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Why Now and What's Next: The February 20th Movement's Challenge to the State

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WHY NOW AND WHAT IS NEXT:

The February 20th Movement's Challenge to the State

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SIT Morocco: Multiculturalism and Human Rights

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ABSTRACT

The Moroccan state takes a nuanced place among autocracies and democracies—the regime features fundamental democratic institutions and while the central power of the monarchy is maintained through a constellation of political, economic, social, and cultural institutions. In this case, David Brumberg’s classification of “liberalized autocracies” is useful, which defines these states as using a mixture of “guided pluralism, controlled elections and selective repression” to maintain and centralize power¹ This political structure of liberalized autocracy creates sufficient political opportunity for various protest movements to emerge but until recently few have successfully enacted change. The February 20th protest movement, inspired by the Egyptian and Tunisian example and organized on Facebook, is organizing in ways to directly confront the paradigm of liberalized autocracy. Their demands, which are a mixture of a call for universal human rights such as democracy along with answers to longstanding economic issues, do not adhere to any ideology and as such it has been successful in garnering support from all corners of Moroccan contentious politics. The movement has evolved fluidly through the Internet, with a loose, nonhierarchical organizational structure and a globally informed rhetoric that is a hallmark of Langman’s “Internetworked Social Movements.”² Through its methods, organizational structure, rhetoric and actions, February 20th is attempting to change the political structure of Morocco and create an active political society. At this juncture, a few months after the beginning of the movement with no end in sight, a conclusion about its attainment of this goal is impossible. Still, two questions remain, why now and what next? The second half of this

¹ “The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy,” 56.

² “From Virtual Public Spheres to Global Justice.”

paper consists of interviews of an array of people close to the movement—an organizer, a government official, an activist and an academic—attempting to answer these questions. By analyzing the rhetoric of each of these actors and applying these existing theories, we can begin to see overlaps in the theory of social movements and autocratic states and their application. This study attempts to capture singular opinions about the February 20th movement and put them in dialogue with greater theories of social and political change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As of late, there have emerged various theories and strategies on how to categorize regimes that are not exactly democratic while not complete autocracies. Different categorizations have floated around, from “democratization” to “liberalization” and even attempts to describe the “regressive” action of shifting towards authoritarianism. Matthijs Bogaards explores the distinctions between the terms are drawn among scholars, explaining that no consensus has been reached³ (476). Liberalization is seen as improvements made by authoritarian regimes, as defined by David Brumberg, and is a part of the larger process of democratization. Democratization can also refer “completing democracy” of already existing democracies by increasing freedoms.⁴ As Bogaards points out, this makes democracy a dichotomous category, a conception which has been used by scholars to define nations as “free,” “unfree” or occasionally “partially free.”⁵ Measures of democracy, although they have their flaws, allow for a comparative analysis

³ “Measures of Democratization,” 476.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

of democratization across states and time. It also recognizes the existence of states between democracy and authoritarianism.

Autocracy has become accepted as the de facto political structure across the Arab world. The Arab world include total autocracies such as Saudi Arabia that subsist on, according to Brumberg, oil money, “harmonic” legitimacy based on the defense of the unity of the Arab or Islamic nation and the enshrined hegemonic state institutions that repress dissent.⁶ More common, however, are liberalized autocracies that are the antithesis of total autocracies in that they do not depend on one uniting ideology, they allow some groups to be establish as institutions outside of the state and do not depend on one economic resource, class or interest. This creates dissonance in the society that benefits the ruling class because through this “divide and rule” strategy, the state can maintain it’s central power.⁷ While these states may have certain facets of democracy, such as elections, the results always favor the rulers. The power of these states stem from different forms of legitimacy. Monarchies in the Arab world usually meld traditional and religious legitimacy, using long dynasties and ancestry from the Prophet to explain their power. Presidents claim legitimacy through sometimes-rigged elections or by calling off elections for years because of an emergency state. By allowing a strategic degree of openness, the state gives the appearance of representing their citizens while actually reinforcing their power.

The power relationship between state and society are not static, as Brumberg points out, there exists “...a protracted cycle in which rulers widen or narrow the

⁶ “The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy,” 58.

