

**Silencing the Voiceless:  
How the Kingdom of Morocco Repressed Critical Journalism  
During the Hirak Movement**

By

Samuel Metivier

Department of Media Studies  
College of Media, Communication and Information  
University of Colorado Boulder

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**Thesis Advisor:**

Prof. Polly E. Bugros McLean

**Defense Committee:**

Prof. Polly E. Bugros McLean, Department of Media Studies

Prof. Patrick Ferrucci, Department of Journalism

Prof. J. Richard Stevens, Department of Media Studies

Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies

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### Abstract

Five years after the 2011 Arab Uprisings swept through the Middle East and North Africa, popular protests similarly took hold of the marginalized Rif region of northeastern Morocco. The 2016-17 Hirak movement demanded better treatment and less abuse from the authoritarian state, but they were met with an iron fist rather than a helping hand. In the aftermath, more than 400 activists were arrested and later imprisoned for “undermining national security.” Seventeen journalists were also arrested on charges related to national security. It is clear they were targeted for having attempted to cover the abuses of the state. Focusing on what transpired during and after the Hirak movement, this research attempts to detail how the state controls the military, judiciary and the political economy to silence critical journalists who serve as watchdogs of state abuse. The results find that in this crackdown, the Kingdom of Morocco may have eliminated critical journalism and citizen journalism as oppositional voices who dare speak truth to power.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

Freedom of the press and information is considered a vital human right. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). The press upholds this right by reporting on abuses of power, such as corruption, oppression and state violence. Moreover, John Dewey (1954) writes that communication and the press are vital in informing and educating a democratic public. Despite the benefits to society, nation states continue to impose draconian regulations to silence journalists. It is this silencing I wish to explore in Morocco — a North African country wherein the monarch King Mohammed VI holds complete executive, legislative and religious power as the unopposed head of state.

### 1.2 Introducing the Hirak Movement

The most recent and public case to extend media studies research into the 2016-2017 popular protest known as *al-Hirak al-Shaabi* (the Popular Movement), which occurred in the Rif region of northeastern Morocco, a historically neglected and abused region of the state. The Hirak movement started in 2016 after fishmonger Mohcine Fikri was killed in a trash compactor while attempting to retrieve fish confiscated by local authorities. His death was seen as indicative of larger issues plaguing the Rif: unfair treatment from the state in terms of corruption, abuse and economic development, as well as a lack of education, healthcare and work opportunities (Zaireg, 2018). Led by Nasser Zefzafi, the non-violent protest demanded a university and an

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oncology hospital, as well as more employment opportunities and fairer treatment from the state. Members of the Hirak movement protested for local demands, but their calls against a discredited Moroccan political body were heard by the rest of the Moroccan public. Tens of thousands took to the streets to protest abuse and neglect; millions more throughout Morocco supported the movement and followed the story daily. Morocco responded to the peaceful popular movement by militarizing the region in order to counter what they deemed a violent separatist movement funded by foreign backers. More than 400 activists were arrested and 53 were imprisoned. Once the movement was suppressed, the state peddled reports on the events that had transpired, however, these reports contrasted so starkly with what journalists reported that it only heightened the distrust between the public and the state (Zaireg, 2018).

In militarizing the region, the state cut off all public access to the region, a move which extended to journalists attempting to cover the story. Nine journalists were there before the region was closed down: Mohamed Ahdad, Rabiâ al-Ablaq, Mohamed al-Asrihi, Abdelkadir al-Horr, Hamid al-Mahdaoui, Abdelhak Belachgar, Omar Radi, Abdelilah Sakhir and Kaoutar Zaki. All were arrested, of whom Ablaq, Asrihi, Horr and Mahdaoui will remain imprisoned for the next three to five years. The others — except Radi, who was released from jail without criminal charges — were convicted and handed suspended six-month sentences, which can be enacted whenever the state decides. The Hirak movement and the state's violent counter is a response to modern demands and abuses, but it cannot be understood fully without acknowledging the unique history of the Rif region in respect to greater Morocco.

### 1.3 Brief History of “Useless Morocco”

Morocco has long been characterized by abuses of power and state repression, particularly in the area of the country French colonizers used to call “useless Morocco,” by which they justified developing one part of the country — “useful Morocco” — but not the rest of it. “Useful Morocco” has historically been the land approximate the coastline between Rabat and Casablanca, a stretch of land rich in agricultural soil, fisheries and material resources (El Bahi, 2011). France did not have much long-term interest in maintaining Morocco as a protectorate — unlike the colonization of Algeria as a department of the state — so they developed “useful Morocco” and neglected the rest. “Useless Morocco,” including the northeastern Rif region, is mostly mountain and desert, which are sparse in agriculture, natural resources and commerce. Once Morocco gained independence in 1956, monarchs Mohammed V (r. 1955-1961), Hassan II (r. 1962-1999) and Mohammed VI (r. 1999) have continued to rule like the French as they have inherited their oppressor’s system of governance. They also inherited a centralized government and uneven development that favors the profitable agricultural economy



Figure 1: Colonial map of Morocco as a French Protectorate. The current Rif region is denoted as the Rif Republic. Western Sahara is shown as Spanish Sahara. From Alpha Omega Translations, 2015, <https://alphaomegatranslations.com/foreign-language/8-things-you-should-know-about-the-languages-of-morocco/>. Copyright unknown.

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and tourism industry.

The northernmost and southern parts of present-day Morocco — including the Rif and the disputed Western Sahara, excluding the international zone of Tangier — were not colonized by the French, but by the Spanish. Though the Spanish did not use the term “useless Morocco,” they neglected the region just the same but with a touch more colonial violence, particularly in the Rif. When the former Spanish protectorates combined with the former French protectorates to create a unified Morocco in 1956, the neglect continued in the Rif as it did elsewhere in the Moroccan periphery. In the 63 years since independence, Moroccan state policy has consistently ignored those outlying lands and worsened the disparity between the two Moroccos. This disparity has resulted in economic hardship, lack of education and work, and social discrimination (Zaireg, 2018). It does not help that Riffians did not inherit French as their colonial tongue, which further marginalizes them from education and work that privilege the French-educated middle and upper classes.

With respect to these factors, it is not uncommon for Riffians to emigrate undocumented to Europe (mostly to Spain) in pursuit of better opportunities abroad. For example, a 2018 viral video depicted Moroccan emigrants dancing and partying on a boat leaving Tetouan for Spain. The video was shocking for many Moroccans who know that the journey across the Mediterranean — usually embarked by Sub-Saharan migrants — often leads to death as they cross choppy waters (Alexander, 2018); more shocking was that the video was published one month after the Moroccan navy shot at a boat carrying migrants, killing one woman on board and injuring three others. It is within this relationship between the state and the region that the Hirak movement must be understood: an uneven relationship of power in which Riffians celebrate

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risking death crossing the Mediterranean to live as undocumented migrants displaced from home.

### **1.4 Morocco Responds with the Stick**

During the Hirak protests of 2016 and 2017, the Moroccan state was quick to brand the movement as separatist, and therefore suppress it, because the Rif region has a celebrated history of resistance. The Rif Republic briefly experienced independence from Spanish rule from 1921 to 1926. They were the first post-colonial state on the African continent until the Spanish violently took back control of the region, during which time they employed some of the earliest instances of chemical warfare (Cala, 2015). (The Rif demanded better healthcare, specifically an oncology hospital, because they have exorbitant cancer rates, which is often linked to the Spanish's use of chemical weapons.) The leaders of the Rif Republic are venerated today and the republic's former flag — as ephemeral as the republic was — is proudly displayed in the region, most prominently during the Hirak movement. In addition, the Rif region's local identity as Berber Riffians makes them stand out juxtaposed against a mostly Arabized Morocco. Zaireg (2018) writes, "For the Moroccan authorities, who have often been irredentist with the expressions of identity and regional politics, this was a 'contempt for the national' and an exaltation of secessionism." This perception of the Rif served as justification for the state to use violence, despite the fact that Hirak leader Nasser Zefzafi stressed without failure that the movement was non-violent and non-separatist.

Morocco is a relatively poor country and cannot meet the demands of the centralized population, much less those who live on the periphery. As basic are the needs of education, work and healthcare (eliminating corruption in Morocco is less feasible), the state could not answer the



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Hirak's calls for reform. The state did not offer a helping hand but an iron fist reminiscent of the 'Years of Lead,' a period from the 1960s to 1980s wherein the state under Hassan II was particularly violent to political dissidents and democratic activists. The Moroccan state under Mohammed VI has experience dealing with democratic movements in the recent past. The state responded to the 2011 February 20th Movement — Morocco's version of the Arab Uprisings which inspired a massive wave of popular democracy in North Africa and the Middle East — by co-opting the movement. Mohammed VI introduced a constitutional amendment that simultaneously maintained the power of the throne and gained international support for guaranteeing certain human rights (whether or not those rights are respected is another question). Though their response to the Arab Uprisings was relatively peaceful, they have responded violently to democratic movements in the disputed Western Sahara, often sending in the military or police to suppress popular organization and protests. Their response to the Hirak was more similar to their treatment of Western Sahara, wherein they sent the military to close the region, squash the protests and arrest virtually anyone they caught engaging in the movement.

Anass Khayati (2018) writes that the state responded to the Hirak movement with the stick approach because repression is their only counter to social and democratic aspirations. In reference to the harsh sentences handed down to protestors and journalists, Khayati writes:

The harsh verdicts, compared to colonialism, could also be interpreted as a move to reinstate state power through incarceration terror after the ruling elites felt challenged by the peaceful Hirak movement. By distributing three centuries of jail on the protestors, the state aims at redrawing the borders of power that protestors keep crossing in a whack-a-mole game ever since the 20 February Movement.

The Hirak movement and the state's response to it is particularly important in the greater context of Morocco because of what it reveals about the power relations between the monarchy and those who challenge or oppose the status quo. Not only are social activists

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seen as a threat to the state, but so too are the journalists who attempt to voice the demands of the activists and publicize the abuses against them. As the state veers towards the ‘Years of Lead’ in their dealings with social movements and the press, it becomes urgent to detail and document exactly how the state flexes its power over the press, how the press is thereby limited and how journalists respond to this increasingly contentious press climate. The goal of this paper is to expand upon previous academic research on the Moroccan press to analyze how the power relationships between the press and state have changed since the Hirak movement captured the attention of the Moroccan public.



