, demographical, ideological, and cultural contexts of targeted subpopulations influenced how the social movement’s senior strategists targeted their use of social media.

Towards a More Nuanced Understanding of Government Structures

As new social movement theory has recognized, theoretical understandings of social movements should carefully take into account cultural, political, and historical contexts. Such approaches privilege local knowledge and equip scholars to look at the varied modalities of resistance that provide an alternative to the hegemonic political nature of knowledge formation and production. This study adds to those earlier perspectives by indicating that social movement theorists of the Arab Spring should also utilize culturally specific understandings of governmental structures that operate in response to the movements. Social movements located within monarchical governing structures, for example, are dissimilar to their Arab Spring non-monarchical counterparts in many ways. Because of the ritualized and, at times, sacred monarchical public sphere, engrained norms function as a unique rhetorical exigency. In such circumstances movements face public backlash against their causes if they fail to display a cultural recognition of and sensitivity to the sacred traditions. Disaggregation of state actors thus becomes a key factor that social movement analysts should recognize as a necessary lens for examining the message strategies in such monarchical contexts.

The sociopolitical challenges facing the February 20th movement’s mobilization efforts, for example, were complex. The movement operated within a highly ritualized public sphere where the monarchy had historical and religious legitimacy among the people. As such, the February 20th movement had to develop appropriate response strategies to the King who held sacred status, the makhzan who was corrupt and used fear tactics to disperse the movement’s followers, and the unresponsive, state-censored media. In an attempt to distinguish amongst the different political
actors, the February 20th movement deployed a combination of direct and indirect communication strategies to dislodge authoritarian constrains while still acknowledging monarchical authority. Moroccan activists generally avoided the use of direct criticisms of the King, choosing instead to emphasize the needs of ‘the people’ and ‘the nation.’ More subtle, indirect attacks on the King, however, did occur, including the use of cultural codes, reappropriated national symbols, and the use of particular languages important to repressed groups. By sharp contrast to the movement’s approach to the King, the movement directly attacked the makhzen and the state media. The movement’s website and slogans explicitly named these two groups and highlighted the damage they caused the Moroccan citizenry, as perhaps most evident in the movement’s highly circulated slogan “down with the makhzen.”

Recognizing the complexity of this context, the February 20th movement grounded its appeals for a new collective identity in national appeals. Such an approach gave the February 20th movement more flexibility to maneuver within a political landscape filled with great risks. The February 20th movement’s approach raised the collective consciousness by highlighting shared grievances of the Moroccan citizenry, without explicit public challenges to the King. Furthermore, the movement’s focus on one national collective insulated the activists from state allegations that they were traitors or that they were working for the Polisario. Within such a framing, the Moroccan security system faced greater difficulty in efforts to accuse the movement of being anti-Moroccan.

From a practical perspective, particular attention to the creation and continuation of national identify frames become an imperative, especially in the context of post Arab Spring. With the threat of sectarianism sweeping the larger MENA region, national identity and citizenship frames can strengthen social cohesion and prevent state collapse. The February 20th
movement serves as a model of how movements can develop a nuanced set of strategies designed to avoid inciting division and violence within its own competing target audiences. Such approaches mark a positive move towards a political model in which there is a space for the existence of multiple political discourses and coexistence of different social groups.

Towards a More Nuanced Understanding of Online and Offline

This study of the February 20th movement in Morocco reveals that studies of social movements need to simultaneously explore virtual, electronic, and physical spaces to more fully understand the communicative context of mobilization. Moving beyond the insights available from examinations of ICTs and traditional media, analysis of a social movement’s use of aesthetic practices (e.g., staged action in public spaces, film, music, clothing, rallies, and alternative media forums) contributes to the unmasking of how culture, politics, and media intertwine and function. Such an expanded model moves away from technological determinism and places emphasis on individual agency, as participants choose not only if they will attend to or believe a particular message, but how they will (en)act those messages now and into the future. Further, it avoids overlooking key insights available from both embodied performances in physical space and disembodied involvement behind computer and phone screens. Attention to a social movement’s full range of media practices better equips scholars to analyze each medium’s opportunities and constraints for building collective identity.

