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L-Makhzan al-'Akbari: Resistance, Remembrance and Remediation in Morocco

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Abstract: *Morocco was prompted by the sense of making and witnessing history that began as the backdrop to the mass uprisings across the region in 2011 and continued well into 2012. At several moments the country at large burst into a mosaic of rebellion. As expected, the state intervened with media propaganda, smear campaigns and intimidation to pre-empt the growing impact of the activists and as such to erase this revolutionary episode effectively from Morocco's collective memory. This article examines the practices and implications of the remediation of past experiences of struggles and brings the memories of past resistance together with experiences of present struggles. This article takes particular interest in the intersection between 20Feb activists' political projects and the growing array of digital politics and allows us to understand better the impact of digital media in times of revolution.*

Keywords: *Activism; Digital Mediation; Makhzan; Memory; Remembrance; 20Feb*

In the spring of 2011 Morocco burst into a mosaic of rebellion. The exhilarating sense of both making and witnessing history continued into 2012. The authorities were taken by surprise. The state intervened with media propaganda; smear campaigns and intimidation so as to weaken the upsurge of mass protest. Its main objective was to pre-empt the growing impact of the activists and as such to erase this revolutionary episode effectively from Morocco's collective memory, as it has done with all previous uprisings. These dynamics suggest that political struggles in the *present* already and inevitably engage with a *future*. Protest repertoires expressed through slogans like '*ash al-Sh'ab*' [Long Live the People, as opposed to the common 'Long Live the King'] and new demands for *karama* or '*adala*' (dignity or justice) were contentious, since people interpreted them as actually *possible*: it was a revolt worth rebelling for.

The central aim of this article is to examine the practices and implications of the remediation of past experiences of struggles, or rather how the memories thereof continue, shift and morph with present struggles. This analysis is grounded empirically in fieldwork I undertook in (north) Morocco between 2013 and 2016, during which I conducted interviews with activists from the network that derived its name, the 20 February movement, from the first national protest in February 2011, known variously as *al-Haraka*, 20Feb and 20Feb (hereafter, 20Feb). Some of the participants never before had engaged in political activity while others had done so in the past. This article attempts to bring aspects concerning memories of past resistance and experiences of present struggles together and to link them to an understanding of digital media in times of revolution. While this article is not a reflection on the theories and practices of 20Feb as a movement or event in general, it recalls that 20Feb was an amalgamation of political groups and individuals, of existing and *ad hoc* organizations, and the sum of the different ideological strands and groups affiliated with the labour movement, human rights groups, environmental groups and

Amazigh rights groups. The network was a unique united front among Islamists, reformists and the revolutionary left. Thousands of Moroccans who either never had protested before or protested in their particular geographic settings for social-economic rights¹ joined forces with organizations offering crucial experience that predated the 20Feb momentum, such as the national student union (Union Nationale des Étudiants du Maroc, or UNEM), the human rights association (Association Marocaine des Droits Humains, or AMDH), the anticapitalist group ATTAC and progressive labour unions.² 20Feb also provided a new opportunity for minoritarian Amazigh activists to push forward their long-standing demands.³ The movement was explicitly inclusive, with banners in both Arabic and the Berber script *tifinagh*.

20Feb has been through several alterations since its inception. A dramatic change in composition was the retreat of the mass-based officially still banned *al-'adl wa-l-Ihsan* (Justice and Charity) movement in the first year. Still, the very fact that the possibility of improvements mobilized hundreds of thousands of people across the country despite the high costs of taking a public stance against the *makhzan*—the dynastic nation with a deep-state administration in Morocco—signifies a crisis of the dominant system. Morocco commonly is described as the positive ‘exception,’ and it indeed stood out from other Arab uprisings in that the state successfully managed to deflect attention and sow confusion among activists. The highly mediated King’s Speech on March 8, 2011, and the fact that the leader of the Islamist PJD (Justice and Development) party, Abdelilah Benkirane, was invited to form a new government in November 2011 out-foxed the broad grassroots dynamic because these interventions contributed to the retreat of several organizations that wanted to give the promised improvements a chance.⁴ The 20Feb movement morphed into new coalitions around issues at the local level. Many activists continue to identify with 20Feb and often recall that period between 2011 and 2012 through commemorative events.

This article takes particular interest in the intersection between 20Feb activists’ political projects and the growing array of digital memories, and while it focuses on political change, it gravitates toward Morocco’s grassroots activism, a perspective that often is overlooked in the mostly liberal mainstream publications about the ‘Arab Spring’ or Moroccan politics. In due course, this double approach adds to the understanding of the power and politics of memory-making and contributes to the kind of analyses Andreas Bandak and Sune Haugbolle in this issue describe as an ‘open-ended situation lingering between hope and

¹ K. Bogaert (2015) The Revolt of Small Towns: The Meaning of Morocco’s History and Geography of Social Protests, *Review of African Political Economy*, 42(143), pp. 124–140.

² M. Buehler (2015) Labor Demands, Regime Concessions: Moroccan Unions and the Arab Uprisings, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(1), pp. 88–103; S. Cohen (2014) Neoliberalism and Academia in Morocco, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 41(1), pp. 28–42; and F. Kohstall (2015) From Reform to Resistance: Universities and Student Mobilisation in Egypt and Morocco before and after the Arab Uprisings, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(1), pp. 59–73.

³ P. Silverstein & D. Crawford (2004) Amazigh Activism and the Moroccan State, *Middle East Report*, 233/34(4), pp. 44–48; D. Rossi-Doria (2016) ‘Le Printemps Démocratique’: Amazigh Activism in the February 20 Movement in Southern Morocco, *Contemporary Levant*, 1(1), pp. 64–75.

⁴ A. Benchemsi (2012) Morocco: Outfoxing the Opposition, *Journal of Democracy*, 23(1), pp. 57–69.

despair, action and inaction, exhaustion and revolutionary belief.⁵ This historical ‘moment,’ marked by repression and resistance, is ongoing and fluid. Therefore, in order to discuss the unique dynamics and peoples’ attempts to be heard, we will need theories that emerge from *collective* efforts and at *different* times—from struggles that connect ‘the bygone times, the current time and the forthcoming time.’⁶ Whereas the online memories I will discuss later exist in the technological realm, many of the local experiences they refer to concern offline manifestations of radical politics. This dual reality between past and present and between online and offline resilience runs throughout this article. Memories are produced and maintained first and foremost through material infrastructures and power relations, the article therefore begins with an exploration of the political-economic context of social media and mediation in Morocco.

Morocco’s Media (r)Evolution

Soon after Morocco’s formal independence from France (1956), the then present media became national state media, and it didn’t take long before all of the independent political, cultural and academic outlets were repressed. After a brief period, the new state grew increasingly oppressive during much of King Hassan II’s reign (1961–1998). The brutal suppression of the Rif uprising in 1958–59 deeply shocked the country, especially the population in the north, yet the repression of journalists and intellectuals meant that the Rif uprising and its defeat was successfully sealed off from the media and educational sources (and thus in national popular consciousness) and the Rif rebels certainly were not commemorated. The Moroccan leadership legitimized the repression as a necessary response to unpatriotic insurrections. The overall crackdown peaked after the two failed coups against the king in the early 1970s and the appropriation of Western Sahara in 1975, all of which provided the conditions for an all-out blackout of the media. It soon became a static, compulsive segment of the public and political sphere.⁷

The media landscape opened up when commercial players disrupted the monopolist infrastructure in the late 1990s. But rather than outcomes of the free market ‘trickledown’ promises, these changes were more related to the political shake-ups. Mohamed VI needed to prepare a new personality for when he would take over the throne from his father Hassan II, who was already gravely ill in the late 1990s. This involved the *makhzen*’s co-optation of some of its adversaries in the unions, political parties and civil society. The *makhzan* invited the banned *Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires* (USFP) to join legislative elections and allowed Abdelrahman Youssfi, leader of the USFP, to form the new parliament. The debates about family law, human rights and free press symbolized landmark changes and the stagnant top-down economy made way for ‘creative’ business models. The transformation to neo-liberal capitalism, which initially began in the 1970s through IMF interventions, happened extremely fast and by the 1990s capital was channelled through multinational networks that mushroomed as part of the great incentives offered by economic liberalization in the background of the preparations for the ascendance of Mohammed VI.