⁷ Brumberg, “The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy.”

boundaries of participation and expression in response to what they see as the social, economic, political, and geostrategic challenges facing their regimes.”⁸ These regimes must allow changes beyond their control because this extends the longevity of the regime. By allowing some changes they appease the people sufficiently to avoid truly threatening their legitimacy. This balancing act between democracy and autocracy creates space for some political discourse through usually not significant structural changes. Political opposition groups are not always openly repressed, but protesting usually amounts to expressing grievances while there is no structure in place to address the complaints. States will claim they are involved in a process of “democratic transition” when in reality it is “an involuted gradualism whose small steps trace the sad contours of an unvirtuous circle rather than the hopeful lineaments of a real path forward.”⁹

The key to dismantling liberalized autocracies, Brumberg explains is opening the political space enough to redefine the relationship between citizen and state so that there is an active political society. He advocates achieving this through “a policy of democratic of democratic gradualism [that] must not only push for the creation of effective political parties, representative parliaments, and rule of law; it must also be accompanied by international support for effective monitoring of local and national elections.”¹⁰ By way of their hybridization of democratic and autocratic features, liberalized autocratic states can resist allowing full representation of it’s citizens, however, if Brumberg is correct, with the creation of an active political society, change may be possible.

⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁹ Ibid., 67.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Political opportunity theory posits that the ability of political activists to advance their claims, mobilize the population and ultimately realize their goals is explained by context.¹¹ The success or emergence of a new movement cannot be explained by a particular legitimacy of their claims but only the external political structure. As Meyer and Minkoff explain “the basic premise is that exogenous factors enhance or inhibit prospects for mobilization, for particular sorts of claims to be advanced rather than others, for particular strategies of influence to be exercised and for movements to affect mainstream institutional politics and policy.”¹² This is an admittedly broad theory whose problems have been discussed extensively by Meyer,¹³ although it remains useful by providing a framework which to explain political mobilizations. The two founders of the theory, Tilly and Eisinger, proposed a curvilinear relationship between political openness and protests. Meyer summarizes this view as “protest occurs when there is a space of toleration by a polity and when claimants are neither sufficiently advantaged to obviate the need to use dramatic means to express their interests nor so completely repressed to prevent them from trying to get what they want.”¹⁴ Simply put, there must be enough freedom to protest without fear of violent repression but, obviously there must be enough repression to create the need to protest.

In addition to political opportunity theory, protests are explained by the complimentary theory of resource mobilization. This theory examines how political activists use resources, human or otherwise, to create change within social structures, while political opportunity theory considers the larger political structure. “Resource”

¹¹ Meyer, “Protest and Political Opportunities,” 126.

¹² “Conceptualizing Political Opportunity,” 1458.

¹³ “Protest and Political Opportunities,” X.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

must be broadly defined, from the support of elites, to the financial resources necessary to dedicate time and energy to protest, to the legal resources that give protesters recourse in case of action. The theory of political opportunity has been combined with resource mobilization theory to create a new paradigm of political mobilization. Alfred Cuzán, in a study of revolutions in the Third World, proposes a paradigm that “sufficient poverty, corruption and social, economic and political inequalities, grievances and discontent are assumed to exist in most Third World autocracies to legitimize violent revolution. Yet, revolution is rare, having more to do with resources, strategy and opportunities than with generalized discontent.”¹⁵ This theory moves the focus from the individual protesters or the specific grievances and to the larger political structure.

Theories of social movement, however, cannot only look at explanations; the success of political mobilization is also dependent on the type of collective action. Langman explores new types of social movements that have emerged from the converging forces of globalization and “computer mediated communication”¹⁶ called “internetworked social movements.” They are distinct from previous movements in their structure, longevity and aims, “these movements are themselves decentralized, democratic, and not easily subject to control. The campaigns are often long and protracted...They are unique forms of activist organizations that have a more global orientation and, like their own kind of organizations, envision a more just, more democratic world with more diffused, fluid, and egalitarian leadership and empowered people.”¹⁷ The first such movement Langman points to various recent movements,

¹⁵ “Resource Mobilization and Political Opportunity in the Nicaraguan Revolution,” 401.