*Figure 2:* Hirak protesters in Hoceima display the flags of the Rif Republic (left: red) and the Berber people (right: green and yellow). From *Toward Freedom*, by Youssef Boudlal, 2017 <https://towardfreedom.org/archives/africa-archives/hirak-moroccan-peoples-movement-demands-change-streets/>. Copyright 2017 by Reuters.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **2.1 Introduction**

The literature review of this paper is based on previous scholarship written about the relationship between the Moroccan press and the state. It is a complicated history that requires an analysis of the sensitive political economy of the Moroccan press, the recent history of clashes between the state and critical journalists, and review of how the state has limited the press through various tactics. This chapter will apply theoretical framework from Pierre Bourdieu (1992) and Michel Foucault (1982) to understand the power relations between the state and press in respect to the greater context of power-resistance struggles. Lastly, this literature review will introduce the research question that drives this research.

### **2.2 Political Economy**

Journalism in Morocco has long been characterized by its contentious relationship with the state. Benchenna, Ksikes and Marchetti (2017) introduced the situation of Moroccan media as similar to “post-USSR media, with a mix of control and private investment with no impact on the power structure, or to southern Europe post-dictatorship media, with weak professionalisation and strong intervention of the state not to establish rules but to develop economic clientelism” (386). The current press climate comes after the rule of Hassan II (r. 1961-1999), who was known as an iron-fisted despot who despised, among many things, communism and literate populations. His fascist tendencies were tolerated internationally during the Cold War, particularly as a state bordering Soviet-backed Algeria. However, as the Cold War wound down in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it became apparent Morocco had to liberalize and modernize, which it did in Hassan’s final decade. When Mohammed VI came to power in 1999,

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he was seen as a new kind of monarch, a more benevolent and open-minded king whose rule would fit the changing geopolitics and liberalizing culture of Morocco, although there were doubts he would quell his own authoritarian power (Maghraoui, 2001). It was during his first several years that the press enjoyed a honeymoon stage as political liberalization followed the modernization and liberalization of the 1990s (Benchenna, Ksikes and Marchetti).

As Morocco began to liberalize its press, however, ownership became concentrated in the hands of the elite, which leads to a concentration of power and influence over their audience (Le Desk, 2019). Moreover, every publication, independent or not, needs to make revenue from advertising, but the businesses that control advertising dollars have deep ties to the monarchy (Zaid, 2017). Benchenna, Ksikes and Marchetti write, “The intertwining relationships between politicians and businessmen are now so strong that the frontier up to now clearly set between party newspapers and newspapers ‘independent from political parties’ is becoming blurred” (400). It is the symbiosis of business and politics where Morocco’s press climate is often subject to the respective parties using media to manipulate public perception through consciously created bias; the result of which is a highly political economy where it pays for publications to support the state. Zaid (2017) writes that of the business-political relationships that make up the Moroccan media system, antagonism to the principles of independent journalism and free speech are worsened by the involvement of the *Makhzen*, “a network of political and economic forces that proclaim complete devotion to the king in return for economic and political benefits” (341). It is in the relationship between the crown and the *Makhzen* that the media system is defined legally and economically.

Considering the foundation upon which the Moroccan media system was founded, the climate is difficult to navigate for journalists and editors. Because the only private funding

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comes from those advertising companies with ties to the monarchy, publications are essentially faced with two choices: accept state-controlled funding and acquiesce to official guidelines, or stay independent and operate by the mercy of advertising money (these choices are not necessarily mutually exclusive). In the former choice, the publication can accept the carrot, but in order for them to secure funding and information, they effectively have to work as a mouthpiece for the regime by accepting public “truths” and restating state-issued press releases (Lesire-Ogrel and Strangler, 2017). Otherwise, publications take the state money and avoid politics altogether and operate more so as an entertainment outlet. Most publications take the carrot. The other choice appears to give publications more freedom, but they too are inseparably tied to the bounds of the state. As we can examine through independent publications like *Le Journal Hebdo*, *TelQuel*, *Mamfakinch*, *Nichane*, etc., there is only press freedom until the free press publicizes something the state does not want, which can include anything from transgressing ‘red lines’ to a story that may tarnish Morocco’s reputation as a tourist-friendly country. As this paper will explore, this is when the state comes down upon journalists and editors, flexes its political and financial muscles, and grapples the press into submission.

After years of relative openness from the 1990s to the 2010, the state has re-exercised this authoritarian power that has not been seen since the Cold War-era ‘Years of Lead’ under Hassan II from the early 1960s through the 1980s. El Iwassi (2016) writes, “The history of the Moroccan media indicates an endemic instability, with sporadic cycles of openness and closure, depending on the regime’s tolerance and its need to survive modernisation challenges” (7). During the early 2000s, there were arrests of journalists during this time for transgressing ‘red lines’ but for the most part, investigative journalism flourished in a newly liberalized press climate, both in the French- and Arabic-reading publics. (The differences between French- and Arabic-language

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publications is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is a topic worth exploring, particularly from a post-colonial lens.) Critical journalism of the state was allowed — and even encouraged — as long as it did not offend the crown. Independent publications thrived during this time, most notably *Le Journal Hebdo* (1998-2010), the French-language magazine where a number of today's remaining critical journalists first gained experience. Others, such as *TelQuel*, built relatively large readerships — compared to the typically meager readerships of independent magazines (Errazzouki, 2017) — for their political and cultural analysis, which may not have transgressed 'red lines,' but was openly critical and published articles that would likely be self-censored had they been written in today's press climate.

Muhammad VI's honeymoon period was over by the mid-2000s, then dead, buried and badly decomposed by 2011-2012. For those familiar with regional politics and history, 2011 is when the Arab Uprisings swept through the Middle East and North Africa. Morocco's version of this wave of democratization is referred to as the "February 20th Movement," named after the initial February 20th, 2011 protest that saw thousands gather outside the parliament building in the capital of Rabat. Their primary demands were ending corruption and limiting the power of the monarchy (El Iwassi). They also demanded new liberties and rights for citizens, including better protections for press freedom. This movement was organized via social media and strengthened in impact by media coverage, and the massive support shook the monarchy with months of protest and calls for reform. Mohammed VI compromised with the movement and introduced changes to the constitution — most notably those related to human rights — but what began as a pro-democracy movement was ultimately co-opted by the monarchy in a "top-down, undemocratic drafting process" that ensured his power was not diminished (El Iwassi).

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During the February 20th Movement, citizen journalist collective *Mamfakinch* was founded by journalist-activists as a way to give voice to active citizens and to help those content producers shape their own narrative of the movement independent of the existing press climate. Following the constitutional amendment, the online publication criticized the motivations of the changes and urged protestors to reject the referendum. In July 2012, however, they said the power of the state showed them just how little press freedom they had. On that fateful day, editors of the site, including Omar Radi, opened an email that contained Italian-made spyware that infected the computers of much of the staff, which then caused paranoia and anxiety, and ultimately led to the decision to close down the website in 2014 (Errazzouki). According to Radi, which he explained during an interview with me, the editors reverse-engineered the source code to determine the damage, and when they realized exactly what kind of virus they were dealing with, it became apparent that only the government could afford such software. Errazzouki confirms in her research that *Mamfakinch* transgressed multiple ‘red lines’ and the state responded with surveillance, a new tool that proved effective (or at least threatening) in a time where most journalism was moving from newspaper stands to digital outlets.

In the years following the 2011 Arab Uprisings, the press climate has grown increasingly precarious for editors and contentious for journalists. Red lines have grown more sensitive and penalties more severe. Ten years prior, perceived transgression was fairly obvious, but now, so much as a journalist receiving funding from abroad can result in imprisonment, such as in the 2017 case of Mohamed Al-Asrihi, who was arrested and convicted partly because his work was funded by Dutch money and he did not have a state-issue press card. There is a strong chance that as journalists move away from state-subjugated publications and increasingly work as freelancers with international outlets or independent citizen media, there will be an increase in

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cases like Asrihi's where critical journalists are required to foray into illegality in their coverage of critical issues.

### 2.3 Reviewing Morocco's 'Red Lines'

Of all the measures the Moroccan state has taken to limit press freedom, the infamous 'red lines' are the most prevalent and impactful. Despite guaranteed protections to the press under articles 25, 27 and 28 of the constitution, 'red lines' exist as an uncrossable boundary that serve to protect the Alaouite dynasty from the press (Errazzouki). The press is vital in shaping public opinion of a leader or a regime, and even as powerful as the Alaouite dynasty is, they are not immune to the effects of popular attitudes. Red lines can thus be seen as a defensive mechanism used by the king to control the social effect media may have on his subjects. The state can deter or control certain criticisms by threatening a heavy hand onto any transgressor.

There are three 'red lines' listed in the 2002 press code, which was adopted from the more repressive 1976 code, and updated in 2016 to regulate digital media (Zaid). They are: (1) denigrating Islam, (2) insulting the monarchy or the royal family, and (3) contesting Morocco's authority over the disputed Western Sahara. Each requires its own explanation.

First, Islam is state-controlled and state-monitored in Morocco. According to Daadaoui (2016), Islam has been the basis for the Alaouite dynasty to rule over Morocco since 1631. They claim descendancy from the Prophet Muhammad and the divine blessing (*barakah*) to justify their position as a sort of natural rulers. The king is the highest authority on religion as he holds the honorific "Commander of the Faithful." By proxy, any offense to Islam is an offense to its highest figure; any defamation of the religious institution is thus a challenge to the king's authority. Via their unchecked control of religion, the dynasty has long used political Islam as a



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tool to maintain power and order. On different ends of the spectrum, the dynasty has used political Islam to unite the population under a common identity as Muslims, as Muhammad V did in his anti-colonialist resistance, and they have used it to constrict and control religion in their efforts to repress radical Salafists, as Muhammad VI did in response to the 2003 Casablanca terrorist attacks (Daadaoui).



Figure 3: This mountain overlooking Agadir, Morocco says in Arabic (clockwise from top): God, Nation, King. From Panoramic Images, 2015, <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/photo/arabic-text-on-a-mountain-agadir-atlantic-high-res-stock-photography/157860119>. Copyright 2015 by Panoramic Images.

The population and culture of Morocco is perceived as less religious (and less conservative) than its regional counterparts, but Islam is deeply rooted in social and legal institutions. Criticism of Islam is a social taboo that permeates legal code. Religious diversity is tolerated, and even celebrated, but for native Moroccans, diversity of thought within Islam is mostly marginalized as part of the regime's political maneuvering. Salafist Islamists (who organize as *al-'Adala wa at-Tanmiya*, or Party of Justice and Development) and Sufi Islamists (*al-'Adl wal Ihsane*, or Justice and Charity) are, and have been, prevalent as oppositional to the throne, but these communities are forcibly pushed away from political influence (Daadaoui). Should someone from those communities challenge the state's religious authority, they risk imprisonment or ostracism, such as in the case of *al-'Adl wal Ihsane* leader Abdesslam Yassine,

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who, among other punishments, was placed by state authorities in a mental institution for three years after denouncing King Hassan II's title as "Commander of the Faithful" (Schemm, 2012).