⁵ See S. Haugbolle & A. Bandak (2017) The Ends of Revolution: Rethinking Ideology and Time in the Arab Uprisings, the introductory article for this issue.

⁶ A. Hajek, C. Lohmeier & C. Pentzold (2016) *Memory in a Mediated World: Remembrance and Reconstruction* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 2.

⁷ F. Loudiya & A. R. Smith (2005) Testing the Red Lines: On the Liberalization of Speech in Morocco, *Human Rights Quarterly*, 27(3), pp. 1069–1119; and J. Smolin (2013) *Moroccan Noir: Police, Crime, and Politics in Popular Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press).

Contextualization beyond the too commonly associated issue of political repression is required to understand these changes, and one focus for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) that is different from Islamism or authoritarianism can be found in shifting capital accumulation and class structures.⁸ As recent scholarship demonstrates, MENA class and state formations are directly linked to the international accumulation of capital.⁹ The fact that Morocco's increasing GDP goes in tandem with increasing inequality exemplifies the capitalist contradiction that wealth can maintain or increase poverty. This (supposed) paradox occurs in many post-colonial states where neoliberal capitalism was set up in the space of a few decades, as opposed to being part of a development that took more than two centuries in Europe.¹⁰ The point is that authoritarian regimes are not necessarily opposed to neoliberal capitalism but are rather a functional *outcome* of that mode of economic development. In Morocco itself the synchronization of financial and royal power grew even deeper. The tight relations between the kings' court and crony interlocutors in financial networks testify to this.¹¹ David Crawford describes the emergence of a Moroccan *lumpenproletariat* in an outstanding 2008 ethnography of the High Atlas region.¹² The bitter truth is that young, well-educated Moroccans are living a more precarious life than their parents.¹³ The mass protests in Tunisia showed this clearest, and the so-called 'Bouazizi Syndrome' became a thorn for all regimes.

A different but interrelated ambiguity can be found in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and media sector, which also gave rise to a new generation of media entrepreneurs that overlapped with new approaches to (non-state) mass media development during the reform phase that began in the late 1990s. Journalists, emboldened by the changes, were pushing the boundaries and experimenting. While media policies changed, the infrastructure itself was undergoing further leaps with the emergence of the internet in the early 2000s. New online and print outlets were tapping into new, younger audiences that had been socialized in the breathing space during the transition period from Hassan II to Mohamed VI. During that small window of opportunity, journalists such as Ali Alnouzla, Ali Lmrabet, Ahmed Benchemsi and Aboubakr Jamaï wrote daringly anti-regime journalism, and founded ground-breaking magazines such as *Hespress*, *Lakome*, *TelQuel* and *Nishan*. The emergence of social media platforms, and the impact of digitization on journalists' activity, led to a more dynamic and networked public sphere.

But the context was also shaped by a political-economy that encouraged an intimate relationship between oligopolies and media organizations, which encompasses personal and institutional relations, from power in the judiciary system to micro-level private relations between press owners and managers, the system of patronage and favouritism known as

⁸ It is in this case interesting to consider Tangier, where my fieldwork largely took place, as a key source of cheap labor in the international division of labor, providing for western companies from which local elites generously scrape the monetary residues.

⁹ A. Hanieh (2013) *Lineages of Revolt: Issues of Contemporary Capitalism in the Middle East* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books).

¹⁰ G. Achcar (2013) *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press).

¹¹ M. Oubenal (2016) *Crony Interlockers and the Centrality of Banks: The Network of Moroccan Listed Companies*. ERF working paper.

¹² D. Crawford (2008) *Moroccan Households in the World Economy: Labor and Inequality in a Berber Village* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press).

¹³ S. Cohen & J. Larabi (2006) *Morocco: Globalization and its Consequences* (New York: Routledge Press).

Figure 1. Mobilization video by 20Feb disseminated via YouTube, Facebook and Twitter.

ma'rifa in Morocco. For instance, most private radio stations in contemporary Morocco are owned by business corporations.¹⁴ We are reminded that 'modern' infrastructures and hyper-capitalist liberalization are not in contradiction with oppressive policies or dictatorial models, as seen also with commercial media in Syria.¹⁵ By 2011, many realized that reactionary rule associated with the Hassan II era actually had been conserved all along. Critique around issues that were taboo in the mainstream media proved to be particularly risky when it also overlaps with sensitive issues.¹⁶ The past five years in Morocco show that when public outrage synchronizes with political mobilization via smart instrumentalization of digital media (see Figure 1), dissidence travels between local, national and even global stages. During such intersections the country can be swept by protest, sometimes the government faces international pressure. This particular synchronization helps explain why Morocco experienced a clamping down on internet freedom, the implementation of a series of restrictive laws, and increasing online surveillance.

The state did not implement the most visible and some of the more draconian measures seen in other Arab regimes in response to the uprisings. It realized it had to be extra careful in the way it managed discontent and did so with its well-known double-faced character.

¹⁴ D. Ksikes, A. Benchenna, & D. Marchetti (2017) (forthcoming) Media in Morocco: When Economics are a Very Political Issue, Everything else is Fine, *Journal of North African Studies*.

¹⁵ D. Della Ratta (2012) Dramas of the Authoritarian State. *Merip Online*. Available at http://www.merip.org/mero/interventions/dramasauthoritarianstate?ip_login_no_cache=49e62796f80baab87526251c83632bef, accessed November 2016.

¹⁶ For instance, the *Amina Filali*, *Daniel Gate*, *Ali Anouzla*, and most recently the *Mohsin Fikri* cases. These occasions, respectively, concerned a raped teenager being told to marry her assailant, a well-known Spanish pedophile being released from prison and the country by the king, a journalist being arrested and his journal closed after reporting on the latter case, and a fish vendor being crushed to death in a garbage truck.

This resonates with Jonathan Smolin's observation in *Moroccan Noir*, where he graphically illustrates the *makhzan*'s unswerving attempt to improve public opinion about the regime via police forces. We discover how popular media embraces and fuses anxieties about crime and juxtaposes them with a reform agenda, which actually helps to improve the reputation of the notorious security apparatus.¹⁷ Smolin's examples show that, in the long run, reporting on violent and extremely corrupt perpetrators produced a new kind of fear, the fear of criminals and terrorists. These are the dehumanized and the depoliticized Others from whom ordinary Moroccans need to be protected, and against which the *makhzan* retakes the moral high ground and demands increasingly harsh policies (e.g., counter-terrorism laws). This tactic turned out to be an important pre-emptive move in 2011.