¹⁶ “From Virtual Public Spheres to Global Justice,” 45.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

beginning with the Zapatistas who used the internet in the late 1990's to defeat the Multilateral Agreement on Trade and Investment in Mexico, the famed Battle of Seattle in 2001 extending to feminist networks in the Middle East.

The Internet allows for the free dissemination of information, creates “virtual public spheres” for organization, contention and mobilization while globalization gives people across continents a common grievance. The Internet as the primary medium of communication has important implications for the structure of these movements, Sheller argues that “today one must also consider how social movements engage in both the literal motion of bodies and things through space and with the “virtual mobilities” afforded by new information and communication technologies. In what ways are the use of “fluid” discourses, organizational forms, and action tactics in contemporary “global” movements related to the changing context of liquidity, ambiguity, and diffuse risk.”¹⁸ This can be seen in the leadership, or lack thereof, which is usually diffuse, highly decentralized, with little to no structural hierarchy and firmly democratic. These movements encompass a wide range of communities including feminism, ecology, labor, peace and various anti-capitalists, creating “a new politics of alliance and solidarity that overcome the limitations and solipsism of postmodern identity politics.”¹⁹ Although they are relatively new, it seems that ISM's can pose a threat to the greater forces they try to oppose by way of their diffuse organization, communication and unity. The disperse nature of ISM's are particularly suited for combating liberalized autocracies in that they are so nebulous, fluid and diverse, they can resist cooptation by the state.

¹⁸ Ibid., 46.

¹⁹ Ibid., 33.

These various theories come together to create a framework with which to understand the February 20th movement. As I will demonstrate in the following section, the Moroccan state operates as a liberalized autocracy, with the state maintaining power through a strategic opening of political opportunities that creates dissonance within society and centralizes power within the monarchy. This reality determines the political opportunity available to protesters, while the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions created a wider opening that provided a catalyst for the creation of this movement. Then, through an overview of the organization and demands of the February 20th movement, I will show how it acts as an ISM and how this tempers its relationship with the state. Finally, I will provide a timeline of what I have chosen as to be the major interactions between the state and the February 20th movement up until now.

THE CASE OF FEBRUARY 20TH

Finding a succinct listing of the demands of the February 20th movement is challenging, even more so to find an English version. This, however, speaks to the fluid, decentralized nature of the movement. It is generally agreed that the movement is calling for the king to become a figurehead and the state to become a full democracy, termed a “parliamentary monarchy” rather than the “constitutional monarchy” it is now. Laila Lalami, author, blogger and defacto representative of Morocco to English speakers, summarizes the demands of the movement as: “their demands include constitutional reforms, the dissolution of the present parliament, the creation of a temporary transitional government, an independent judiciary, accountability for elected officials, language rights for Berber

speakers and the release of all political prisoners.”²⁰ These demands demonstrate the deplorable state of democracy in Morocco.

The first article of the 1996 constitution reads: “Morocco shall have a democratic, social and constitutional Monarchy.” The second article ensures the sovereignty of the people while the third article protects against a one party system and provides for the participation of political parties.”²¹ A more accurate representation of power in Moroccan politics can be found in the country’s motto: “Allah, al Watan, al Malik”, translating to “God, Nation, King.” This phrase has often been quoted to show the fundamental, and unifying role that the monarchy has within the Moroccan state. In practice, the monarchy is the center of Moroccan politics with parliament, the ministries and supposedly independent political parties revolving around it. In practice, Morocco operates as a liberal autocracy.

Brumberg’s first distinction between liberalized and total autocracies is that they “have not tried to impose a single vision of political community...they have put a symbolic distance between the state and society in ways that leave room for competitive or dissonant politics.”²² This qualifier is in response to the Arabist-Islamist rhetoric used by total autocracies to united their population against rival forces such as the West. Morocco takes the opposite tact and promotes the image of a reforming, multicultural, pluralistic society. For example, in an article from Islamopedia.com titled “Mohsine El Ahmadi examines how Moroccan law promotes multiculturalism, as informed by Shari’a,” which describes “King Mohammed VI, who ascended to the throne in 1999,

²⁰ Lalami, “Arab Uprisings.”