On the state's sensitivity towards denigration of Islam, the arrest and conviction of Nasser Zefzafi is a prime example. Zefzafi was a celebrated leader of the Hirak Movement in the Rif region of Morocco, who was arrested in May 2017 for disrupting a sermon at the masjid and in July 2018 was sentenced to 20 years in prison for undermining state security. In the sermon, which is standardized by the federal government and handed down to local masjids, the sheikh warned people of joining the social movement. Zefzafi refused the message and interrupted the sermon to criticize the state's control of religion as a political tool. He was arrested for these actions. Omar Radi, a journalist reviled and revered for his criticism of the state, claimed in his 2018 documentary on the Rif that the sermon had been designed to bait Zefzafi into reacting as he did, and that the state was waiting for any reason to arrest him. (This is something we will see more of later, particularly with Radi.)

More than a decade before Zefzafi's arrest, we can see this red line play out in respect to media and journalism. Driss Ksikes, former editor-in-chief of Arabic-language publication *Nichane*, was arrested along with reporter Sanaa al-Aji for running an article analyzing popular jokes related to religion, sex and culture in December 2006 (CPJ, 2006). One such joke ran afoul in its depiction of the Prophet Muhammed at the gates of heaven and evidently offended the religious institutions. They were charged with denigration of Islam under Article 41 of the Press and Publication Law of 2002, which resulted in suspended three-year sentences, the closure of *Nichane* and a fee of roughly US\$9,000 (CPJ).

Second, the red line that controls against harm to the monarchy or the royal family is most vague in law and thus the most flexible for censorship. The phrase "causing harm" can be

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interpreted however the state wishes, and if they see perceive a transgression, they can punish for just about anything. One such case occurred in May 2006, which as Douai details, came when Islamist activist Nadia Yassine said during an interview that a republican government should replace the existing monarchy, which she argued is not viable to rule in this day and age (Douai, 2009). The government pressed charges against Yassine and the editor of the publishing magazine, which in turn caused an uproar in the Moroccan discourse on the topic of press freedom, though nothing really came of the uproar (Douai). This transgression is somewhat obvious: Yassine publicly stated that the authoritarian government should be replaced with a more legitimate system of government. It was not a direct attack on the monarchy, but the state did not need her to directly call out the king for it to be an offense of his throne.

Other cases of transgression are not so clear cut. Transgressions now include investigative journalism that seeks to shed light onto the usually opaque dealings of the monarch and the *Makhzen*, his inner circle. Journalists who investigate such issues are constantly threatened by the state; *TelQuel* director Abdallah al Turabi said there is more information about the palace, but “the day they decide they want to go after a journalist or a media institution, they will not be short of means to do so” (El Iwassi). Any journalism critical of the state runs the risk of “causing harm” to the crown, even if those pieces objectively analyze sensitive information. As this paper will examine later through an interview with Omar Radi, exposing corruption between the monarchy and the *Makhzen* comes with serious repercussions.

Third, the most serious red line in recent history has been related to Morocco’s claim to the disputed territory of Western Sahara (“Moroccan Sahara” to Moroccans, “Sahrawi Republic” to Sahrawis). The history of Western Sahara is tied to colonization and Moroccan nationality, so the issue is a serious matter concerning national pride and loyalty. The region of 260,000 square

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kilometers (slightly larger the United Kingdom) was surrendered by Spain in 1975 and was intended to be independent. However, Hassan II initiated the 1975 Green March, a massive movement of hundreds of thousands of unarmed Moroccans into the state to claim it as Moroccan territory. The military followed shortly and has since occupied the region despite independence efforts by Sahrawi people represented by the Algeria-based Polisario Front.

The Green March was initially a nationalistic movement to settle a region the state claimed to be theirs, which during Spain and France's colonization of the Maghreb, they believe had been taken from them (Joffé, 2010). There is a reason, however, that the region remains disputed, and why the Polisario Front actively represents its people in the African Union, among other international organizations. The people of Western Sahara sought independence and aimed to be a socialist state supported by the leftist Algerian government. There are few things Morocco despises more than Algeria, and in the midst of the Cold War, it was of strategic gain for the U.S.-backed Morocco to occupy the region, control the coastline, and avoid having what they thought would be an Algerian puppet state on their border after the 1963 Sand War, a border war between Algeria and Morocco following the former's independence from France (Joffé).



Figure 4: This map shows the occupation of Western Sahara by the Moroccan military (light tan) and the border of Polisario control (yellow). From the Economist, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/11/29/a-new-push-to-resolve-the-conflict-over-western-sahara>. Copyright 2018 by the Economist.

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Apropos of its history, the topic of Western Sahara remains a nationalistic issue, of which criticism is not tolerated. In 2005, journalist Ali Lmrabet conducted an interview with the leaders of the Polisario Front, during which it was claimed the people in Polisario camps in southern Algeria are not held against their will. This directly contradicts Morocco's claim to the Western Sahara, which is built upon the assertion that the Polisario Front is an extremist, violent organization from whom Morocco must protect Sahrawi people. The Polisario camps, which are now permanent refugee camps on the southern Morocco-Algeria border, are thought by the Moroccan state to be forced upon the people living there, but Lmrabet's interview claimed the exact opposite and implied the emigrants had left because life was better for them outside Morocco. This is dangerous for Morocco because public support of the Western Sahara occupation requires people to believe in the state's moral justification for the invasion, where in fact it is an obvious act of imperialism that imposes against the sovereignty of Sahrawi people. For having jeopardized "territorial integrity," Lmrabet, long an adversary to Moroccan authorities, was sentenced to a 10-year ban from practicing journalism in the state (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

According to the updated 2016 Press Code, transgressions of 'red lines' are no longer punishable by arrest and imprisonment, but they are punishable by steep fines that are unaffordable for most journalists and editors (Zaid, 2015). Moreover, in lieu of arresting for such transgressions, journalists have faced repercussions beyond 'red lines,' such as self-censorship and surveillance. As this paper will later argue, critical journalists are subject to arrest and imprisonment under charges that are technically unrelated to their coverage, but are brought down upon them directly because of their work as critics, activists and investigators.

### **2.4 State Tactics Beyond ‘Red Lines’**

Due to the sensitive political economy of the Moroccan media system and the politics that are imbedded within, journalists are limited beyond those ‘red lines.’ As Morocco cycles between openness and closure, as detailed by El Iwassi, ‘red lines’ grow more sensitive and other tactics used by the state increase in number and usage. These tactics include, but are not limited to, self-censorship, accessibility of press cards, discrediting journalists’ integrity and morality, surveillance and threat of arrest. These topics will be expanded upon in the findings of this paper.

Until recently, the most prevalent of the five has been self-censorship. The limitation is fairly self-explanatory: due to the pressures of the political economy, editors and journalists will avoid punishment by avoiding critical work that the state would not want published. The ties between the state and the media system are so intertwined that censorship is unavoidable. As detailed above, the state has massive influence over advertising, and in a political economy where virtually every publication requires advertising revenue, that means publications have tremendous pressure to avoid any story that might offend the state; any slip-up could result in a blacklisting from advertising companies, which would result in the closure of the publication (Zaid). This economic repression is more concerning in how these advertising dollars flow to publications that are more favorable to the state, not the publications with the most readership (Spinner, 2018).

Beyond editorial dissuasion stemming from financial pressure, the journalists who do proceed with critical work face additional repercussions, mostly in the penal court. The updated 2016 press code eliminated prison time for nonviolent speech offenses — including transgressions of ‘red lines’ — but that appears to be a hollow change, because now instead of being arrested and imprisoned under the press code, journalists are instead targeted under the

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penal code (Human Rights Watch, 2017). As will be discussed in the findings section of this paper, there have been many journalists in recent years arrested under dubious charges — usually crimes that are rarely enforced on Moroccan citizens, or charges that were likely invented or planted — resulting directly from their reputation or work as critical voices. In the process of arrest, they often use other media to smear the moral and professional reputation of the journalist in question.

To make matters worse, the state tends to punish critical journalists more harshly than normal citizens (Errazzouki), then suspend those convictions indefinitely. (Juries exist, but as many Moroccans may attest, justice does not.) Once there is a suspended conviction, the state can arrest and imprison them whenever they want, which then works as an implicit threat that the conviction will be brought down if the journalist publishes critical work (Zaid). Combined with the expanding definitions of ‘red lines,’ which are intentionally vague, there is a fine line between criticism and transgression. That line is constantly changing, so most journalists avoid it altogether, meaning self-censorship is the norm in the Moroccan press industry.

Additionally, journalists and editors are subject to the highly selective and highly politicized issuing of press cards by the Moroccan state. After 2016 updates to the press code, it is now illegal in Morocco to practice journalism or establish publications without a state-issue press card. In a vacuum, it seems beneficial to the Moroccan public to have professional journalists and publications registered and verified by the state, but in this particularly context, it means one more component of the media system where the state has control. The state bodies that handle registration and authorization are known to “deny authorization or reject renewals for political reasons,” according to Zaid (2015). As we will see play out over the coverage of the Hirak movement in the Rif region of northern Morocco, this means that critical journalists and

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citizen journalists alike are technically breaking the law by covering certain issues, and thus subject to arrest (Spinner). This also means limited press access for foreign correspondents, who find it easier to register with Morocco as tourists instead of journalists and can thus be arrested and deported for covering sensitive topics.

The last tactic that will be discussed at length is that of surveillance, which in the case of *Mamfakinch* has been referenced earlier. The citizen journalist collective was founded by many influential journalists who had built their reputations with other independent journals during a period of political openness, which combined with the publication's involvement with the Arab Uprisings and their criticism of the monarchy's proposed constitution, means the state had political incentive to surveil their actions. The independent Moroccan press is a relatively small community where mostly everyone knows and interacts with each other, any infection of spyware was sure to threaten both the *Mamfakinch* staff and their professional peers. According to Radi, the *Mamfakinch* staff did not know exactly what information the state uncovered, but the threat itself was enough to cause the paranoia and anxiety that led to the halting of operations and the closure of the publication (Errazzouki).