Following the state news channels (M1 and 2 M) during fieldwork between 2011 and 2015, I noticed an adaption. The agenda shifting from attention to the domestic (suggesting there is not much to *gain*) to the regional (implying how much there is to *lose*). For example, the official media disproportionately mediates news concerning Syria, especially after late 2011, when events there span out of control. Although the Moroccan state media cynically capitalized on the miseries of Syrians, it hardly offered any reflection on, for instance, the important (and still hopeful) process in Tunisia. This is a conscious choice by the state, and a dangerous one, since it produces a discursive and visual framework for sectarian tensions in Morocco, hence the comment from a bystander with whom I spoke during a *waqfa*' (sit-in) in December 2013 in Tangier 'But we don't want civil war like in Syria, did you see the news, you want the *Riyafa* to kill the *Arabs* or *Souassa* to kill the *Jbala*?'¹⁸

Morocco illustrates what is common across the world: That political communication is an essential tool for capitalist hegemony, to paraphrase Antonio Gramsci.¹⁹ As found across the world, the juxtaposition of a dominant corporate media sector and state power is obvious through the tight networks of shareholders, politicians and media moguls. Moreover, the way that repression is reframed as part of a democratic agenda, rather than its negation, is very familiar to Moroccan activists. Both the Patriot Act in the United States and the 'anti-radicalization' Prevent program recently enacted in the UK sacrifice liberties in the name of security. The 2003 Casablanca bombings allowed the *makhzan* to redefine its repressive measures as counter-terrorism. This relationship is also present in the mistreatment of 20Feb activists through censorship and surveillance.²⁰ Moreover, there is another, more sacred, feature that allows state hegemony in Morocco to reach beyond its abilities.

The Moroccan regime derives religious legitimacy from the Mohamed VI's sharifiyan lineage—his alleged family relationship to Prophet Mohamed, Ali and Fatima—and the king's position as *Amir al-Mu'mineen* (Commander of the Faithful). This is a tremendous benefit, a grotesque 'social capital' so to say, that partly explains why powerful contenders such as the grassroots *al-'adl wa-l-Ihsan* movement, or the parliamentary contender *hizb al-'adala wa-l-Tilmiya* (The Party of Justice and Development or PJD) have difficulty breaking this

¹⁷ J. Smolin (2013) *Moroccan Noir: Police, Crime, and Politics in Popular Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press). But while this is allowed (e.g., access to crime scenes and photos and personal details) since it overlaps with the wish to project a new-born, clean and accountable government since the 1990s, it is also the hard work and *demand* of numerous independent journalists and outlets.

¹⁸ These terms refer to different socio-linguistic groups in the North, East, Middle and South of Morocco.

¹⁹ A. Gramsci (1971) *The Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers).

²⁰ The case of Mamfakinch and other anti-regime media is notable. See: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2016/12/how-a-hacking-campaign-helped-shut-down-an-award-winning-news-site/>.

hegemony.²¹ The main explanation of state hegemony is that the *makhzan* has excelled in co-opting elements of the opposition ever since independence. To the backdrop of protests in 2011, the *makhzan* allowed the PJD to participate in the legislative elections. With that move, it managed to kill two birds with one stone, bringing to mind the incorporation of the USFP in the 1997 elections. During those elections, the overwhelming boycott among the left in protest of the proposed artificial reforms led to a split in the vote. Not long after the PJD announced it would join the elections in the fall of 2011, the popular *al-'adl wa-l-Ihsan* turned its back on 20Feb. The PJD had brought with them logistical and financial resources, as well as many of its members who were a substantial part of the movement as a whole and contributed a large part of the infrastructure. For most activists I interviewed, the sudden retreat was felt as a betrayal, especially when violent crackdowns began to be applied, and the number of people on the street, forming massive defence lines, really mattered. Morocco shows that despite its sacred appeal the monopoly of violence is a crucial role for maintaining political hegemony. One of the promising contradictions of capitalist development is that the public, i.e., working-classes that produce and consume communication products—use these technological tools in ways *not* intended for them.

The Internet: Game Changer or Change Maker?

Since 1990 the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have become a comfort-zone for capitalist accumulation, including for the ICT sector. However, as mentioned above increased levels of ICT production and dissemination have not reduced ideological (content) or material (access) bias.²² Inequality inherently is built into the socio-economic structures of contemporary capitalism,²³ and the privileged capitalist class, not the immediate producers, own profit derived from the surplus-value.²⁴ Free-market liberalism amidst political transformations in Morocco did not lead to horizontal networks of participation. One of the sharpest illustrations since 2011 has been the systematic targeting of political critics and the media outlets they speak through, which increasingly are forced to outmanoeuvre state media, avoid surveillance and find alternatives to inaccessible infrastructures.

The most deceptive craft that combines coercion and consent is the road through bureaucracy and red-tape via incomprehensible regulations, and of course extravagant fines.²⁵ The war on terror and especially the Arab uprisings eventually gave online surveillance further leverage.²⁶ The reason this works so well is that the *makhzan* retains full access to judicial and administrative mechanisms, such as direct control of the official press agency Maghreb Arab Press (MAP). The independent regulating body *Haute Autorité de la Communication*

²¹ A. Boukhars (2011) *Politics in Morocco: Executive Monarchy and Enlightened Authoritarianism* (New York: Routledge); I. F. Molina (2011) The Monarchy vs. the February 20 Movement: Who Holds the Reins of Political Change in Morocco?, *Mediterranean Politics*, 16(3), pp. 435–441; and M. Daadaoui (2011) *Moroccan Monarchy and the Islamist Challenge: Maintaining the Makhzen Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).

²² M. Aouragh & P. Chakravarty (2016) Infrastructures of Empire: Towards a Critical Geopolitics of Media and Information Studies, *Media, Culture and Society*, 38(4), pp. 559–575.

²³ J. Dean (2005) Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics, *Cultural Politics, An International Journal* 1(1):51–74.

²⁴ C. Fuchs (2015) Against Theoretical Thatcherism: A Reply to Nicholas Garnham, *Media Culture & Society*, 38(2).

²⁵ B. Zaid & I. Mohamed (2011) *Mapping Digital Media: Morocco. A Report by the Open Society Foundations*. Available at: <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/mapping-digital-media-morocco-20130805.pdf>, accessed November 2016.

²⁶ H. Elmiraat (2015) *Their Eyes On Me: Stories of Surveillance in Morocco* (London: Privacy International) Available at: <https://privacyinternational.org/node/554>, accessed November 2016.

Audiovisuelle (HAC) was established in 2002 by royal decree in order to grant TV licenses and accredit radio frequencies. But despite the official independence of the HAC, the *makhzan* remains the *de facto* regulator. Interestingly, the Moroccan state proclaims its conformity to international media standards, while defending Moroccan exceptionalism in its press codes in quite inconsistent ways.²⁷

Ordinary, working-class people, whether organized politically or not, produce a lot of dissident media and have contributed during politically contentious moments mostly through their increased use of social media.²⁸ The 2008 protest in the port town of Sidi Ifni following a labour strike demonstrates the radical political potential of mobile phone cameras and YouTube.²⁹ Some of the first public outcries over events filmed on mobile phones and disseminated via video sites were of police violence. Whereas the violation of Sidi Ifni remained confined to the margins of social media platforms, recordings of police officers accepting or demanding bribes caused a wider stir. In some cases the uploaded videos led to parliamentary outcries and announcements of policy changes. Especially when internet consumption normalized, including the ways that political events were consumed, available technologies began to change the objective conditions, the rules of the game, so to speak.³⁰ Although technologies have no independent agency, they altered the algorithms of protest, changing the game between the *makhzan* and the activists. What is more, the protests in 2011 represented a unique historical convergence of a new generation of activists and a new media ecology. Furthermore, political content that is disseminated online inevitably is archived. Retrospective access to the legacies of the ‘Ayaam Rassas’ (‘the years of lead’; the most repressive period of Hassan II’s rule) became meaningful in the last decade of expanding internet access, but the meaning of these memories also changed during the new (revolutionary) moment.