Further, a model that expands social media to online and offline practices provides opportunities for examining the complementary relationships of the varied media practices and how different media function, negotiate, and circulate. Social movements do not rely on a single, homogenous online and offline approach to reach their multiple target audiences. The complementary functions of online and offline media practices are heavily dependent on the
local contexts, and, in turn, those same regional and cultural contexts influence the types of communication strategies activists will deploy. Demographic breakdowns, ideological makeups, audience access, resource availability, and security levels all contribute to the movement’s choice of medium and messaging strategy. Accordingly, a movement’s media practices may differ substantially from one area to the next within the same political borders.

For example, the study found that in Morocco the online social platforms alone were insufficient to build a national collective representative of the Moroccan public in its entirety. The online marginalized subaltern publics were often unable to participate because of high rates of illiteracy and limited access to organized movement activities. Additionally, while the online environment helped set the agenda for political discussion, it was also unable, on its own, to mobilize the Moroccan people to come to the streets. Operating within a local context steeped in political apathy and fear, the online simply could not substitute for traditional offline communication.

Further, the study found that the northern and southern cities were different in their usage of Internet technologies and offline communication strategies. For instance, the northern city of Rabat substantially relied on Internet technologies, as activists there were mainly youth. Video technology was particularly a focus for activists in Rabat. On the other hand, the southern cities of Casablanca and Tangier relied more on a combination of offline and online platforms. As both of these cities contain large shantytowns on their outskirts where poverty is most visible, the movement had to incorporate more offline activities. The heavier reliance on the offline also emerged in these southern cities because a large segment of activists from Casablanca and Tangier came from marginal neighborhoods and identified with the subaltern.
The February 20th movement communication strategies clearly demonstrate that the movement did not rely on a single, homogenous online and offline approach to reach the Moroccan people. Regional differences and cultural contexts influenced the types of communication strategies the activists deployed. Viewed from a holistic perspective, however, the movement used the online environment for communication between core activists and to strengthen those networks throughout the country, while the offline communication strategies were key to building trust and collective identification with various segments of the population, such as the subaltern.

**Towards a More Nuanced Understanding of Target Audiences**

This study of the February 20th movement also reveals that studies of the Arab Spring should not presuppose a homogenous populace as the target population for the movements. Cultures are polyvocal, multilayered, fractured, and decentered. In particular, studies of social media and the Arab Spring should not ignore the political reality of poor urban and rural populations, as democracy frequently cannot take root without the participation of these groups. By focusing on dominant audiences in high profile national and transnational events, scholars can misrepresent or ignore non-dominant public(s) or the subaltern class altogether. By taking a broader look at how communication strategies target particular audiences, communication scholars can more adequately address the cultural impact of changing media environment on the different, and often disparate, publics.

This study demonstrates the need for more attention to how activists use different forms of media to mobilize and empower the subaltern publics. While certain communication approaches seem more beneficial for reaching such groups as opposed to their young, wired, urban counterparts, subaltern publics are not homogenous. At times, the distinction between activists
and the subaltern publics become blurred. Further, different sets of subaltern publics have different set of challenges and media preferences. Activists, therefore, have to both understand the nature of the subaltern population they are targeting and modify their communication strategies to reach the particular audience. To better understand the various communicative strategies social movements deploy to mobilize subaltern publics, the study of social movements should move beyond medium-centered approaches to more context-centered approaches.

For instance, the unique political contexts of the various cities in Morocco played a major role in the movement’s targeted choices of communication platforms. The biggest difference between the three cities was the ratio of Islamists to leftist activists. In Casablanca, Islamists and leftists were almost divided equally. In Rabat, the percentage of Islamist participants was minimal, while in Tangier, the Adl wa Ihsan outnumbered the leftists to a large degree. Many of the Adl wa Ihsan members from Tangier and Casablanca came from poor neighborhoods. As such, activists in those cities were able to mobilize a large segment of the subaltern publics and had greater success with their message. In Casablanca, hip-hop artist and activist Al Haqed, in particular, played a key role in mobilizing the people from marginal neighborhoods. Seen as one of them, the hip-hop artists spoke in the vernacular language and discussed issues that were pertinent to the marginalized publics.