²¹ “Constitution of Morocco, 1996.”

²² Brumberg, “The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy.”

made a strategic decision to introduce democratic reforms and restructure the legal system so that Morocco can move toward becoming an inclusive, multi-religious society, one which better adheres to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which is partly dedicated to progress on religious freedom.” The article goes on to describe the king’s creation of an agenda called “Reformation of [the] Religious Field” in 2004 which was subsequently delegated to the Minister of Endowment and Islamic Affairs. At the 2007 writing of the article, however, there was no mention of the practical applications of this agenda.²³ The monarchy has made some changes toward creating a more open society and society is considerably freer in comparison to his father Hassan II’s repressive regime, but much of the changes are in words only.

As part of this open regime, plurality has become a hallmark of Moroccan politics. In the most recent parliamentary elections in 2007, thirty-three political parties and thirteen independent electoral lists competed for 325 seats. Of these parties, five were represented in almost every district, and eighteen parties were represented in the majority of the country’s ninety-face electoral districts.²⁴ The overwhelming number of political parties creates a cacophony that leaves the monarchy as the center of the power. Amr Hamzawy outlines how this political reality stems from “two central impediments to democratic transition in Morocco, the concentration of power in royal hands and the absence of credible checks and balances.”²⁵ To exacerbate the situation, the electoral system is based on proportional representation, which “always produces a fragmented

²³ <http://www.islamopediaonline.org/editorials-and-analysis/mohsine-el-ahmadi-examines-how-moroccan-law-promotes-multiculturalism-inform>

²⁴ Hamazy, *The 2007 Moroccan Parliamentary Elections: Results and Implications*.

²⁵ Ibid.

parliament that is easily checked by the monarchy.” He concludes that the “seemingly pluralistic process that has left the monarchy untouched as the final arbiter of the system.”²⁶ In this way, Morocco fulfills the second requisite of a liberalized autocracy in that “allow contending groups and ideas to put down institutional roots outside of the state” with the intention of creating competition. The very structure of the Moroccan political system ensures dissonance, leaving the king as the arbiter of power.

Morocco does not have an “obsessive concern with any single interest, class or resource”²⁷ like oil, the economy is diversified with the key areas of the economy being agriculture, light manufacturing, tourism and remittances, according to the CIA World Fact Book. This, however, does not prevent the monarchy from playing a central role in the economy. A WikiLeaks cables from April 24, 2008 revealed the king’s central role in Omnium Nord Africain, a holding company that has substantial shares in many of sectors of the economy²⁸. The cable was concerned with the dismissal of the CEO of Wana, one of ONA’s subsidiaries, because the king was dissatisfied with his handling of the company. This cable confirmed the king’s business role, a topic that the cable observed, “too have long sparked hushed debate in Moroccan business circles, but few expect the royal role in ONA to change anytime soon.” On March 25, 2010, ONA merged with Societe Nationale d’Investissement, SNI, another major conglomerate. In 2011, Bloomberg News reported that “according to the bourse’s website, SNI owns 48.3 percent of Attijariwafa Bank, the country’s No. 1 publicly traded lender; 79 percent of Wafa Assurance, the biggest insurer; 63.4 percent of Centrale Laitiere, its largest dairy;

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Brumberg, “The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy,” 61.

²⁸ “WikiLeaks cables accuse Moroccan royals of corruption | World news | guardian.co.uk.”

75.8 percent of Lesieur Cristal, the main maker of cooking oils; and 63.5 percent of Cosumar, the largest sugar refiner.”²⁹ This issue illustrates the extent of the monarchy’s power in Morocco.

The structure of the liberal autocracy, however, depends on not only the centrality of the monarchy but also on dissonant politics but without any real political society. Protest in Morocco have long existed but have not succeeded in changing the political structure. They are a common sight in most major cities, with one of the most enduring being unemployed university graduates. Human Rights Watch reports that by Moroccan law, organizers of an outdoor demonstration must provide advance notification to authorities “who may forbid the event if they deem it a threat to the public order.”³⁰ The organization continues that “the response of security forces to demonstrations varies widely; they sometimes allow the event to run its course undisturbed; sometimes they beat the protesters with batons, and assault journalists who photograph or film the events. Authorities have over the years charged hundreds of Moroccans with participating in “illegal” demonstrations, and courts have sentenced many of them to prison terms of a few to several months.”³¹ While the Moroccan authorities allow protests officially, that opportunity opens and closes as the regime sees fit.