The question often is asked whether the internet became a game-changer, but more interesting than determining the power of the internet is to acknowledge that new digital infrastructures changed the dissemination of content. Yet, even though public discourse about the role of the internet tended to frame it as such, it was mostly not on their own terms: It is not ‘their’ media. Digital media offers important *additional* agency to activists and obvious vernacular features that favour revolutionary narratives. But what if this self-expression has revolutionary potential? Digital tools can help decode past experiences (see next section), as for instance in the way that revolutionary artefacts—images of anti-colonial icon Abdelkrim al-Khattabi, or songs about the famous prisoner Saida Menebhi—are made and remade via the internet. This corresponds directly with the notion ‘mediated world,’ a conceptual space where media and memory come together and re-create a sense of past *and* present *and* future.³¹ Activist digital media help document, mediate and archive the activities, some of whose objects are appropriated and in turn produce new initiatives. In revolutionary times, this occurs mostly during collective struggle.

²⁷ Ksikes, Benchenna & Marchetti (2017, forthcoming) Media in Morocco: When Economics are a very political issue, Everything else is fine, in *Journal of North African Studies*.

²⁸ M. Aouragh & A. Alexander (2011) The Egyptian Experience: Sense and Nonsense of the Internet Revolution, *International Journal of Communication*, 5, pp. 1344–1358, 1932–8036; and A. Alexander and M. Aouragh (2014) Egypt’s Unfinished Revolution: The Role of the Media Revisited, *International Journal of Communication*, 8, pp. 890–915.

²⁹ See: <http://observers.france24.com/en/20080821-amateur-video-beating-sidi-ifni-morocco>, accessed November 2016.

³⁰ HCP (2014) The overall internet penetration rate has reached 70%, and social networking sites such as Facebook is at least 30%.

³¹ J. van Dijck (2007) *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).

The particular socio-techno synchronization between mass access to the internet and social movement activism during politically contentious moments occurs in two related ways. First, new formats bring new mnemonic devices into action, affecting how activists disseminate their victories and defeats. Second, activists acquire instant access to events and also tap into different temporalities at once. Against analyses that exaggerate the novelty of *new* movements or *unique* tools, it became clear to me during fieldwork that *non-novelty* was not a weakness but actually a potential strength, produced by long-term experiences in the ambiguous realities of local (illicit) politics, warranted accountability or personal trust grown over the years. Many activists rejected the almost obsessive focus on ‘new’ ways to frame their struggle. In our conversations, they often complained that political economy, ideology and material rights are hardly part of that discourse, that the celebration of ‘new media’ was patronizing, and even pathologized their project. The neophile framing of these protest movements is itself an attempt to remove ideology from the revolutionary project.³² Revolutionary moments therefore have a double effect in the landscape of social media: the moment itself, and the later reliving of that moment because it is always filmed, stored and becomes accessible, which has a number of consequences.

The Moroccan regime understands that history cuts like a knife and some political memories risk undermining it. The political past is disturbing. The rediscoveries of activists when looking into web archives and newly accessible content, especially amid confrontations in 2011 that were eerily similar to repression in earlier generations, helped open a memorial lid. I am referring to a lid that stayed closed even when there were numerous reconciliation efforts and public confession witness trials about the brutal period between 1961 and 1999. Thus, a politics of memory appeared (see next section) that differed from state-initiated reconciliation and archiving projects concerning the ‘years of lead.’ Although long overdue, it was in principle welcomed by diverse sections of the movement because there were promises of accountability.³³ But the extraordinary elements (specifically the chilling testimonies) notwithstanding, by touching it the *makhzan* cast a spell on the reconciliation project. It’s the *makhzen*’s own direct responsibility for perpetrating abuses (disappearances, torture, decades of incarceration) that is still fresh in popular memory. But the regime simply had avoided confronting the past because the conditions under which it allowed the tribunals to review the complaints—forbidding naming and prosecuting perpetrators—were severely limiting. True reconciliation without accountability is impossible: All the conditions, exceptions, disclaimers emptied it of real potential and washed away much of the emotional efforts and hopes attached to it.

This is why several interviewees spoke of a revolutionary shake-off, one that clears the old stupefying (and deliberately anti-intellectual) smoke screens. They were, for instance, challenging dominant narratives about human capacities for change and progress during public discussions, such as the ‘*Felsafa fe Zenqa*’ (‘philosophy on the street’) initiated by recently politicized youths. They deliberately organized in parks and streets to break the fear and normalize the idea of coming together and discussing socio-political matters. At one of the gatherings I attended, the participants mentioned that Morocco needs two revolutions, ‘*thawra ‘iqliya*’ (‘of the mind’) and *thawra siyasiya* (‘political’). Some of them exchanged Marxist books that were printed in the 1970s and 1980s (Figure 2).

³² A. Alexander & M. Aouragh (2014) Egypt’s Unfinished Revolution: The Role of the Media Revisited, *International Journal of Communication*, 8, pp. 890–915.

³³ S. Slyomovics (2005) *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press).



Figure 2. Left: Protester literally *wearing* political figures, including Saida Menebhi (Rabat, April 2014). Right: Book exchange after *Felsafa fe Zenqa* meeting (Tangier, December 2013).

Digital technologies reconstitute how politics are remembered. The *tansiqiyat* [local networks] of 20Feb both facilitated and inspired a new ‘citizen media’ that relied heavily on digital tools and spaces. In addition to the traditional vernacular of, for instance, chanting and street performance, the readily-accessible digital technology, especially of recording and editing, enriched and renewed the possibilities for mobilization. This meant that through hyperlinks and hashtags, users were able easily to find sources and, also to rediscover them later. This gave birth to a different regime of memory-making. The rediscovery of the past was not about creating performative or artistic collages, although sometimes they had incredible artistic value, or even about the necessity to archive for legal purposes, as we find in Syria.³⁴ It is about how this history in the making helps people cope with lived experiences in dignified ways and preserves new solidarities for the next stage of struggle: To prolong the stamina, to postpone exhaustion. As stated in this special issue’s introduction, it is important to see how crisis prepares the ground for (additional) political action, for moments that activate and push new ideological formations.³⁵ These opportunities are grabbed when the window of possibility is small, as many of the Moroccan activists know very well from previous experience, and from observing activism elsewhere. But don’t we risk producing a

³⁴ E. De Angelis & Y. Badran (2016) Syria Untold and the Anxiety of Digital Memory. Paper presented at International Association for Media and Communication Research, 30 July, Leicester, UK. Also see S. Haugbolle (2016), Evidence, Justice, and Peace-Making in Syria, in: Syria Untold, 8 December. Available online at: <http://www.syriauntold.com/en/2016/12/evidence-justice-peace-making-syria/>, accessed November 2016.

³⁵ See S. Haugbolle & A. Bandak (2017) The Ends of Revolution: Rethinking Ideology and Time in the Arab Uprisings, the introductory article for this issue.

conceptual loop when taking the theories and practices of grassroots moments at face value? In order to grasp the historic continuations and overlapping objectives and political ideals, we have to take ourselves out of the present moment and study the ‘befores’ and ‘afters’ of ongoing political developments.