In respect to the 'red lines,' other tactics used by the state to impede critical journalism, and the financial payout to publications whose coverage favors the state, it goes without saying that there is every reason to not do critical journalism. Aboubakr Jamaï, the former founder and editor-in-chief of French-language *Le Journal Hebdo*, "The carrot in Morocco is bigger than the stick; the state would rather reward you for obedience than punish you for dissent. So many otherwise good journalists prefer the financial rewards than the risky duties of watchdogs" (Zaid, 2017, 341). All told, it is a wonder what motivates the few critical journalists who risk everything to publish articles that few Moroccans will even read in a largely illiterate yet over-



saturated reading public (Zaid and Ibrahine, 2011). It is necessary, then, for this paper analyze the role of journalism within Moroccan society in respect to the power dynamics and the resistance-power struggle that define their movements and motivations.

### **2.5 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that was used to ground the research questions and methods of this paper is drawn from Pierre Bourdieu's conception of a 'field,' as well as Michel Foucault's description of power relations between powerful and weak actors. This framework is borrowed from Errazzouki, who applied both approaches to the Moroccan context to describe citizen media during and after the 2011 Arab Uprisings. As referenced by Errazzouki, Bourdieu defines the field as such:

A field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in their determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.) (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 97).

Comparing the 'field' to a chess match wherein all pieces can only move according to and relative to the rules and context of the game (Fierke, 2009), Errazzouki applies this conception to the Moroccan context:

this paper will consider online media as the 'field,' whereby the players are bound with limited movement that are shaped by shifting positions and alliances, and the 'game,' composed of its own 'structure of rules' that are shaped by the pushes and pulls between citizen media and state actors. Thus, the game pieces in this context would be citizen media and state actors, while citizen media strategies and state policies can be viewed as their movements within the 'game'. The stakes of the game

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vary for both sides: for citizen media actors, the stakes are establishing a critical voice and carving out a ‘free’ space of information and expression; for the state, the stakes are to maintain a balance between citizen media and regulation, while promoting the perception of a free space of information and expression.

To apply the conceptions of the ‘field’ and ‘game’ to this paper’s specific research, the only modification to Errazzouki’s treatment is in her reference to citizen media actors. Her research analyzed *Mamfakinch*, a citizen media outlet that was a vital alternative voice during the Arab Uprisings, but as she detailed, they shut down in 2014 and are no longer actors in this game, though many of those working for *Mamfakinch* remain. Citizen media, moreover, varies somewhat from traditional journalism in the Moroccan context, most notably in lacking professionalism and not having the training to turn raw information into professional investigations, according to Hicham Houdaïfa in an interview with me. *Mamfakinch* was likely the most professional citizen media outlet to exist in the Moroccan press, but because there has not been a similar successor and because most citizen media now exist as blogs or on social media, the “stakes of the game” should be applied instead to professional journalism as opposed to citizen media. There are questions that could be asked of what constitutes independent journalism as opposed to independent blogs, especially now that journalists are not necessarily credentialed with state-issued press cards, but for this study, I will default to defining “journalists” as those who have worked with established publications or are otherwise described as journalists in original reports from various NGOs that advocate for press freedom. Professional journalists are inseparably bound to the state through their dependence on state-issued press cards, advertising money that is controlled by the *Makhzen*, and most of their state-related information is leaked, and therefore gate-kept, by those who work in the government (El Iwassi). Citizen journalism is still considered a threat to the state, but this research is

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primarily focused on the relationship between the state and professional journalists who attempt to speak truth to power.

If there is a major similarity between *Mamfakinch* and the journalists I have attempted to study, it is that both issues have arose out of social protest and the state's repression of it. As such, Errazzouki's treatment of Foucault can be applied here as well. She writes:

Foucault's approach to power relations, primarily the resistance-power struggles [defines] the interaction between powerful and weak actors (1982, 327) ... In order to understand what power relations are about [...] we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts to dissociate these relations (1982, 329).

Errazzouki defined the powerful actor as the state and the weak actors as the *Mamfakinch* journalists who felt the heavy hand of the state. Similarly, this study will define the state as the powerful and critical journalists as the weak, however this will additionally view participants of social movements and street protests as weak actors subject to state repression, as detailed in the introduction to this paper. The current press climate is shaped by opaque public-private relationships between the *Makhzen* and the crown while the social movements the press attempt to cover are themselves a result of marginalized peoples struggling against the state. State repression is thus threefold: journalists are repressed for reporting on repressed social movements that protest state repression. Therefore, any research that analyzes the repression of the Moroccan press cannot be fully understood without analyzing the press and protestors as weak actors in the resistance-power struggles that define the Moroccan context.

### 2.6 Research Question

This paper will attempt to answer a singular question about the media system of Morocco: **How do journalists navigate a contentious press climate?**

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The question will refer to the greater Morocco media system — with references to, but no direct analysis of, visual media, social media and consumption habits by the general Moroccan public — while focusing specifically on how the press exists within the power relationships applicable to the theories of Bourdieu and Foucault. The purpose of this question, and ultimately what this paper hopes to contribute to the greater discourse on Moroccan media studies, is how critical journalists respond to the increasingly authoritarian tactics used by the state to silence them and the issues they attempt to cover. Most recent studies on Moroccan media have answered the question of what the state has done to limit press freedom and how it relates to the state's recent history, but none (to my knowledge) have asked the question of how journalists respond to these limitations.

## Chapter 3: Research Methods

### 3.1 Introduction

My research into Moroccan journalism began with an exploratory design by emerging myself into many activities on the University of Colorado Boulder campus and building relationships with students and faculty from the Arab World, which in turn developed an interest in regional politics and justice. With my academic and career interests in North Africa, I decided to study abroad in Rabat, Morocco, at an intensive journalism program with the U.S.-based School for International Training, which provided me the opportunity and resources to independently conduct research in the field. Out of these experiences, I have employed a mixed-method research design through interviews, analysis of public lectures and document analysis to illustrate and support answers to the research question. Each of these methods have their own rationale and strategies, and the compilation thereof should provide a fairly encompassing understanding of the Moroccan press climate and the challenge journalists must navigate.

### 3.2 Public Lectures

My research in Morocco was possible through a study abroad journalism program based in Rabat. Part of the required course load was a class called “Contextual Studies of Morocco,” which entailed a two-hour period every day wherein a different guest lecturer gave a structured talk on their area of expertise. Not all of these talks can be applied to this study, but five were journalists and editors who spoke of the media industry, press freedom and their challenges working in Morocco. Questions were encouraged. My strategy was to use these lectures as a foundation to understand the general attitudes and anxieties of media professionals. Then during question-and-answer parts of the lectures, my strategy was to ask questions that asked about their

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relationships with the state and how they were possibly limited by certain policy and state tactics. I did not yet have my exact focus at this time — these lectures occurred mostly at the beginning of the semester, from October to September — but I had enough of an idea to elicit useful information about press freedom.

The five lectures were given by Aida Alami, a freelance journalist who contributes to the *New York Times* and *Al Jazeera English*; Mosa'ab Elshamy, a photojournalist for the Associated Press; Kenza Sefrioui, an editor of *TelQuel*, publisher at En Toutes Lettres, and former director at *Le Journal Hebdo*; Omar Radi, a freelance journalist who has contributed for *Le Journal Hebdo*, *Mamfakinch*, and *TelQuel*; and Dounia Benslimane, a director with *Racines*, a Casablanca-based non-profit organization that promotes education and freedom of speech. Four are journalists with at least five years of experience working in Morocco and each have significant connections with Western publications and journalism protection NGOs. The fifth, Benslimane, does not have experience as a journalist, per se, but she is a former lawyer whose expertise is in freedom of expression.

Additionally, the advantage of having journalism professionals speak with us in a safe, private setting meant they could be more open about their experiences in the Moroccan press climate. Alami discussed the differences between her and her peers working in Morocco. She is writing in English for publications that could be described as untouchable in most countries whereas many of her peers are writing in French or Arabic for local publications that are vulnerable to state subjugation. Elshamy works as an English-language and international photojournalist who began his career covering the 2011 Arab Uprisings in his native Egypt and spoke to us about the similarities and difference of the Morocco context compared to what he experienced in Cairo. Sefrioui described her concerns about the Moroccan reading public, mostly

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that independent magazines and critical books are limited in their impact in a country where poor education and illiteracy negatively impact public discourse. Radi played his independently produced documentary about the Hirak protests and discussed what went into making it and how he was limited and threatened by the state. Benslimane discussed the Moroccan reading public and the challenges the organization faces in this press climate.

### **3.3 Semi-Structured Interviews**

I also conducted semi-structured interviews to have a deeper understanding of the experiences and anxieties of journalism professionals working in Morocco. Semi-structured interviews were chosen, as opposed to structured or unstructured, in order to have a structural integrity to the interviews and ask deeper questions that may in turn start a natural discussion that delves deeply into the topic. These interviews will be textually analyzed relative to the game theory discussed in the theoretical framework. Applying Bourdieu and Foucault's theories to the Moroccan context requires a treatment of each journalist as a piece in the game whose movements are inherently tied to and defined by the existing power structures and relationships thereof. Their interviews offer a glimpse into how journalists think and act within this contentious relationship between the press and the state.

On the 18-question interview guide (Appendix A), most questions were aimed at grasping each journalists' underlying anxieties and general experiences about the relationship between the Moroccan state and the press. These questions sought to facilitate discussion and cut into how the Moroccan state has impacted journalists and editors, specifically how they may be constrained, censored or threatened by various measures of the state, and how that in turn may limit their work and impact as a watchdog in Morocco society. Other questions were geared into

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gaining background knowledge that would otherwise be unknown, such as asking the journalists if they had ever been arrested, or if they had ever been issued a state press card to practice their profession; though these journalists are public figures, not everything about is necessarily public information.