This winter, the Arab Spring began. On the television sets and on the front pages, Moroccans watched the progress of the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, seeing protests become revolutions and despotic dictators forced to leave by the will of the people. These protests were new; they were lead by the supposedly apathetic youth of the Arab world

²⁹ Aida Alami, “Morocco King’s Investment Fund to Give Up Major Company Stakes - Bloomberg.”

³⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Morocco: Thousands March for Reform* | *Human Rights Watch*.

³¹ Ibid.

and organized using social networks. Within the kingdom, there were some protests in support of the regime and in early January and on Facebook there appeared a group calling for their own Moroccan uprising. The Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions provided inspiration for activists and also served as a warning to Morocco's monarchy. In this way, the revolutions temporarily altered the relationship between the state and society, leading citizens to question the power of authoritarian regimes. In terms of political opportunity these revolutions created a political opening by redefining the place of protest in Arab society. Referring back to Tilly and Eisinger's curvilinear relationship between openness and political mobilization, with the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, the political opportunity in Morocco moved from a position of ineffective protest to a point at which it seemed protest could enact real change.

Depending on who you consult, the February 20th movement began with either a Facebook group or a video. It all depends on who you ask. In effect, it emerged organically and no one can pinpoint the leader or the moment when it first began. The two minute YouTube video demonstrates the movement's beginnings the best. It is simple arrangement of young Moroccan men and women, each beginning with "I am Moroccan and I will take part in the protest on February 20" and then go on to explain their reasons: freedom, equality, an end to corruption, better living standards, education, labor rights, Amazigh and other minority rights.³² This video exemplifies the tactics of the February 20th movement. It uses new technologies and rhetoric of universal values to bring together diverse segments of the Moroccan population. Also, this video and the movement that followed, exhibits all the characteristics of an interconnected social

³² *Morocco campaign #feb20 #morocco.*

movement.

The February 20th movement was unquestionably born on the Internet and subsists on the freedom of information that Langman believes is so necessary for ISMs. By who or through which website is an open and irrelevant question for a leaderless movement but the impetus, organization and strategy all are from online. The movement has created its own website Mamfakinch.com, meaning “Never give up,” which aggregates information about the movement. Lakome.com, an alternative news website that publishes in both French and Arabic, has also recently been created, and provides a view critical of the monarchy. In fact, the most reliable information about the movement can all be found online from websites such as Hespress.com, Demain.com and Lakome.com.

The rhetoric of the February 20th movement is unmistakably preoccupied with Morocco. The flag is featured prominently on websites, the Moroccan identity is strongly represented in their releases, even their initial video was began with the phrase “I’m a Moroccan.” Their rhetoric does not mirror those of other globalized movements that Langman uses as examples of ISMs by calling for international solutions to the negative effects of globalization. Their demands, however, do stem from values that have become part of the international social justice language. Democracy, justice, equality, an end to corruption and freedom are all recognized as universal human rights. Some of the demands are very specific to Morocco, however the general call of the movement comes from a common international discourse. This rhetoric has attracted groups from all parts of Moroccan politics—Islamists, Marxists, and increasingly members of political parties all are counted among the members. The majority of the participants however are youth. Interestingly, the February 20th movement has no guiding ideology, only demands,

allowing for groups with diverse, even contradictory ideologies to coexist as part of the movement.