Moroccan activists do not only reclaim the past *in the* present in order to correct a historical wrongdoing on the representational level, they mobilize the past *for the* present in order to change the world they live in and through struggle automatically provide tools for the future. For instance through the iconography of famous celebrated martyrs from earlier eras and chanting the name of *Ila al Amam* revolutionary Saida Mnebhi, who died during the legendary prison hunger strikes of 1976. But also by literally carrying her picture on a dress (Figure 2), while they *embody* the notion of ‘*standing on the shoulders of giants*’, they do not only attend to the past for how its repressions and betrayals but also with love and admiration. In a sense, they actively construct a narrative based on past symbols so as to prefigure future memories. We can even assume that by resurrecting ephemeral events and commemorating particular actors they place *themselves* in this legacy. And they do this through (old) photos on banners and (new) YouTube video collages that have become indicative of digital political consumption.

Unsurprisingly, the role of ICT is crucial in these mnemonic processes. More than any other source, these newly available technologies complicate previous ways that past rebellions are consumed. To understand the roles of memories better, we not only have to deconstruct political repression, but also show how this momentary vacuum creates (and stores) the collective memory of the movement. They are like mental reservoirs, which in due course, through new regimes of memory-making, allow a different source of and energy for activism. Feb20 involved instances of rebellion that were captured through spectacular images that are hard to remove or cover-up.

Memories of the Past for the Present to the Future

Memory studies have become a vital approach for anthropologists working on political change and conflicts.³⁶ Questions around the need to revisit certain historic events—on the impact of reminiscing the past—are not unique to anthropology. As far back as Plato, memory has fascinated scholars, and beginning in the nineteenth century, the ground-breaking work of psychologists (e.g., Hermann Ebbinghaus, Sigmund Freud, Maurice Halbwach) turned memory and memory-making into a crucial field of research. Many clues are offered for making sense of the world in which we live and understanding the difference between memory from specific cases (thus remembered as it occurred in a particular context), referred to as *episodic* memory, to the general information (generic) knowledge, referred to as *semantic* memory.³⁷ Yet, when zooming out from this scholarship, what can be considered episodic or semantic is less clear. In other words, what is remembered or forgotten is very context-dependent. Something merely semantic in one context can be episodic in another. In other words, when something is particularly affective in the past (episodic experiences), it can change our conception later, and in due course evolve into semantic (everyday) memories due to normalization through language, education, or behaviour.

Digital technologies have changed social and everyday dynamics. It could be said that an over-reliance on the internet has increased the tendency to forget, has induced short-term

³⁶ See e.g., D. C. Berliner (2005) *The Abuses of Memory: Reflections on the Memory Boom in Anthropology*, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 78(1), pp. 197–211.

³⁷ J. Foster (2009) *Memory. A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

memories. In fact, scholarship about memory with regard to digital communication entails considerably different approaches. There are concerns that these technologies negatively affect our cognitive abilities and reduce our attention span. People have become more induced to short-term sources, they are less able to pause, reflect and therefore also less inclined to incorporate information into long-term memory.³⁸ In that case, maybe the fast pace of digital media does indeed weaken abilities to remember (consolidate politics) in the organizational sense. For instance, YouTube videos rarely demand more than a few minutes' attention, and on Twitter 'discourse' is reduced to a mere 140 characters. The tendency for constant digital archiving also raises questions about privacy and intimacy. Not only is content expanding into massive amounts of information, the focus has shifted to the individual, the *self*, and the constant preservation and presentation on digital media has become instant self-expression.³⁹ But it is clear that in the current context, simply being forgotten has become nearly impossible, and therefore considered not so much a right as it was formulated 15 years ago during debates about the *digital divide*, but in fact a virtue.⁴⁰ These are all important questions, but as others have argued, this particular fixation with memory is itself linked to the long-existing fear about amnesia and the bad effect of technology.⁴¹

An approach invested in critically studying Moroccan activism therefore needs insights from intersecting explorations. A number of fascinating studies about digital technologies have indeed become the venue and vehicle for memory studies.⁴² It has been argued that the main impact of narratives from the past on today's remembrance occurs through the emphasis on archiving through digital media. Nostalgia and melancholia are often related matters in these discussions. Incidentally, there is no shortage of nostalgia in Morocco.

Morocco is drenched in memories and especially a certain type of public-retro nostalgia. On the one hand, there is the well-known externally projected fascination by (and later, for) the presence of international literati, such as the author Paul Bowles, in Tangier. On the other hand, there is a certain melancholia-infused recollection of colonial times through photography.⁴³ Some previously unfamiliar memories, especially those contested by the state and out of public view for so long that most were obliterated from Moroccans' collective ('episodic') memories, may come to problematize a romantic nostalgia, such as turning the sweet taste of 1960s hippies into a bitter one when it concerns epic moments, whether anti-colonial or domestic events (Figures 3 and 4). Despite the fact that struggles in the past have been kept

³⁸ N. Carr (2010) *The Shallows. What the Internet is Doing to our Brains* (New York City: Atlantic Books).

³⁹ G. Gudmundsdottir (2017) *Forgetting Online: Self Representation on Social Network Sites*. (London: Palgrave).

⁴⁰ V. Mayer-Schönberger (2011) *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

⁴¹ E. Haskins (2007) Between Archive and Participation: Public Memory in a Digital Age, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 37(4), pp. 401–422.

⁴² A. Hajek, C. Lohmeier & C. Pentzold (2016); C. Pentzold & C. Lohmeier (2014) Digital Media – Social Memory. Special Section of *Media, Culture & Society*, 36(6), pp. 745–809; A. Reading (2014) Mediated Mobilities, *Media, Culture & Society*, 36(3) pp. 285–301; E. Haskins (2007); and J. Garde-Hansen, A. Hoskins & A. Reading (eds) (2009) *Save As ... Digital Memories* (London: Palgrave Macmillan).

⁴³ Examples are available on, for instance, the following websites: *Morocco Nostalgia* at: <https://www.pinterest.com/BMEDESIGN/morocco-nostalgia/>; *Old and Vintage Morocco* at: <https://nl.pinterest.com/Nissurin/old-and-vintage-morocco/>; and *Past to Present: Photos from Morocco* at: <http://www.past-to-present.com/showcountry.cfm?country=Morocco>; date of access for all three foregoing websites was November 2016. I also came across a large dose of nostalgia among Israeli Jews of Moroccan origin who are lamenting the idyllic past of co-existence censored by official Zionist narratives; see, for instance, the essay *Shared Memories and Oblivion about Israeli Jews' Nostalgia*, by E. Trevisan. Available online at: <http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=312>, accessed November 2016.

années 50.



Figure 3. Women of the resistance in Rabat 1950s.

Figure 4. Casablanca uprising of 1965.

hidden, contested, haunting and brutalized history tends to be resilient. Such histories are *not* completely forgotten even if not consciously remembered. This echoes Fredric Jameson's critique of (postmodern) mass-mediation, which he describes as 'nostalgia for the present', a conceptual rejection of history through an emphasis on spectacle and commercialism.⁴⁴ Instead of critical inquiry, such media theories valorize consumption and particularly focus on the 'new.' A correction to this postmodern condition is made possible both by the political moment of revolution and new forms of mediation, which allow for a critical unearthing of hidden histories in new contexts.