Not surprisingly, Casablanca and Tangier differed from Rabat in their approach to mobilizing the subaltern neighborhoods. The movement’s decision to relocate the protest rallies from downtown to marginalized neighborhoods was problematic in Rabat, as the activists were not as well connected to the subaltern publics as the activists from Casablanca and Tangier. In Casablanca and Tangier, the subaltern publics played major roles in the protests and mobilization of the movement. The national media’s lack of attention to the subaltern made them less visible
to the public. As a result, the makhzen tactics differed substantially when the protests occurred in these neighborhoods rather than at downtown locales.

Due to the demographic and cultural contexts of the cities, the February 20th movement used aesthetic practices, such as body performances and street theater, more frequently in Rabat and Casablanca than in Tangier. On the whole, northern Morocco is much more conservative than the southern portions of the country. As such, nontraditional forms of art, such as performances emphasizing the body and western appropriated art, were less likely to prompt identification with the movement. Even within the offline platforms, cultural considerations influenced the movement’s selections of how to deliver its messages to target audiences.

As illustrated, this study establishes that activists in social movements use localized tactical strategies to mobilize the subaltern publics. Activists privilege offline media communication practices to encourage participatory politics and build trust between the social movement and the subaltern publics. Their specific strategies include face-to-face communications, multilingual messaging, cultural codes and vernaculars, simplified language, embodied performativity, neighborhood gatherings, onsite protest rallies, and visual and sound-based communication. In addition, activists rely on charismatic artists from the subaltern neighborhoods to deliver trustworthy messages while simultaneously building identification with the movement. They also establish subaltern neighborhood committees and utilize family and friend networks to widen the base of subaltern supporters. Using a language of inclusivity, these complementary strategies help build trust and identification with the movement. However, the types of offline social media practices can from one geographical area to the next. A systematic tracking of all a social movement’s offline social media practices would equip scholars to better comprehend the
social movement’s approach and the reasons behind the activists’ selection of particular offline communication practices.

**Limitations and Areas for Future Study**

One fruitful area of needed future study would be an examination of the specific mobilization strategies of the February 20th movement in small towns and rural areas. This study limited its focus to activists located in three cities: Tangier, Rabat, and Casablanca. While these cities represented the largest number of people that mobilized and went to the streets, a comparative analysis of the mobilization strategies presented here with those deployed in Morocco’s small towns and rural areas could yield further insights into how the socio-political context influenced the movement’s communication approaches. This study, for example, found that cities with large concentrations of youth and limited conservative populations relied more heavily on aesthetic practices to mobilize their publics. Did the movement utilize a similar approach in small towns and rural areas, especially in the regions that had more turbulent past interactions with the state?

A second avenue for future research would be to focus on female activists in the February 20th movement. This study limited its interviews to those who responded to calls from a Moroccan journalism who offered activists the opportunity to participate. Perhaps as a result, only 6 of the 24 interviewees were female. Gender issues emerged as a common subject in both the movement’s national and local meetings. They also served as a point of contention between the Islamists and the leftist members of the February 20th movement. As the perspective of female activists could differ substantially from that of their male counterparts in the movement, more focus on female senior strategists appears warranted.
A third avenue for productive future research would be a comparative study of the February 20th movement with other movements in the MENA region that called for reform within the existing political institutions. Did the activists employ similar reformist strategies? Are monarchies that operate within a tribal culture different from non-tribal monarchies? For instance, did the social movements calling for political reform in the Gulf region have a different set of challenges influencing their activists’ choice of communications strategies? Did the activists differentiate between the political system and the King or did other nuanced cultural understandings guide the movement’s strategic thinking? Such a focus will allow examination of the various forms of communication available for enabling progressive change.