These universally appealing goals yet lack of ideology and diversity of communities complicate creating a working organization for a movement. As Langman pointed out, however, the Internet enables social movements to be incredibly diffuse describing their structuring as “decentralized nodules along communication networks as are easily created, constructed and rhizomatically spread to deterritorialized “virtual public spheres”...where people and information intersect in virtual communities or subcultures.”³³ The February 20th movement reflects this structure in real public life as well. The group is made up of coordinations in the most of the major cities in Morocco that meet, discuss and organize their own events. These coordinations are sometimes one and the same as the Tansiquiyat, local groups that emerged in 2008 in response to rising food prices, an innovative type of civil society in Morocco. The meetings are run democratically, without a specific leader. There are officers in the coordinations but they mainly serve a logistical purpose such as communicating between the groups. The groups have no hierarchy or no official leader. There have, however, emerged certain central members who have become the spokespeople for the movement at conferences, with the international and national press and at protests. Overall, however, the organizations are highly localized with only goals in common.

THE EVOLUTION OF A MOVEMENT

Many ratings agencies listed Morocco as the most stable country in the region after the

³³ Langman, “From Virtual Public Spheres to Global Justice,” 55.

Arab Uprising³⁴. While the February 20th movement does not threaten revolution only reform, it's success has startled many observers and the monarchy by surprise. Estimates of participants range, but most agree that these protests are the largest, most widespread protests in Morocco's history and they have been growing. Stanford University professor and Moroccan, Ahmed Benchemsi claims that there were 120,000 protesters in "no less than 53 cities and villages."³⁵ Since the beginning of the movement until I finished my research on May 1, 2011, there has been a constant tug of war between the monarchy giving concessions in hopes of controlling the movement and February 20th trying to press for more change. The monarchy has responded in ways typical of a liberalized autocracy—allowing some openings while attempting to continue maintain central power through different policies of cooptation and undermining the movement. Many of the February 20th movements actions have tried to circumnavigate the structures the monarchy has put in place. This relationship has brought the movement out of traditional spaces of political contention; spaces of conflict include music festivals, business boardrooms and picnics at secret prisons. As of now, the protests continue while the monarchy stays firm. Below is a timeline of the important events in the movement's short but exciting history, but their significance will be discussed later through the interviews.

This relationship began before February 20th. There was a media campaign through social networks and by some government ministers to discredit members of the protest calling them everything from homosexuals to nonbelievers³⁶. Simultaneously, the broadcast media networks such as 2M, made lies of omission by completely ignoring

³⁴ "UPDATE 1-Thousands of protesters demand 'A New Morocco' | News by Country | Reuters."

³⁵ Benchemsi, "Moroccan monarchy's sacredness: an obstacle to democracy - CDDRL."

³⁶ Champion, "Morocco Joins In, Defying Predictions."

existence of calls to protest. Government ministers called the protesters foreign agents, a scheme borrowed from other rulers in the Arab world, and the official news agency of Morocco release a statement that the protests had been canceled.³⁷

After the initial protest was deemed a success because of sheer numbers and absence of government brutality, the populace seemed emboldened. In the days following the protests, media outlets that previously ignored the movement began discussing their demands and expectations for the monarchy. The February 20th movement tried to sustain momentum by continuing to release information through the Internet, staging smaller protests in front of Parliament and coordinating for the next protest nation-wide protest on March 20th. Meanwhile, the king stayed silent for weeks while the country waited expectantly.

On March 9, the king made his speech. In it he outlined what seems like sweeping reforms that have the potential to significantly alter the political system. They include the direct election of the prime minister and regional governors, full recognition of the Amazigh identity and transforming the judiciary into an independent branch of government. There was no mention of the February 20th movement. The next day he appointed a constitutional commission made up of by, as Benchemsi puts it “18 local experts, the overwhelming majority of whom are loyal civil servants. Little independent spirit is consequently expected.”³⁸ The commission was instructed by the king to “listen to political parties, trade unions, youth organizations and qualified civil society groups, intellectuals and scholars, to work closely with them and to seek their views.”³⁹ Political

³⁷ Lalami, “Morocco’s Moderate Revolution.”

³⁸ Benchemsi, “Moroccan monarchy’s sacredness: an obstacle to democracy - CDDRL.”

³⁹ His Majesty, “Moroccan king promises reform.”

party spokespeople, domestic media sources and government officials all hailed it as a landmark move by the king to voluntarily give up power, many remained skeptical. Political parties soon after presented their proposals, which mirrored the king's wishes though appeared to be more extensive than their previous platforms for change, making it appear that the success of the February 20th movement had radicalized them. Reuters reported that Eurasia Group, a political risk consultancy, said reform would “not strip him of his broad powers” but allow greater political participation “which will likely placate many regime critics.”⁴⁰ Regardless, the March 20th protests continued as planned, peaceful with more numbers than before.