Web archives with digitized photo collections, for instance, open a window to scenes of which people never may have heard, or did but find hard to visualize. Archives of digitized photos are numerous and very diverse, from intercommunal and queer lifestyles, to epic moments of colonial violence and anti-colonial resistance. They include pictures, for example, of red-light districts and of Oum Kulthum dancing with people in the street during a visit to Morocco.⁴⁵ Some of the resurfaced images complicate the official narrative that the anti-colonial struggle was led and won by King Mohamed V, as they show how it rather resembled a struggle of a broad-based, grassroots, and nationwide movement. In this regard, the 1958–59 Rif uprisings are a case in point. It left many scars in northern Morocco.⁴⁶ Screenshots of the cover of the critical journal *TelQuel* showing Crown Prince Hassan II taking part in the armed repression of the insurrection, films like *Brise du Silence* (2015), now accessible via video platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo, as well as digitally-designed posters disseminated via Facebook groups, contribute to breaking the spell (see collage in Figure 5). Such digitally-triggered political reminiscence helps to contextualize and reorders popular interpretations of the historic lineage and therefore feels so revolutionary.

Revolutions create ruptures that, sometimes violently, shake normative experiences of chronology, whereby the one-dimensional continuous and linear timeframes become multi-dimensional. They usher liminal moments through the collapse of past, present and future. For example, a number of my informants found out that their own mass revolts are not the first in the country, as they saw through new publications, or by meeting older activists at protests. As 19-year-old Amina remarked during an interview in Tangier in 2013, 'we thought we were making history, but actually we are only now learning about history.'⁴⁷ She was involved in the high-school and university protests, and through the solidarity of other leftist organizations whose activists had been students in the 1980s and even 1990s, these historical layers gradually were being revealed.

It turns out there were similarly important episodes in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s: major protests that challenged the *status quo*. They not only occurred in the country's central nodes like Casablanca or Rabat, but also in the Rif and Tangier. New memories based on present struggles are produced, and reset as *part of* previously forgotten ones. These most probably will provide inspiration for new activities or simply reignite political stamina during downturns (most notably the sudden announcement of a national referendum or the

⁴⁴ F. Jameson (1991) *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).

⁴⁵ See previous note; and also <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2015/12/174080/moroccos-most-emblematic-historical-events-in-pictures/foradditionalexamples>, accessed November 2016.

⁴⁶ As Nabil Mouline's excellent piece illustrates, the rebirth of the Rif Revolt continues; see: [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/20664/reconsidering-the-rif-revolt-\(1958-59\)](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/20664/reconsidering-the-rif-revolt-(1958-59)), date of access November 2016.

⁴⁷ Author Interview, Amina, Tangier, Morocco, 2013.

Figure 5. Top left: Crown Prince Hassan II participating in the massacres of 1958. Right: digital poster of the ground-breaking film about the Rif revolt, below left: scene from the film on YouTube.

legislative elections in 2011, but also the crackdowns in April 2014). In this reading, internet technologies have become mnemonic tools in similar ways that intense emotions activate reflexes. The experience of collective resilience is intense, bringing to mind other metaphors from memory studies, such as ‘Fight, Flight, Fright’ impulses.⁴⁸

The way activists dress up or chant resembles such mnemonic reflexes. When I encountered the screams or ululations in response to riot-police charges, or as I heard (and tried to repeat) the chants during fieldwork in Morocco, I began to recognize them as rituals. But they denote rituals that are both repetitions *of* and warnings *from* the past at the same time. Such rites expressed in the public sphere are a form of protest helped by *activating* memories. With reference to the earlier-mentioned Saida Mnebhi, protestors chanted ‘*Saida irtah irtah sa nowasilo kifah*’ [Saida, you just rest, we shall deliver your struggle], and about those imprisoned and killed in 2011–2014 crowds said together ‘‘*taqalhom ‘damahom, wlad al-Sha’b ikhelfuhum*’ [they arrested them, they tortured them, but the children of the people will replace them]. As *Khlef* means *to replace*, the activists identify as replacements of previous revolutionary subjects, and so embody the link between past and present. Heard

⁴⁸ J. Foster (2009) *Memory. A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 6.

at street protests, these sayings show that activists are indebted to a wide source of political legacies, partly for melancholic reasons, but that nevertheless help make sense of the present.

Moreover, I realized that most of those who were intensely engaged in activism have little patience—literally no time—for a kind of often-mentioned passive nostalgia. Thus, when it doesn't actively restore a blacked-out past, it's considered leisure, bourgeois: pontificating. Some even expressed that dwelling on the past takes away energy from the future. At first I believed this was a generational tension: a reaction from young about older leftists who sometimes reminisce the valiant past. With more examination, I found that it was not related to younger comrades being annoyed by the older cadres at all. Plentiful interlocutors, from across generations and progressive tendencies, reflected on the past in different ways.

The discussions and sometimes the deep reflections hinted at a conceptual difference between firstly, nostalgia as a passive, and often hierarchic, tool employing a moralistic melancholia of 'when the left was really true to its revolutionary principles' or 'when we did it differently,' and secondly a very different kind of nostalgia, that of a pro-active preparation which, while it feeds off antecedent passions, it reaches out for the new and the unknown. For example, I came to know Jamal in 2013, and we met a number of times between 2013 and 2015 and through him I interviewed numerous other activists who were involved in the 1970s and 1980s. Jamal himself, in his 50s and active in Rabat with AMDH (Morocco's foremost and independent human rights association), and in the trade union movement, was not interested in the 'heroic' past of the left nor of the radical fight against the regime of Hassan II. He saw that as *passive* nostalgia, akin to the first form:

Look, I have a project for the future more than nostalgia to the past. Only dogmatists have this nostalgia for the past. I have a project and I know that I will not see it achieved in my life or even for the coming generation, but this project will come true in the future. ... I did not start this project but will continue in it. Therefore, it is not the nostalgia that motivates me, but my future project.⁴⁹

But if the 2011 events now are rendered 'the past,' scale and intensity changes the quantifying measures, what is 'the past'? This instant past-making echo the truism popularly attributed to Lenin: 'There are decades where nothing happens, then there are weeks when decades happen.'⁵⁰ Revolutions alter the perception of time, and 2011 is now '*zaman, liyaam*' ('the time of yesterday') the times of mass rebellions. Even the short period between 2011 and 2012, a fraction of time yet full of change, has become a historic episode for which some have become nostalgic. Perhaps in that case most experiences, as described so appealingly, 'apart from the thin edge of the present' are already a form of memory.⁵¹

This brings me to another observation. As long as it is connected to a future project, activists will not be neutral in their motives or objective in their choices., Tactical manoeuvres against manipulations of the earlier-mentioned divide-and-rule strategy of the *makhzan* always are required. Hence, their experiences are encoded, decoded and mediated in very selective ways. For instance, their online disseminated content tends to display the visual and audio markers that conjure strength. Their tone and message responds to everyday tactics of survival against co-optation and repression, and, because of the common leftist

⁴⁹ Author Interview, Rabat, December 2013.

⁵⁰ See the archived quotes at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/quotes.htm>, accessed November 2016.