Lastly, an audience study of the February 20th movement would illuminate whether the strategic communication approach of the activists impacted the various subgroups in the ways the activists intended. Particularly useful would be an audience study in the subaltern neighborhoods of Casablanca and Tangier. These subaltern neighborhoods were the most active in the February 20th movement, despite the fact that the people faced the most risk. What made the subaltern public neighborhood join the movement? How and why did these communities identify with the movement’s cause? What changes did these populations hope to achieve?
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## APPENDIX A

### Interviewee Description

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Number</th>
<th>City (indicate if they participate in other cities)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Casablanca (participated in Tangier, Rabat, and Casablanca protests)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tangier</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rabat</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rabat</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Casablanca</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Casablanca</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Casablanca</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Rabat</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Rabat</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Participated in Casablanca protests as well)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Casablanca</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Participated in Rabat protests as well)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(participated in Rabat)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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APPENDIX B
Interview Questions and IRB Protocol

1. What is your profession? How old are you? What was your last grade in school?
2. What changes does the movement want to see in Morocco?
3. Do you consider the February 20\textsuperscript{th} movement a success? Why or why not?
4. Do you think there were any key figures or leaders of the movement? If so, who?
5. What were the biggest challenges the movement faced?
6. What channels did the movement use to get its message out to the poor and marginalized citizens? Rank order the following: February 20\textsuperscript{th} website: mamfakinch.com, other online platforms (please specify which ones), satellite television, national television, newspapers (please specify which ones), music tapes/cds (please specify which ones), brochures/pamphlets, graffiti art (please specify which ones), face to face communication.
7. What channels did the movement use to get its message out to the rural citizens? Rank order the following: February 20\textsuperscript{th} website: mamfakinch.com, other online platforms (please specify which ones), satellite television, national television, newspapers (please specify which ones), music tapes/cds (please specify which ones), brochures/pamphlets, graffiti art (please specify which ones), face to face communication.
8. What online communication strategies did the movement use to reach marginal and poor areas? Can you provide examples?
9. What offline communication strategies did the movement use to reach marginal and poor areas? Can you provide examples?
10. What online communication strategies did the movement use to reach rural areas? Can you provide examples?
11. What offline communication strategies did the movement use to reach rural areas? Can you provide examples?

12. How did the movement choose the actors for the videos? How did it determine what languages to use to convey the video messages? What factors went into the movement’s decision to use certain images in its videos?

13. How did the movement attempt to identify with the diverse segments of the Moroccan population?

14. How did the movement elicit public sympathy for its cause?

15. Is there anything else you would like to add?

**IRB Protocol and Safety of Participants**

During this entire project, the safety of participants was of utmost importance, given the security situation on the ground in Morocco. This study took many steps to assure the safety of the participants, including, but not limited to, providing each interviewee a consent form, encryption of the interview responses, removal of identifying information on all participants, and only allowed individuals to participate after they made first contact with the interviewer.

Upon further reflection, however, more protection of human subjects was needed. By using the certified translation with the interviewees prior to the approval of the IRB board the researcher did not fall within the parameters of her approved protocol. Further, during the fieldwork component of the study the research carried a higher risk to those involved than reported to the IRB. Finally, the researcher did not upload the certified translation consent form in French and Arabic for more than a year.
By delaying the upload of the certified translated copies of the approved English consent forms for the IRB approval according to the timeline of this study’s protocol, Arabic or French interviewees could have potentially given their informed consent based on mistranslated information. Fortunately, after the delayed submission of the translations to the IRB, reviewers found: “the two translated consent forms appear to match the approved English consent forms.” Had the translations not been as carefully constructed, the interviewees would have experienced increased risk. By failing to communicate all of the risks on the ground in a timely manner to the IRB, potential additional needed precautions were not taken.

To avoid such risks in the future, the researcher will upload all necessary and agreed upon amendments before any research or new procedures take place, so that appropriate review can occur. Further, the researcher will not conduct any research or use any documents that have not been approved (in advance) by the IRB. In addition, if conditions on the ground in the fieldwork change, the researcher will notify the IRB in a timely fashion so that any needed protocol adjustments can occur.
APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

Georgia State University
Department of Communication Studies
Informed Consent

**Project Title:** Media Usage and the Arab Spring: Activists and the Subaltern Publics  
**Researcher:** Houda Abadi  
**Principle Investigator:** Dr. Carol Winkler  
**Student Investigator:** Houda Abadi

**Purpose:**

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to examine the communication strategies used in the February 20th movement. First, it will examine the movement’s communication strategies. Second, it will examine how the Moroccan public responded. You are invited to participate because you currently identify yourself as a Moroccan or because you are a current or former in the movement. Participation will require 2-3 hours of your time in one day. The approximate number of Moroccans to be enrolled in the study is twenty-five.