Houdaïfa and Radi were chosen to interview because of their extensive work in the Moroccan media industry as critical journalists and editors with independent outlets. Houdaïfa, 49, has been working as a journalist, editor and publisher in Morocco since 1996, while Radi, 32, has been highly active as a journalist, editor and activist since he began working in 2009. It is also important the type of journalism each does. Houdaïfa is currently working as an independent publisher at *En Toute Lettres* and self-publishes journalistic books that cover controversial topics, such as how Moroccan society has fostered religious extremism by marginalizing and isolating certain peoples. He has also served as an investigative journalist and editor with independent outlets like *TelQuel*, and he has an established reputation within the industry (and most likely known by state officials) as a critical voice. Radi was chosen because his name kept coming up in my historical research about the Arab Uprisings and as an investigative journalist working for *Le Journal Hebdo*, *Mamfakinch* and *TelQuel*. Before I even reached Morocco, I wanted to interview him on whatever topic I eventually chose to focus on. Once I attended his lecture about the HIRAK movement, he was an essential interview for my research; I believed at the time, and still believe in hindsight, that this research would not be complete without having him discuss his experiences and fears as a journalist and editor. The interview with Houdaïfa was secured through his wife, Kenza Sefrioui, who had given a lecture about publishing and editing in a difficult environment. The interview with Radi was set up through my advisor, Ursula



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Lindsey, soon after his lecture and it was conducted the day after he finished a reporting assignment in Tunisia.

### **3.4 Document Analysis**

I also analyzed original reports from four press freedom NGOs: London-based Amnesty International, New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Human Rights Watch (HRW), and Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF). Each NGO has its own website equipped with a page dedicated to Morocco/Western Sahara.

CPJ and HRW detail on their websites how they conduct their research, while Amnesty International and RSF publish their motivations and values. CPJ tracks and compiles hundreds of attacks on media every year, detailing reports on every journalist killed, imprisoned, exiled or disappeared, and they use their data to monitor and call for the release or justice of affected journalists (CPJ, 2019). HRW has over 80 researchers on staff who “conduct regular, systematic investigations of human rights abuses around the world ... actively researching, reporting, and advocating for change in more than 90 countries” (HRW, 2019). Specific to journalists, HRW rely on help from networks of human rights activists and civil society members to monitor and document abuses, then they report on the abuses using extensive background research before conducting interviews with victims and witnesses. Amnesty International investigates abuses of journalists and advocate for freedom of expression, the release of prisoners of conscience, abolition of laws that criminalize free speech and peaceful protest, abolition of laws against hate speech, and for people to have access to information (Amnesty International, 2019). RSF advocates for “freedom of opinion and expression” as written in article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In their advocacy, they defend oppositional journalists, support

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journalists as “independent watchdogs capable of challenging authorities” and promote freedom of information (RSF, 2016). RSF compiles their research to create the World Press Freedom Index, on which Morocco ranks 135 of 180 countries listed.

Each website includes a chronological listing of every report each organization has written about Morocco. There are only 74 reports about Morocco combined on those four websites since 2011, so it was manageable to read and analyze each report — including duplicate reports of the same arrests — instead of sampling a portion from the sum. Seventy of the 74 reports publicize 32 separate arrests of journalists and each release charges, court decisions or other relevant information regarding the case. Most reports are calls for an arrested journalist to be released from prison or publication of new information on the case. They discuss the case history and potential meaning of the arrest, and lastly call for the immediate release of those arrested, if it applies. Each report, with some exceptions, describes the charge, sentence and potential reasons for the arrest. It is possible to compile these reports to qualitatively analyze why journalists have been arrested and how harshly they have been punished, if at all.

The period of study was between 2011 and 2019. 2011 was chosen as the beginning date because that is when Morocco’s wave of the Arab Uprisings led to a constitutional reform; the Arab Uprisings also marks the beginning of the state increasingly exercising their power to limit the democratizing power of the press. Between 2011 and 2019, the year 2016 serves as a point of inflection as to legal explanations for journalists’ arrests. That was the year the state introduced a revised press code that eliminated prison sentences for journalist’s work, but as previous scholarship has shown, critical journalists have since been arrested on charges technically unrelated to their work, although it is obvious they are targeted because of what they have written or said.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### 4.1 Introduction

This research will attempt to answer the question: **How do journalists navigate a contentious press climate?** To answer this, these findings will incorporate three main research methods discussed the previous chapter: archival research of original reports, five public lectures with journalists in a forum setting, and two intensive semi-structured interviews with prominent critical journalists.

### 4.2 Journalist arrests have increased despite 2016 Press Code reform

According to 23 unique reports from RSF, CPJ, HRW and Amnesty International — not double-counting accounts of the same cases — there have been 41 journalist arrests in Morocco since 2011, 31 of whom are Moroccan nationals. Broken down by year, two were arrested in 2011, two in 2012, one in 2013, two in 2014, two in 2015, thirteen in 2016, seventeen in 2017 and one in 2018. There were prominent spikes in arrests in 2016 and 2017, both of which have clear explanations.

The spike in 2016 involved the arrest of seven journalists who were training citizen journalists with a smartphone application. According to Amnesty International (2016), all were arrested under Article 206 of the Penal Code of “threatening the internal security of the state through propaganda that may threaten the loyalty that citizens owe to the State and institutions of the Moroccan people.” Each face up to five years in prison, although the trial has reportedly not concluded. Of those arrested, Maati Monjib, a historian and founder of human rights organization Freedom Now, was also charged with fraud, and Maria Moukrim and Rachid Tarik, journalists who serve as presidents of the Moroccan Association for Investigative Journalism,

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were additionally charged with “receiving foreign funding without notifying the General Secretariat of the government” (Amnesty International, 2016). Monjib is a known critic of the state who must have been targeted in this prosecution, according to researchers at RSF and Amnesty International. Hicham al-Mansouri, also arrested in his sweep, had been recently released from prison following a 10-month conviction of adultery, a case in which he was reportedly beaten, stripped naked and later convicted in a political move to tarnish his reputation as a critical journalist (CPJ, 2015).

The spike in 2017 is associated exclusively with the Hirak movement, a social movement based in the Rif region of northern Morocco that protested against unfair treatment from the state in terms of corruption, abuse and development, as well as a lack of opportunity in work and education. Seventeen journalists were arrested for covering the protests, including nationally known Moroccans, foreign correspondents and citizen journalists local to the Rif region. Hamid al-Mahdaoui, an editor of *El-Badil*, was arrested on his way to cover the movement. He was sentenced in 2017 to one year of prison for "committing misdemeanors through speeches and shouting in public places," then was convicted in 2018 to three years on a separate charge of “failure to report a crime threatening national security” (CPJ, 2018). Like Hicham al-Mansouri, who arrested in 2015 and 2017, Mahdaoui was previously convicted in 2015 of criminal defamation after he reported accusations of torture by the family of Karim Lachgar, an activist who was killed in May 2014 in police custody (CPJ, 2015). Rabiâ al-Ablaq, a journalist at *El-Badil*, was arrested in the Rif region for charges related to undermining national security. Mohamed al-Asrihi, an editor of *Rif24*, was arrested after having produced video coverage of the protests in Hoceïma. He was sentenced to three years in prison for charges that include "participating in unauthorized demonstrations," “inciting against the unity of the kingdom," and

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“claiming to be a journalist without having acquired the necessary accreditation” (CPJ, 2017). Abdelkabar al-Horr, the founder and editor of *Rassd Maroc*, was arrested and convicted to four years in prison for charges of “condoning terrorism,” “inciting a banned demonstration” and “insulting state authority” (RSF, 2018); the terrorism charges stem from a controversial Facebook post he liked in 2016 and the other two charges result from his coverage of the Hirak movement.

Four others, Mohamed Ahdad of the newspaper *al-Massae*, Abdelhak Belachgar of the newspaper *Akhbar Al Yaoum*, and Kaoutar Zaki and Abdelilah Sakhir of the news website *Aljarida24*, were given suspended six-month sentences on charges of “divulging confidential information” and “complicity,” which come from publishing confidential information that exposed suspected corruption in the Moroccan Retirement Fund (RSF, 2018). Five other citizen journalists — Abdel Ali Haddou of *Araghi TV*, Mohamed al-Hilali of *Rif Press*, Houssein al-Idrissi of *Rif Press*, Jawad al-Sabiry of *Rif24* and Fouad Assaidi of *Awar TV* — were arrested on charges related to press law violations (RSF 2017), although it has not been reported if they were convicted.

Of the journalists who attempted to cover the same protests in northern Morocco, four foreign correspondents were arrested and expelled for their work. Saeed Kamali Dehghan, a British correspondent for the *Guardian*, was detained and deported for not having state-issued credentials while reporting in Hoceïma. José Luis Navazo and Fernando Sanz, Spanish reporters with *El Correo Diplomático*, were detained while interviewing people in Tetouan under the charges of lacking permits to shoot video footage in public places. Djamel Alilat, an Algerian reporter for *Al-Watan*, was detained and deported while attempting to cover protests in Nador; the exact reason for his deportation was not published, but it is likely he was detained for not

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having credentials. There have been other issues in the past with foreign correspondents being denied accreditation after being critical of the Moroccan state. Six foreign TV journalists were expelled in 2016 for covering sensitive topics in central Morocco because they did not have permission to film. Since the 2016 Press Code was enacted, most foreign journalists operate in a state of illegality because it is easier for them to enter the country and conduct their work as registered tourists than it is to obtain the necessary accreditation.

This increase in journalist arrests follows the 2016 Press Code, a revised version of the 2002 Press Code which made a public point of eliminating prison sentences for journalists. Before 2016, journalists could be arrested and convicted to prison specifically for what they wrote, which is why most of the earlier cases were charges of criminal defamation or transgressing ‘red lines.’ The state used other tactics as well, such as using duped charges of adultery or drug trafficking to simultaneously imprison and tarnish the reputations of critical journalists. As of the 2016 revisions, the state can no longer lock up journalists for defamation or transgressing ‘red lines,’ so the state instead follows a similar tactic as their adultery and trafficking strategies. In many cases, the laws on national security are so vague that just about anything critical can be seen as damaging the “unity of the kingdom.” If Ali Anouzla was arrested and convicted — his sentence has been perpetually suspended — in 2013 for linking to a terrorist organization’s critique of the King in an article on a *Spanish* media outlet, it is quite easy for the state to say Asrihi is culpable for having participated in the Hirak protests in whatever capacity, especially considering his Riffian identity and support for the movement. Omar Radi, a prominent independent journalist who I interviewed and whose lecture I attended, referred to Asrihi as a core activist in the movement and claimed the state wanted him and his cohorts in jail.

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In the case of Mahdaoui, there is talk that he was intentionally set up by police. The case itself is suspicious. Ismaïl Bouazzati — an Amsterdam-based Moroccan who was not identified by the court but by other Dutch-Moroccans — had anonymously called Mahdaoui to tell him military-grade weapons were being smuggled to Hoceïma to arm protestors, a claim Mahdaoui did not believe was credible and therefore did not report (Delouche, 2018). Somehow, the phone call was recorded and processed as evidence to be used later. This phone call was made in May, yet Mahdaoui was arrested in July when he traveled to the Rif region to report on the protests. Radi discussed that it was more than likely he was set up by the state wherein Bouazzati called with the intention of incriminating Mahdaoui and recording the conversation. Radi discussed how police surveil journalists: they wait for them to slip up and commit a crime in their personal life, and once the police catch something vaguely illegal, the court sits on that evidence until they want that journalist silenced. Before his arrest, witnesses in the city told CPJ investigators that Mahdaoui was followed by a police car near Hoceïma.