⁵¹ Gazzaniga, cited in J. Foster (2009) *Memory*, p. 2.

challenge, to overcome internal divisions. This is of course not typical Moroccan but an idiosyncratic strategy of progressive activists. Mehdi, who is in his early 60s, has many personal memories to share from his time in the revolutionary Marxist movement *Ila al-Amam*—to which many of the well-known leftist revolutionaries such as Abraham Serfati belonged—which was underground until the late 1990s, after which it renamed itself *Nahj al-Demoqrati* [The Democratic way] and began to operate publicly. While Jamal cautioned about the past, he was not keen on idealizing the present either. He explained that sometimes forgetting is good because not remembering also can be empowering. During a meeting in Tangier he commented that it's not always fun to remember some of the comrades who went over to the *makhzan*:

There were big shifts in 1990s. *Nahj al-Demoqrati* continued from *Ila al-Amam* after years of underground organising. The 2011 protests in the Arab world and Morocco didn't come out of the blue. I mean our demands didn't really change. They did become louder. I remember we mentioned *karama* [dignity] and corruption at the time (1970s/1980s) as well. This is our collective inheritance [*hadi athar diyalna*], and the legacy of 20Feb movement.⁵²

Mehdi clearly wanted to convey an idea about not idealizing the past. He made me understand that the act of forgetting sometimes is needed to construct new ethics, to make space for self-growth, and to allow different identities and innovative cultural definitions to merge with existing (revolutionary) frameworks. This process, or openness, can be blocked by frameworks that were stymied for a long time when the movement was inactive. In this way, forgetting also can be an empowering form: a *useful* amnesia. The 20Feb experience is part of the leftist *athar* (legacy, inheritance), as Mehdi says. Thus, activists often add new layers along the road, they are not writing onto a *tabula rasa*. This *athar* of the radical left was retained through a number of human rights, feminist, and legal associations in the dangerous 1980s. The radical left represents different generations and has a popular base, and their formulations should not be understood as the vanguard *or* vanquished, as it is framed in the introduction of this special issue, but as both. Sometimes the vanquished return to central stage and the vanguard is exposed as a fraud.

One of the most powerful chants (this article title) I heard during fieldwork in Tangier, 2013, and later during a protest outside the prison of Casablanca where activists were held was '*l-Makhzan al-'akbari bgha iraja'na, li-lawry, li l-ayaam rasas awtani, wa 'ahd Hassan Tani*' (the reactionary state wants to take us back, to the years of lead again and to the era of Hassan II). This reference is not about the need to remember solitary suffering, but to contextualize the power relations that still dominate them: that the *makhzan* won't hesitate, but if it needs to, it will use the kind of fierce repression it did in the 'years of lead' that the people have been told is part of the dark past; their freedom is built on false promises.⁵³ The commemorative practices communicate that history *cannot* repeat itself. Through such chanting, bystanders were re-sensitized to the past, and sometimes these bystanders would be filming the scene so as to show to their friends or families later, showing the overlap between offline and online politics. Furthermore, by reminiscing through the various digital

⁵² Author Interview with Mehdi, Tangier, March 2014.

⁵³ And it really did so during several cases of imprisonment, torture, and killings. Those incidents are censored out of mainstream media but salvaged as the theme of chants during protests. In that way remembering and retelling is a continuation of existing traditions of oral history.

forms that they can use, activists also remind themselves of the rules of the game. These rules are also relevant for their engagement on the ground, despite the online repression they may face with hacking or surveillance, it matters in the offline domain.

Online/Offline Remediation

The need to organize, to maintain the energy of the movement and to deepen political consciousness, and simply to salvage what remains, is very time-consuming. Even worse, the extra energy produced by the adrenaline that comes from successful developments can be lacking. This is where the online memories constructed before and mentioned above, become valuable. It shows that archiving present (new) memories is in fact an investment, to relish and consume again later. This double-layered mnemonics is a direct consequence of the revolutionary moment. Those making and witnessing the revolution in the present document these new alternatives. But not without also being framed by previous experiences, the *reappropriation* of the past moments is part of this script. Thus the rediscovered *fuels* for the movement's activists, the energy and stamina being stored for later, are found in the past. As the historic experiences of mass struggle are re-inscribed in everyday life, debates about *how* they will be remembered continue across time.

Hence, as the critique by many activists about state-orchestrated reconciliation projects suggested to me, it is also a matter of reparation in the cognitive sense because parts of the country's history are not given due attention. They are remembering in order to *repair* the 'years of lead.' It seems to come down to the very basic adage that without justice there can be no peace. If today's activist sees herself as part of a revolutionary *athar*, then her own present involvement has a place in memory-making for those after her. The aim of these memories goes beyond retelling what people experienced; it is a retelling in order to continue the struggle where it left off. They don't want to reconcile as part of the government's aims to move on because they discover there never was a peaceful reconciliation. Interesting parallels are found during the M15 (*Indignados*) protests in Spain where people simultaneously respond to a *Black Hole*: a post-Franco, neoliberal consensus.⁵⁴ Spanish activists share with their comrades in Morocco a rejection of the very ontology of this 'new' chapter, or fresh 'start.'⁵⁵ One of the first tasks of a new ruler or after regime-change is to get the masses into a new stable normality, complete with a political-cultural cleansing operation. The modern consumer as the ideal subject represents the re-start. But the activists do the reverse.

The fact that they stand on the shoulders of their predecessors and proudly situate themselves as part of a regional history of a leftist realm suggests that the present recollections also began to merge with another reparation: the black hole of Arab progressive radicalism. Some Moroccan interviewees would reference national and regional heroes such as Abraham Serfaty, Mehdi Amel and Mehdi Ben Barka in the same breath and conceive of them as 'theirs': Part of an Arab left identity despite the repression of democratic-left movements that actually have a long history.⁵⁶ These activists want to live and protect their way of life based on justice, and a fair separation of the powers, and of course an honest divide of the (massive) profits of capitalism. Albeit very neglected in Morocco, they are

⁵⁴ A. Ribeiro de Menezes (forthcoming) Entanglements of Memory and Crisis in Contemporary Spain, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*.

⁵⁵ Spain has a rich legacy of anti-fascist resistance that is well preserved and documented (the international brigades being particularly inspiring) through books and films about the battles of Catalunya; it is thus part of a transnational leftist narrative.

⁵⁶ S. Haugbolle & M. Sing (2016) New Approaches to Arab Left Histories, *Arab Studies Journal*, 24(1), pp. 90–97.

taken to be, and self-identify as, the offspring of this radical left legacy. This is closely related to what Philip Marfleet remarked about political subjectivities emerging from the Arab uprisings⁵⁷: By erupting in revolutionary protests, their demands embolden us to defy the analytical givens.

These revolutionary episodes provide examples that remind people of previous victories, and such ‘reminiscence bumps’ are remarkably resistant to forgetting and carry emotional resonance.⁵⁸ Ideas about a (momentary) ‘suspended environment’ help understand this context of revolutionary uprisings that can be described as an emotional resonance that conveys a *zero-social-gravity*. They concern deeply affective memories related to personally empowering and uplifting experiences of solidarity, of a sense of genuine equality and about which activists talked during interviews and, pointing at their arm, comment ‘look, it still gives me Goosebumps’; it is about freedom and comradeship without social, religious and class differences between activists.⁵⁹ This is also the intersectional angle where the macro politics of major events are shaped by the *micro politics* of emotions, as Wendy Pearlman describes.⁶⁰ Many activists express the intention to live the future *now*. There is no necessity to postpone the ideal forms of organizing or the progressive (social) lifestyles, and they reject the idea of ‘after the revolution,’ because, for them, being a revolutionary means daring to practice what you preach in the present.