On April 5th, Reuters reported that 45 members of the February 20th movement from 40 different cities were invited to participate in a meeting on April 16th, although the movement had been skeptical of the king's real commitment to reform.⁴¹ The process of rejection provided insight into the workings of the leaderless movement—on April 5th, Reuters reported that the Rabat constituency would boycott the talks and by April 8th the entire movement had rejected the invitation. One member explained, “They could have released political prisoners or shown serious resolve fighting corruption by unearthing old and recent cases”⁴² By rejecting involvement in the constitutional commission, the movement made clear that it demanded material proof of the king's commitment, not symbolic acts.

On April 10th, Mamfakinch.com released an open letter written by the February 20th movement addressed to the artists of the music festival Mawazine, asking for them to

⁴⁰ Reuters, “ANALYSIS-Moroccan king navigates tightrope with reform plan.”

⁴¹ Karam, “Youth group snubs Moroccan king's reform invite | News by Country | Reuters.”

⁴² “Morocco king's reform team open to youth proposals | News by Country | Reuters.”

cancel their appearance, saying “By refusing to attend, you will contribute to reforming Morocco and paving the way for its transition to democracy”⁴³ Mawazine has been held annually since 2001 and has evolved into a major music festival featuring local, national and international pop stars. As the Facebook group “The National Campaign for the Cancellation of the Mawazine Music Festival” explains “the priorities for spending public funds in Morocco should be the infrastructure, the promotion of basic services and the provision of jobs for the youth.”⁴⁴ It has come under recent criticism as being part of the “festivalization” of Morocco, a trend towards commodification of Morocco’s culture into festivals and also placating the youth by spending money on entertainment rather than government projects.

On April 14th, 190 political prisoners, mainly Salafi jihadist prisoners, had their sentences pardoned or reduced by Mohammed VI.⁴⁵ The trials of many of these prisoners were highly controversial because they were one of the 2,000 people arrested after the Casablanca bombings. One of the prisoners, Mustapha Mouatassim, explicitly thanked the youth for their release.⁴⁶ The government, however, did not mention the movement’s role in their decision to release the prisoners.

On April 22nd, Bloomberg reported that the monarchy was decreasing its involvement with the group SNI, which it described as a “Moroccan investment fund with assets valued at least \$2 billion controlled by King Mohammed VI” has “plans to become a minority investor in a number of companies to reduce its influence over the

⁴³ Almiraat, “Morocco: Controversy Over International Music Festival · Global Voices.”

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Mekhennet, “Moroccan King Opens Door for Change.”

⁴⁶ “Mouatassim: Un grand merci à nos jeunes.”

economy.”⁴⁷ Karim Chbani, an investment manager for the fund, responded to criticism about SNI’s close role with the monarchy in that it had “contributed to the economic and social development of Morocco and that “we have always ensured transparency and civic responsibility”⁴⁸ While the representative did not state whether this was inspired by the protests, the king’s business role had been a central complaint in the May 20th protest and was to be rallying cry for the April 24th protests.

The April 24th protest was promoted heavily by the February 20th movement, including a guerilla appearance on a national TV program when audience members held up signs with the movement’s logo on it, visibly distracting the host. Coordination was again put together on Facebook, with Mamfakinch.com providing a Google map guide to the locations of all the protests, which it reported was now in 100 towns around Morocco.⁴⁹ This protest was focused on corruption and unemployment, with calls for El Himma, Fasi and other corrupt elites to step down. In Rabat, the protest was moved to a low-income residential neighborhood, at once bringing the protest to a wider public and bringing media attention to the social problems in Morocco. Reuters reported that 10,000 people joined in at the Casablanca protests and again the nationwide numbers were reported to have increased.

On April 26th, Prime Minister Abbas Al Fassi announced an increase in minimum wage that would cost the government up to \$5 billion over the next five years, a major

⁴⁷ Aida Alami, “Morocco King’s Investment Fund to Give Up Major Company Stakes - Bloomberg.”