Radi claimed he was arrested in 2017 for attempting to cover the protests in Hoceïma, although his arrest was never reported by any of the four NGOs used in this research, most likely because he was released without charges after three days in jail. Radi's arrest is not included in my total journalist arrest count because it was not on those websites; there could be other journalists I am missing who may have been briefly detained in similar situations. Whether or not his arrest is considered part of this study's quantitative research, it is nonetheless vital to understand, in the words of Radi, why the state arrests certain journalists. He said he traveled to Hoceïma to report with independent outlet *Le Desk* on the protests and subsequent police repression. Once he reached the city after a seven-hour drive from Casablanca, he went to a restaurant to have a beer with his dinner. Apparently followed — Radi has experience being

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followed from his days as a core activist in the February 20th Movement — they allegedly used his drinking as a pretense to arrest and detain him for however long it took for him to not do his job.

Arrested for public intoxication, Radi was jailed for three days and according to him was only released after numerous phone calls from the NGOs he is affiliated with, such as CPJ and RSF. He claimed his arrest was intentionally made spectacular by tens of police to demonstrate what happens to a known critic of the state. This is a result of his reputation in Morocco as a critical journalist and former activist, he claimed, which has resulted in being blacklisted from publishing in the country. As of July 2018, any Moroccan outlet that publishes his byline will be cut off from all advertising revenue, a market that has deep ties to the palace and serves as another avenue of control for the state, he explained. That is why I interviewed him after his return from an assignment in Tunisia — even though he still lives in Casablanca, his career has been effectively exiled from Morocco.

Radi does not have a state-issued press card, nor do Hicham Houdaïfa or Mohamed al-Asrihi, among countless others working in the industry. Radi claimed that since press cards were instituted in the 2016 Press Code, he has been denied all four times he has applied, although he meets every requirement; he plans to sue the state for unfairly denying him because of political reasons. Houdaïfa has refused to apply because he believes it is unjust for the state to have power over who can and cannot legally practice journalism; he sees this as another opportunity for the state to have control and limit critical voices. Moreover, it was suggested by Radi and discussed in previous scholarship that the state intentionally denies press cards to keep many journalists semi-illegal. Similar to how they allegedly surveil critical journalists and use that evidence to arrest them whenever they want them silenced, the state can use the lack of press cards as a



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convenient excuse to either deny entry to an area, such as in the cases of the four foreign journalists, or to arrest and imprison a known dissident, such as in the case of Asrihi. There are many journalists who operate without press cards — such as Houdaïfa, who has never been arrested. However, ever since the enactment of the 2016 Press Code, no journalist has been arrested or deported for the infraction unless they were attempting to cover an issue the state did not want covered.

### 4.3 Local Journalism in the Rif Region

Omar Radi was one of the only nationally-known journalists who made it to the conflict zone before the state militarized the Rif region. He was arrested for alleged public intoxication, but he claimed that unlike his local counterparts who remain imprisoned, he was only held in jail for three days because of international pressure calling for his release. As a French- and English-language reporter with an international reputation as an activist and investigative reporter, he is protected, to an extent, against state repression. Aida Alami has been quoted before as saying she is mostly unbothered by the state, partly because Alami is discrete, and also because she writes in English for prestigious English-language publications such as the *New York Times*. If she was ever arrested, there would almost certainly be international uproar. Casablanca-based journalist Hicham Houdaïfa said,

[Known journalists] are well-connected, we have friends in Europe, in Brussels. It takes a call to our contacts in the EU saying look what happened to us. You have the ability to get your story worldly known. Local journalists do not have this (Houdaïfa, personal communication, 2018).

Radi said that in addition to Arabic-language journalists not having European connections, they are “more vulnerable ... because they are more local.” They are reporting on issues that are close to them and close to their local audience; they also have less means, according to Radi and

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Houdaïfa, and have less leeway with state authorities. This paints local journalism as a vulnerable profession, especially during tumultuous times in this marginalized and oppressed region of the country. It is rare for local and citizen journalists to become entangled with state-scale problems, according to Radi, partly because there are few local news outlets and they are limited in reach and readership. There were similar protests in 2017 and 2018 in Jerada and Zagora, two border cities that appropriated the Hirak movement to fit their local demands, but there was little coverage of those protests for unclear reasons; the popularity of the Hirak movement was likely an exception to the rule in Morocco.

Of the critical journalists in Morocco, it appears only Radi made it to Hoceïma before the state militarized the region. Everyone else, according to Houdaïfa, covered the movement by taking phone calls with witnesses and state officials instead of conducting field work. Radi was not able to produce his own coverage or footage because of his arrest, but he did create a documentary from footage of the protests. He gathered the footage from Asrihi and local citizen journalists — seven of whom were arrested and currently imprisoned — who published videos on social media for public consumption. Houdaïfa said,

Because of their work and engagement, they were inside and gave us the inside story. They permitted someone like Omar Radi to do their job. They are definitely very important to give us a grasp of what's going on even if they have don't have the budget (Houdaïfa, personal communication, 2018).

That inside story would refer to what actually happened in the Rif as opposed to state-issued press releases that depicted the Hirak movement as a violent separatist movement — information that Houdaïfa believes caused them to be persecuted. Radi said that because of these journalists publishing social media content,

People saw the truth that these are peaceful protests and not separatists; they saw that they just want a hospital and university. ... People were shocked because they

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saw what happened and how huge the repression was and how savage the authorities were (Radi, personal communication, 2018).

In addition to mass arrests of local, independent and foreign journalists, the Rif region was essentially cut off from the rest of the rest of Morocco. According to Radi, 30,000 police officers occupied Hoceïma, a city of 60,000, to put an end to the protests, make an example out of those who led it, and block any coverage of what had occurred. Once the Rif region was militarized, Houdaïfa said, it became nearly impossible for journalists to conduct any field work, and because many local voices had been arrested or threatened arrest and social media had been shut down in the region — a tactic borrowed from the state’s response to the Arab Uprisings — there were no insiders to produce information from behind the barricades. The story swept over the whole of Morocco, but because of state repression, there was little that could be reported. New information about the protests only came about during the mass court trials of July 2018. Even as the defendants claimed abuse, solitary confinement, forced confessions and torture, 53 people, including Mahdaoui and Asrihi, were convicted and sentenced under charges related to threatening national unity.

### **4.4 Moroccan Journalism is Beyond Self-Censorship**

“Nobody does real journalism anymore,” said Omar Radi. “There is no great journalism in Morocco, so the state is no longer afraid of the media. The media is no longer a source of noise for the state” (personal communication, 2018). The investigative work that made Radi’s reputation is rare, he claimed, because of many reasons tied to the state’s control and influence of the industry. Radi explained that the state has control of state-issued press cards, and therefore control the legality of reporters, near-complete control over advertising revenue publications need to survive. Radi said the state has made it clear to journalists and activists that “if they want

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you in jail, they will get you jail” because of vague laws that can be interpreted however they want. These factors have taken a significant toll on Moroccan journalism over the past ten years; Radi’s statement demonstrates that these tactics have essentially made journalism a docile industry that the state barely worries about now.

The state previously used their tactics to encourage self-censorship — journalists would avoid transgressing ‘red lines,’ investigating anything related to the palace, and never touch the military — but even when journalists self-censored, there was still room to be critical and serve as a watchdog in some capacity. Radi said they are now past self-censorship because journalists can no longer strike a balance between criticism and transgression, and therefore withhold from writing about anything remotely critical. There are only a handful of investigative journalists left working in the state and they are severely limited in their capacities. Hicham Houdaïfa, for instance, conducts this kind of investigative journalism, but he admits that he stays away from topics that could get him in serious trouble. Aida Alami and Mosa’ab Elshamy conducted investigations on the conditions and abuses of Sub-Saharan migrants, but as noted earlier, they have certain privilege working for American publications. Even those like Radi and Houdaïfa who have protection from NGOs, Moroccan journalists are very much subject to state repression; Hamid al-Mahdaoui, for instance, had a state-issued press card and has support from NGOs, but because the state was able to pin a crime on him, he will remain imprisoned for three years because of his work as a journalist.

As discussed in the literature review of this paper, Aboubakr Jamaï referred to the state as using the carrot and stick approach to journalists. This means the journalists who stay away from critical investigations and report state-issued press releases are well funded and protected, whereas journalists who investigate sensitive topics, challenge official statements and criticize

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the state are subject to arrest, blacklisting and financial repercussions. Jamaï said most journalists take the carrot (Zaid). Radi corroborates, saying:

99% of Moroccan journalism doesn't do anything to embarrass the power, so there's no problem. The power controls completely the media, the content, and also journalists. ... The state is financially grateful to the media. A lot of money comes from the ministry to journalists and the media to finance their silence. We had 30 or 40 online media in 2010, now we have 1,600 — maybe more. The state lets people create online news outlets to drown out information and make it so people don't know which media is credible or not (Radi, personal communication 2018).

While Radi touches on the inflation of online media, something outside the scope of this research, he describes the situation as one wherein critical journalists have every reason to concede to the state. It is here, then, that the vast majority of journalists have adapted to the contentious press climate by avoiding critical journalism and instead report what is friendlier to the state. There are exceptions, but they are few and far between, and as the cases of Radi and Mahdaoui show, the state has a powerful stick to silence the few journalists who refuse the carrot.

As Moroccan journalism increasingly shies away from critical work, the role journalists play in Moroccan society may have shifted as well. In addition to a dearth of critical journalism, interviewees suggested that most discourse has shifted to social media and that whatever journalism exists now is mostly consumed for entertainment. Social media is outside the scope of this study, but the topic of journalism as entertainment can be considered. Radi lamented that most Moroccan readers would rather read gossip about the palace, such as the king's health, than consume investigations into public-private corruption, such as the story that led to Radi allegedly being blacklisted. Kenza Sefrioui discussed (2018) the issue as well, saying that most independent publications have short life-spans because (1) there is little interest in these critical

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topics, (2) there is not a large reading public, particularly not for French-language work, which is the usual language of independent journals, and (3) because of the limited readership and interest, critical journalism thus becomes something of a luxury product that may only be consumed by the francophone middle- or upper-class, demographics that do not necessarily feel the impact of issues like corruption or state repression. Dounia Benslimane of *Racines* claimed (2018) that Moroccans generally have no interest in reading books or newspapers and that people distrust journalists because they represent distrusted politicians. That is why *Racines* attempts to foster discourse in entertaining ways, such as podcasts and public performances, however they were nearly dissolved by the government because a podcast host criticized the king's policies about police repression of street protests.