**Procedures:**

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer some questions. The interview will take between two and three hours in one session. You will be audiotaped. The interview will take place in a public coffee place. You are encouraged to add any additional information. It will be a one on one interview. It will take place only once.
Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life. It is unlikely that the interview will cause you any discomfort. However, you may leave the interview at any time. You do not need to explain.

Benefits:

Participation in this study may not benefit you personally. You will have the opportunity to archive your experiences with the movement as part of this study of Moroccan history. We hope to gain a better understanding of new media’s role within a North African and Middle Eastern social movement.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. Being in the study is your choice. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. You may ask me to rewind the tape and record over any information you would like.

Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Houda Abadi and Carol Winkler will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection). We will assign your tape a study number and the role you played in the February movement. Your name will not appear on any of the study's records. The information
you provide will be digitally copied. It will be stored in a firewall password protected laptop in Morocco. It will be deleted from the digital audio-recorder after it has been uploaded. We will transfer all data to a USB for transcription in a locked office in Atlanta, Georgia.

Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in a group form. You will not be identified personally unless you request your identity to be public in the interview.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this study, you may contact the student investigator Houda Abadi at 908-420-3077 / houda.abadi@gmail.com or the principle investigator Carol Winkler at 404-413-5105/cwinkler@gsu.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in Georgia States’ Office of Research Integrity. Her number is 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

Please indicate if you consent to participate in today's interview and be audio recorded.

Thank you.
APPENDIX D

Glossary of Arabic Terms

*Adala wa Tanmiya*: A Moroccan Islamist organization that has parliamentary representation and works within the existing political institutions, also known as “Justice and Development Party” (PJD). The organization is led by Abelilah Benkirane. In 2011, Benkirane became the new Prime Minister of Morocco, marking the first led Islamist government elected to parliament. Benkirane is outspoken that Islam must be the source of law and inspiration in Morocco.

*Adl wa Ihsan*: A Moroccan Islamist organization that was founded by Shiekh Abdsalem Yassine. It is a banned but popular Islamist movement, also referred to in English as “Justice and Spirituality”. Unlike Adala wa Tanmiya, Adl wa Ihsan refuses to participate in the political system.

*Amazigh*: The indigenous population of Morocco (also known as Berbers). Given that the term “Berber” is derived from the Spanish word “barbaric” and has a negative connotation, this study will use Amazigh to refer to Morocco’s indigenous population.

*Amir Mu’minin*: Commander of the faithful. A title that the King of Morocco holds to mark his role as spiritual leader of the Moroccan people.

*Baltagiya*: Slang term used for thugs or outlaws. Also known as Chmakriya.

*Baraka*: An Arabic word that means blessing.

*Bay’aa*: Annual rite where members of the royal family, Islamic scholars, and high-level officials from around the country claim respect and allegiance to the King.
**Darijaa:** The local dialect of Morocco that is derived of Arabic, some “arabatized” French and Spanish words. The majority of Moroccans speak Darijaa. It is the colloquial language of Morocco.

**Makhzen:** The Moroccan political state apparatus and ruling elite with close ties to the monarchy. The makhzen is made up of a patchwork of clientelist networks, which although historically centered on and supportive of the person of the monarch, have their own interests (Willis, 1999).

**Moudawana:** Moroccan family law code. It compromises laws that govern women’s relationships within the families, children, and husbands. Some of the 2004 Moudawana reforms include raising the marriage age from 15 to 18; giving spouses equal rights and responsibilities in the family, divorce based on mutual consent, and rescinding the wife’s duty of obedience to her husband.

**Rif:** Northern region of Morocco. According to the activists, this region faced the most police brutality and state repression.

**Tamazight:** Language spoken by Amazigh. The 2011 constitution recognized Tamazight as an official language of Morocco, alongside Arabic. Despite problems with implementation, a majority of activists see this development as a step forward.