While memory or mediation is often about the digital realm, the offl realm imposes itself on the digital. The dual online and offl reality are in turn conditioned by the emergence of physical sites of remembrance. The places where activists meet or return to for sit-ins. In Tangier, the small square in Bni Makada became such a mnemonic place. Activists gather there for *dhikra*’s [commemorations] of the original 2011 uprising. In these physical places memories are *maintained* and such offl sites of remembrance simultaneously become the opportunity to protest something else. Thus, they themselves become the utility, the mnemonic mediator. One of the 20Feb commemoration-protests I attended ended in numerous slogans about the privatization of water and increasing electricity prices by the French-owned corporation Amendis. It was prophetic because a year later the broadly shared anger at the Amendis price rises had mobilized thousands into the streets of Tangier, inspiring numerous comparisons with the epic protests in 2011. In this way, protest sites both recall the past and generate activity in the present; activities that are experienced offline and recorded or shared online, to be recollected again in the future.

Conclusion

The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born, in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.⁶¹

... To attend carefully to something we are leaving, as survival, something our gut tells us we ought to cherish and preserve, and bring with us on our inexorable March into the unknown.⁶²

⁵⁷ P. Marfleet (2016) The political subject in the ‘Arab Spring,’ *Contemporary Levant*, 1(1), pp. 4–11.

⁵⁸ J. Foster (2009) *Memory*, p. 64.

⁵⁹ I thank Ghassan Hage for making this fascinating point during a workshop session, and I thank Sune Haugbolle for inviting me to this conference.

⁶⁰ W. Pearlman (2013) Emotions and the Microfoundations of the Arab Uprisings, *Perspectives on Politics*, 11(2) June, pp. 387–409.

⁶¹ A. Gramsci (1971) *The Prison Notebooks*, p. 276.

If one observation during fieldwork and attending numerous protests and meetings can be made, it is that repetition has become a strategy for preserving the present, for keeping the ongoing struggles and emotions related to their enduring initiatives. This chapter reminds us of grassroots activists and their extremely hard work when forced to avoid multiple forms of subjugations and simultaneously having to change those conditions. The first few months of 2011 were rather incredible. Peoples' growing confidence was a serious warning; they managed to push their demands with successful mobilization across the country. The Moroccan regime was probably on the verge of collapse, which explains the drastic measures it took quite early on. The outcome of the historic King's Speech in March 2011 in response to mass protests was devastating for the movement. The unrelenting political dominance in the Moroccan context is first a result of the unequal balance of forces. But the movement had (temporarily) defied the regime and caused an important shift in the political algorithms: it challenged the balance of forces by adding another into the usual equation (money, arms, law); the category of *al-Sha'b*, the people. That, if nothing else, was the essence of the revolutionary moment in Morocco.

Over the past five years, since beginning my research until writing this article, the neo-liberal modes of suppression continue and judiciary harassment of and by the media that were mentioned by the activists and discussed in this article even increased. And yet they have not stopped critics. In fact, another great wave of protests erupted after the death of Mohsin Fikri in the coastal town of al-Hoceima in October 2016 as Morocco collectively rose up and hundreds of thousands of people protested in over 40 cities. It was in response to the brutal crushing of a fish seller but cannot be understood outside of their larger political-economic context. The protests reminded of the recurring anger about police repression in continuation of the protest in 2011 as well as grievances of the *imazighen* in the northern and southern parts who still carry the weight of an 'unfinished business' that has to do also with the repression of the 1958 rebellion discussed in this article.⁶³

Despite the highly performative moments that were generated by government-funded reconciliation exercises in the 1990s, there has remained a sense of limbo. I argue that precisely because they were banned *then*, they are more likely to be expressed now. As I have shown, past events have become the *belated* sources: martyrs from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s and recently are merged in collages and chants. For the *makhzan*, the efficacy of their memory must be obscured or encrypted with a contradicting explanation. It is overridden so as not to allow the reminiscing of such memories to produce a didactic impact. The past has not really been dealt with, just *passed* with time, like the adage of Gramsci, the old is being rejected, *dying* in terms of its legitimacy and support yet *the new cannot be born*. People become aware of this during periods of heightened protest or counter-revolution. How to disrupt the political norms without getting stuck in a loop caused by this political oblivion, is probably the most difficult task. Meanwhile, activists are aware of the risk to idealize the past let alone the present and therefore see the need to differentiate between an optimism

⁶² D. Crawford, B. Deseyn & A. Bamouh (2014) *Nostalgia for the Present: Ethnography and Photography in Berber* (Leiden, NL: Leiden University Press), p. xi.

⁶³ M. Aouragh (2016) Fishy Neoliberalism in Morocco, November 10, 2016, *Historical Materialism*. Available at: <http://www.historicalmaterialism.org/node/236>, accessed November 2016.

geared toward garnering a stronger will and motivation, and allowing space for pessimism about their capacities and conditions.

Rituals are needed (especially through repetition) because they help break ruling-class hegemony, a mystical dynastic hegemony acquired over many centuries and maintained through a combination of Sharifian populism and dictatorial fear. This two-edged instrument hangs like a Damocles' sword over would-be activists and demobilizes many of their revolutionary potentials. These rulers constantly are challenged by counter-hegemonic narratives, which are not necessarily synchronous with the personal choices and styles of activists but nurtured by historic loyalties, the approach of a political party, or the specific inspirations of ideological frameworks. Sometimes alliances are weak, unable to garner trust or build cooperation. That is why the quintessential activist task has become to document and portray the demands, the protests, the events and to remediate them as a *united* spectacle. Activists don't want the *makhzan* to exploit the internal differences. They have to be selective about the narratives they produce. Therefore the memories they revive from the past, *and* are themselves making in the present for the future, must be selective. They show that emotion, inspiration and stamina are part of the general survival mechanisms. That means that both material and immaterial objectives are required, they form a set of collective emotions that become instrumental for social justice. Material and physical and urgent resistance is joined by a sentimental longing for something better, at times assumed with the past but also anticipated in the future.

I consider the continuation of the past in the present as a means to reproduce the activists' experiences and stamina. Recreating certain exhilarating moments helps to generate multiple cycles of resistance instead of 'ending' with one. My reading of contemporary online/offline memory-making echoes David Crawford's above-quoted notion of nostalgia: a longing in the present that is often about the future, which is beautifully described as 'something our gut tells us we ought to cherish and preserve.' This goes well in conjunction with theorization of *Nostalgia of the Present* as formulated by Fredric Jameson.⁶⁴ By bringing Crawford and Jameson together we learn to see the Moroccan context as marked by inequality, which allows for an anti-capitalist vocabulary to understand the aims of the activists in times of revolution. This article illustrates how eventually online/offline dialectics entail different temporalities of present-future, but also that their ongoing memories-in-making are linked to the structural inequalities of technology. This means that the struggle over memory is at the heart of the struggle for justice.

In the past six years we have seen that it is attractive to give up on the activist, and the Arab Winter was declared as quickly as the Arab Spring. People seem eager to declare the revolutionary project as 'failed.' Numerous interlocutors complained that they only felt loved when they produced spectacles, but were ignored after the first setback. Yet, they return to our screens with another round of struggles, as 'new horizons of possibilities keep emerging.'⁶⁵ The revolutionary moments carry the agents, objects and circumstances not so much in a state of liminality but along a ruptured (though repetitive) continuum.

⁶⁴ See website sources in Footnote 43.

⁶⁵ See the introductory article to this special issue by S. Haugbolle & A. Bandak, *The Ends of Revolution: Rethinking Ideology and Time in the Arab Uprisings*.

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