## Chapter 5: Discussion & Conclusion

### 5.1 Introduction

This final chapter discusses the research findings relative to the theoretical framework applied from Bourdieu (1992) and Foucault (1982). This research concludes that after the Moroccan state cracked down on critical journalism during the Hirak movement, there may not be any journalists left to serve as watchdog of state abuse. This is because nearly all critical journalists have been effectively silenced through the state's control of force, the judiciary and the political economy of the media industry. Those who have not been silenced face the threat of the state's stick approach, which combined with the allure of the state's carrot approach means that critical journalism may be dead in Morocco.

### 5.2 Fourth 'Red Line' Emerges

If there is any one lesson from the 30 arrests in 2016 and 2017, it is that the Moroccan state will no longer tolerate coverage of social unrest, particularly if it jeopardizes the state's monopoly of narrative. The existing 'red lines' have historically been: (1) denigrating Islam, (2) insulting the monarchy or the royal family, and (3) contesting Morocco's authority over the disputed Western Sahara. There may now be a fourth 'red line,' unofficially, that forbids journalists from covering social unrest, lest they undermine national security or threaten internal security.

The aversion to social unrest is likely tied to the 2011 Arab Uprisings. After the monarchy was shaken by those popular protests, which were made possible because of the communicative technology the state had yet to control, the Moroccan state now understands the collective power of a mobilized population. The monarchy survived the Arab Uprisings because

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they co-opted the movement and found a way to fortify their power under the guise of constitutional reform. The violent suppression of the Hirak movement, as well as reoccurring state violence in the closed off Western Sahara, could be seen as a preventive measure to protect the monarchy from another wave of popular protests. The state wanted to prevent the Hirak protests from spreading — their demands resonated in both centralized and periphery Morocco — so the state militarized the region, arrested its leaders, and later violently repressed appropriations of the Hirak protests in other parts of the country. Moreover, the state's contentious relationship with the press signifies that the state understands the power of critical journalism and has attempted to control the industry for their own benefit. In controlling advertising revenue, offering the carrot to complicit journalists and threatening arrest to those who cause trouble, the state effectively has a monopoly of narrative on matters of the state. If the state claims a certain movement is violent and separatist, there are few who can dispute the claim without the presence of alternative voices on the ground investigating the situation. This shows part of the disparity in power between the state and those who speak out: the state can dictate the economic and legal rules of the game, set the conditions under which democratic change is possible or impossible, and ultimately use this control to silence anyone who threatens their absolute power.

Each of the seventeen arrested in 2017, in addition to Omar Radi, were journalists who the state must have designated as a threat to their monopoly of narrative. According to Radi's account, the state attempted to depict the Hirak protests as a violent separatist movement, but because there were independent, foreign and citizen journalists to report what actually occurred, public opinion turned. The Moroccan public saw the movements as local in their needs, but their demands for a less corrupt and less distrustful state resonated with their compatriots. The state's



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attempt to control the narrative of the movement was juxtaposed against firsthand reports, which then made the public even more distrustful of the state and more sympathetic to the movement. As a matter of public opinion and general awareness, the Moroccan state would prefer their abuses be unreported, as they are in the militarized Western Sahara.

In their handling of the Rif, the state did not want the truth of the matter to get out. Once the Moroccan public learned how the Hirak movement was violently suppressed and its leaders imprisoned, the state wanted to punish those who publicized the information to prevent similar watchdog journalism from happening again. The arrests of journalists was a political move within the framework of the 'field' of Moroccan power dynamics, wherein the state has a monopoly of force, control of the judiciary and massive influence of the media economy; moreover, they as 'powerful actors' have this power over journalists as 'weak actors,' who are subject to the crown within this police state. Every move taken by journalists and activists is defined by how they can move according to the rules of the game, which the state has power to control. Journalists cannot effectively serve as a watchdog of state abuses if they are faced with financial and legal repercussions amid constantly changing laws and codes.

This political move served to silence via imprisonment and blacklisting those who were active during the Hirak movement. The arrests also signaled a threat from the state to those who may publicize similar abuses in the future. The message is simple: If you cover abuses, we will find a way to imprison you because we are the law, we are the military, and we can do whatever we want without fear of retribution. If independent, critical and local journalism provide certain benefits to a society, it is clear that the Moroccan state fears those benefits, particularly those associated with an educated, democratized public.

### **5.3 Citizen Journalism is a Threat for the Monarchy**

The mass arrest of seven Moroccan journalists in 2016 follows a similar pattern in that the state flexed their power to protect the interests of the monarchy. Those arrests were a threat by the state that although criminal charges were eliminated from the 2016 Press Code, journalists could still face imprisonment for duped charges punishable under the Penal Code. The seven journalists attempted to train citizen journalists to anonymously report news using a smartphone application, but they were arrested for “threatening the internal security of the state through propaganda that may threaten the loyalty that citizens owe to the State and institutions of the Moroccan people.” This case is similar to the charges against Mohamed al-Asrihi and Rabiâ al-Ablaq who were arrested for “undermining national security” after having published reports and videos covering the Hirak movement. The laws related to the national security are vague enough that the state can effectively arrest anyone who is politically active with an oppositional party. Morocco has a history of using justifications of national security and counter-terrorism — which can be seen recently in the arrests of critical journalists Ali Anouzla and Mustapha al-Hasnaoui — to silence opponents of the state, a tactic that dates to Hassan II’s rule during the ‘Years of Lead,’ although he focused mostly on disappearing leftists and Islamists. Such justifications can be interpreted however the state changes, which is another example of them abusing their power over the law and courts as tool to eliminate oppositional voices.

The seven journalists arrested were not actively publishing sensitive information that the state did not want public. Instead they were seen as an opponent of the state presumably because they attempted to train citizen journalists. The state does not recognize citizen journalists and therefore denies them of credentials and access. However, as seen in this case as well as that of

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*Mamfakinch* and in the Hirak movement, the state fears citizen journalism just the same. If Mohammed VI is anything like Hassan II, he may share his father's disdain for an educated public. If educated populations tend to revolt against oppression, it stands reason to be similarly afraid of a public that is able to publicize and contextualize the abuses they face, thereby galvanizing others under common struggles. That is what happened with the Hirak movements as their demands spread beyond just the Rif region, which may be why there were such harsh convictions for the citizen journalists arrested in 2017. Similar to using the threat of arrest to silence critical journalists, the state may be ensuring internal security interests in blocking and harshly punishing citizen journalism as a way to prevent it from having an impact in the future.

### **5.4 Impact on the Rif Region**

Morocco's violent response to popular protests in the Rif region is the latest example of their simultaneous neglect and abuse of periphery Morocco ("useless Morocco"). The Hirak movements had reasonable demands: they wanted a university, an ontology hospital, work opportunities and fairer treatment from the state. These demands come from a history of neglect at the hands of Spanish colonialism and Moroccan passive rule over the outlying regions of the state. But however reasonable these demands were, the state could not meet their needs for a variety of reasons, so they responded as they typically do and called in the military to suppress the protests and close the region. In this situation, the state would again be considered 'powerful actors' contrasted against the Riffians as 'weak actors.' Those active in the protests never failed to declare the movement's intentions as a peaceful demonstration of their demands, yet they were treated as if they were armed, dangerous and fighting for separatism.

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No matter how popular the protests were, activists never had power over force or power over law; all they had was power over narrative through the power of journalism and social media, but that too was limited by the state peddling their own truths of what transpired. When the state responded to the movements by arresting and convicting everyone they could, including the journalists covering the issue, the Hirak movement lost their power over narrative. Once local and citizen journalists were imprisoned for undermining national security or practicing journalism without state-issued press passes, there was no one left in the Rif to detail what had happened, what is continuing to happen, and may happen in the aftermath. The only journalists who were left to report on what happened were either expelled, as in the case of the six foreign journalists, or were arrested alongside the local voices, as in the case of Hamid al-Mahdaoui and Rabiâ al-Ablaq. Omar Radi was the only journalist left relatively unscathed, but not only has he been blacklisted in the interim (for an unrelated investigation of public-private corruption), but he admits that he was only able to avoid prison time because of connections that are not available to everyone in the field. As Hicham Houdaïfa complained, even with access to conflict zones, there are few journalists who will go into the field and report on issues away from the major cities. Now that the state has implicitly issued the threat of arrest to any journalist covering social movements, there is one more deterrent on an ever-growing list of reasons to not do real journalism in Morocco. Radi has since been blacklisted, Mahdaoui and Ablaq sit in jail and foreign journalists have been threatened with expulsion, meaning there are only so many critical journalists left in Morocco. It remains to be seen who will step up as watchdog of abuse now that local, independent and citizen journalism have been controlled, threatened and suppressed by an increasingly authoritarian state.

### 5.5 Structural Limitations

The greatest limitation to this study was my monolingual language barrier. This severely limited me in my literature review, archival research, interviews and my general involvement and observations within Moroccan society. This was always going to be a limitation studying in a country that speaks predominantly Arabic, French and Tamazight, but as obvious a problem as this is, it still requires discussion.

As a monolingual researcher, I was effectively cut off from any information that was published in French or Arabic, the two languages that are most prominent in academia and journalism in Morocco. I was able to access Reporters Sans Frontiers because they translate their reports into English, but otherwise I had to rely on British- and American-based NGOs on reports of arrests. This meant I did not have access to more local organizations like Freedom Now or the National Union of the Moroccan Press, which limited my archival research as well as the experts I could have contacted and interviewed while in the country. Moreover, Omar Radi discussed in his interview that the majority of journalists who are arrested write for Arabic-language publications, and because they are less connected to European and American contacts, they are less likely to be backed and publicized by those European or American NGOs. I researched the case of Mohamed Al-Asrihi, an editor at Arabic-language Rif24, via RSF and CPJ reports, for example, but if there is an analogous case that has not been reported by these NGOs because of such limitations, I would not know about the case without having access to more local sources and reports. Therefore, it is possible that this research is not complete because it may be entirely unaware of ongoing cases that may not have been reported in English-language publications. Likewise, language ability eliminated content analysis of the coverage of the Hirak protests or of the journalists being arrested, which may handicap this specific research as I

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cannot compare coverage, or lack thereof, between news outlets that take the carrot and news outlets that are faced with the stick.

Aside from historical and archival research, I was severely limited in the field. I was only able to interview Omar Radi and Hicham Houdaïfa because there are not many journalists in Morocco who are fluent English, and even they are both more comfortable speaking and writing in French and Arabic than they are in English. I was not able to interview any Arabic-language journalists, which is sadly ironic in a study that discusses how Arabic-language journalists are more vulnerable than their French- and English-language counterparts. This research feels incomplete without firsthand input from those most at risk.

Besides my language issues, I ran into the problem of not knowing the focus of this paper until late in the research process. This meant that in the public lectures, which occurred early in the semester, I did not yet have the background to ask cutting questions to different lecturers about their expertise. These structural limitations were expected because I employed the method of grounded theory, meaning I had planned on traveling to Morocco not knowing exactly what would be studied. It is ultimately acceptable that I used the time to ask general questions about the Moroccan media industry because without those questions there is a possibility I would not have found the specific topic I eventually chose. It helped that I had four months to research in the field, but a grounded theory may not be feasible for someone with less time in the country.

Lastly, as a first-time researcher, I was predictably limited in that I was conducting independent fieldwork in a foreign country with a vastly different culture and language than in the United States. It did not help either than I had limited contacts, limited transportation, and literally could not communicate with many of the journalists I hoped to interview. My practical recommendations for future researchers are to have fluency in French or Moroccan Arabic, find

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a focus before conducting research in the field (unless you have at least four months to study there), and generally be prepared for the organized chaos that is life in Morocco.

### **5.6 Political Limitations**

The repression of social movements and the targeting of journalists are contentious issues that are difficult to discuss in Morocco, particularly when those interviewees are marginalized public figures who may feel the pressures of self-censorship. Therefore, I ran into political limitations in that I was asking sensitive questions about a borderline-taboo subject and I sought personal information about the interviewees that was relevant to the subject, such as whether or not they had state-issued press cards or had ever been arrested.

In asking about arrests, there was a chance that it would cross the line into something personal and turn the interview into an uncomfortable setting. There was also a chance that in asking how the interviewees perceive the state's power and authoritarian tactics, I could be suspected of being an agent of the state attempting to elicit a defaming or otherwise criminalizing statement; for political dissidents working in a police state, it is wise to be suspicious of everything. However, each interviewee knew that I was a student in the SIT program, knew my instructor and advisor — American journalist Ursula Lindsey and *New York Times* contributor Aida Alami, respectively — and knew that I was conducting undergraduate research with no ulterior motives. These questions could have been too personal for the interviewee, but they were only asked because the topics had come up in previous lectures with one of the two interviewees, Omar Radi, who had been open about the topic of arrest in his formal talk; Radi, moreover, has been quoted numerous times in reports, academic papers and journalism articles on the topic of arrest, mistreatment and the Moroccan state's authority. The

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same controversial questions were asked to Hicham Houdaïfa, the second interviewee, and he was similarly open about the topics, although unlike Radi he said he had never been arrested or spied on by the state, so the topics were not explicitly personal.

Lastly, the political implications of this study meant that a certain number of journalists were not available to be interviewed. This would include the journalists arrested in 2016 for training citizen journalists, the local journalists arrested in the Rif region and the foreign correspondents expelled from Morocco. Those arrested in 2016 could not speak because it is an ongoing case that has yet to be resolved; disclosing certain information may be unwise or even illegal in their situation. Those arrested in the Rif region were unavailable for the obvious reason of being imprisoned in a police state that would certainly deny them from speaking out against the state's abuses. Of the foreign journalists who were expelled from the Rif region, one of whom denied my interview request under the advice of his lawyer because the situation was yet to be resolved. Considering that the interviewees are the ones facing legal consequences, it remains to be seen what they could possibly gain from speaking with an undergraduate researcher whose work may never be published.

### **5.7 Future Research**

This paper will conclude with three vital questions concerning the role of journalism in Moroccan society: (1) If there are no journalists — independent, local or citizen — present to report on abuses of power, how does the public become aware of such abuses? (2) Does that role fall onto social media in the absence of press freedom? and (3) What can be done if the state has demonstrated surveillance and control over social media, as they have during the Arab Uprisings and Hirak movement?



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I do not have answers to any of these questions, nor do the readings I have encountered in my research. Fears are real that the state is veering towards the 'Years of Lead.' The issue of the free Moroccan press, ever dwindling in its power and influence, may be critical in the near future of the state and its people. For future research on the topic, these questions should be addressed.

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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I am a student at the University of Colorado in Boulder, USA. I have been in Morocco with at the School of International Training in Rabat studying journalism and new media within the Moroccan context.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and confidential. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can withdraw from the study at any point.

Your responses to my questions may be published in a journalistic piece and/or in an honors thesis. If you wish to remain anonymous, your identity will be strictly confidential and data from this research will be reported without your name or affiliation.

If you have an concerns or need further information you may contact my academic director at SIT, Ursula Lindsey, or my faculty advisor at the University of Colorado, Dr. Polly McLean. At the end of my work, I would be happy to send you a copy of my paper.

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Introductory questions to confirm information.

1. Please tell me your name.
2. How old are you?
3. What is your current occupation? How long have you been working as a \_\_\_\_\_(reporter, editor, journalist)
4. What type of media are you working for now? — newspaper, magazine, independent, etc.
5. Do you or have you ever had a state-issued license to practice journalism in Morocco?

General questions about the press in Morocco:

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6. At your current position, what are the main challenges you face on a day-to-day basis in getting a story out?
7. How do you see the relationship between the press and the Moroccan state?
  - a. Has this changed in recent years?
8. Have you been arrested or fined by the Moroccan state?
  - a. If yes
    - i. On what charges?
    - ii. Do you believe this was because of your work in journalism?
      1. If yes — Why do you believe this was why you were arrested?
      2. If no — leave the question
  - b. If no
    - i. Are you at all afraid of being arrested for your work in journalism?
9. Do you believe you have ever been spied on by the police?
  - a. If yes — In what ways were you spied on?
  - b. If yes — Why do you believe you were spied on?
10. Generally speaking, what effect does potentially being arrested have on journalism professionals and local journalists?

### Questions about local journalism:

11. What role does local journalism play in Morocco?
12. What challenges do you think local journalists face in doing their work?
13. Are local journalists more vulnerable than more popular professionals?

### Questions specifically about journalism in the Rif region. (towards the topic

14. Have you ever covered conflicts in the Rif region?
  - a. If yes — Can you tell me about the challenges you faced?
15. Is the Moroccan state doing anything to prevent coverage in the Rif region?
  - a. Does the threat of being arrested impact alternative voices?
16. What role do “alternative voices” play in changing public perception? (e.g. non-traditional journalists)



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17. What does reporting in the Rif (or other conflict zones) look like without local journalism?
  - a. Are stories there even accessible?
18. What does reporting in the Rif (or other conflict zones) look like without citizen journalism?

## Appendix B: Data on Arrested Journalists

**Table 1: Moroccan Journalists Arrested from 2011-2019**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Charge</b>	<b>Covered Hirak?</b>	<b>Source</b>
Taoufik Bouachrine	2018	Sexual assault	No	CPJ
Mohamed Ahdad	2017	Divulging confidential information	Yes	RSF
Rabiâ al-Ablaq	2017	Undermining national security	Yes	CPJ
Mohamed al-Asrihi	2017	Undermining national security	Yes	CPJ
Mohamed al-Hilali	2017	Unknown	Yes	RSF
Abdelkabar al-Horr	2017	Condoning terrorism	Yes	RSF
Houssein al-Idrissi	2017	Press law violations	Yes	RSF
Hamid al-Mahdaoui	2017	Failure to report a crime	Yes	CPJ
Jawad al-Sabiry	2017	Press law violations	Yes	RSF
Fouad Assaidi	2017	Press law violations	Yes	RSF
Abdelhak Belachgar	2017	Divulging confidential information	Yes	RSF
Abdel Ali Haddou	2017	Press law violations	Yes	RSF
Abdelilah Sakhir	2017	Divulging confidential information	Yes	RSF
Kaoutar Zaki	2017	Divulging confidential information	Yes	RSF
Hicham al-Mansouri	2016	Threatening internal security	No	Amnesty
Samad Ayach	2016	Threatening internal security	No	Amnesty
Hicham Khreibchi	2016	Threatening internal security	No	Amnesty
Maati Monjib	2016	Threatening internal security	No	Amnesty
Maria Moukrim	2016	Threatening internal security	No	Amnesty
Mohamed Sber	2016	Threatening internal security	No	Amnesty
Rachid Tarik	2016	Threatening internal security	No	Amnesty
Rabiâ al-Ablaq	2015	Criminal defamation	No	CPJ
Hamid al-Mahdaoui	2015	Criminal defamation	No	CPJ
Hicham al-Mansouri	2015	Adultery	No	CPJ

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**Table 1 (continued): Moroccan Journalists Arrested from 2011-2019**

Ali Anouzla	2014	Promoting terrorism	No	HRW
Mahmoud Lhaisan	2014	Unlawful protest	No	CPJ
Mustapha al-Hasnaoui	2013	Terrorism	No	Amnesty
Youssef Jajili	2012	Criminal defamation	No	CPJ
Mohamed Sokrate	2012	Drug trafficking	No	RSF
Mohamed Dawas	2011	Drug trafficking	No	CPJ
Rachid Nini	2011	Undermining judicial decision	No	HRW

**Table 2: Foreign Journalists Arrested in Morocco from 2011-2019**

Name	Year	Reason for Expulsion	Covered Hirak?	Nationality	Source
Djamel Alilat	2017	Unknown	Yes	Algerian	CPJ
Saeed Kamali Dehghan	2017	Press law violations	Yes	British	CPJ
Jose Luis Navazo	2017	Press law violations	Yes	Spanish	CPJ
Fernando Sanz	2017	Press law violations	Yes	Spanish	CPJ
Pierre Chautard	2016	Undermining national security	No	French	RSF
Pierre Le Beau	2016	Unknown	No	French	RSF
Jean-Louis Perez	2016	Undermining national security	No	French	RSF
Luigi Pelazza	2016	Press law violations	No	Italian	RSF
Mauro Pilay	2016	Press law violations	No	Italian	RSF
Martin Weill	2016	Unknown	No	French	RSF