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “Mamfakinch.com — خارطة مسيرات 24 ابريل — Mapping des marches du 24 avril.”

win for labor unions.⁵⁰ According to state television, public sector employees would receive an increase in 600 per month beginning May 1 while, minimum wage for private sector employees would be raised by 10% from July and 5% at the beginning of 2012. The current minimum wage is 2,110 dirhams. Additionally, The minimum pension would be raised by 70% to 1,000 dirhams per month. The government also promised jobs in the public sector for 4,300 graduates and higher wages and benefits to the 47,000 members of auxiliary forces who tame protests and fight riots.⁵¹

Then, on April 29th, a bomb went off in a popular tourist cafe in Marrakech, killing 16 people. This bomb was called a terrorist attack, some speculating that it had the hallmarks of an Al Qaeda attack. This is the first major terrorist attack since the Casablanca bombings in 2003.

On May 1st there are traditionally protests of labor unions across the globe with Morocco being no exception. February 20th asked to march with the workers, saying if they were rejected they would march separately for worker's rights and also denouncing terrorism. Despite the government's agreement to raise wages, two of the largest labor unions in Morocco, the UMT and the CDT, agreed to march with February 20th. The UMT's procession was lead with a sign reading "for the dissolution of the government and parliament."⁵²

The movement continues with the routine of weekly protests, with the plans posted on the Facebook group's wall and website. They plan to hold demonstrations in solidarity with those killed or wounded in the bombings and denounce terrorism in Marrakech on

⁵⁰ "UPDATE 2-Moroccan unions win wage hikes as protests grow | News by Country | Reuters."

⁵¹ Reuters, "UPDATE 2-Moroccan unions win wage hikes as protests grow."

⁵² "Rabat: l'UMT adopte les revendications du 20 février."

May 8th. Also, there are plans to incorporate innovative forms of protest, the next major project is a picnic in the forest surrounding the secret Temara detention center on May 15th. Lakome reports that “by this action, the movement claims to trial those responsible for torture and serious violations of human rights.⁵³”

Throughout the past three months, there have been three nationwide protests, each with increasing numbers of participants across larger swaths of the nation. Responses have come from all corners of the polity: The king initiated a constitutional reform commission; Political parties have radicalized their own rhetoric to closer match that of the movement; Labor unions agreed to march with the young protesters. However, by simply watching the political scene, much of the story is lost. The king has also raised minimum wage and gave more jobs to unemployed graduates, addressing economic grievances. A music festival became a symbol of squandering of government money. The king partially bowed out of his “business role” by reducing SNI’s share of their subsidiaries, quietly addressing charges of corruption. A terrorist attack changed the agenda of the movement and brought the country to a standstill. These interactions can be summarized as the king giving small allowances in different sectors to placate the people enough that this movement does not become bigger. It also can be seen as either strategic or foolish maneuvering by the movement to stay free of influence of the king by rejecting any direct negotiation. There are few prospects for resolution and many continue to speculate on the outcome. In the next section, I outline the viewpoints of four Moroccans close to the movement, each attempting to answer the questions: Why Now and What Next?

⁵³ “Le 20 février s’attaque au centre de Témara.”

LIMITATIONS

The two primary limitations in conducting field research on this topic were time and language. I was limited to three and a half weeks of field research, which severely limited the breadth and depth of my research. Secondly, I am only comfortable interviewing in English and Spanish. I used a translator in two of my interviews, both of which are noted in the paper. One portion of an interview was, amusingly, conducted through Google Translate, which I have duly noted. While I tried to interpret and understand these interviews through the translator, technological or human, certain words, feelings and emotions were undoubtedly lost. These limited language abilities also biased whose viewpoints I was able to hear. With most of the interviews I formally sought I did not specify that it must be in English, such as my interviews with government officials and recognized leaders of the February 20th movement. My informal and spontaneous interviews I conducted on the streets and at protests, however, were limited to English speakers. This may have biased my sources towards more educated, richer, more cosmopolitan segments of society so that I was unable to capture a wide overview of protesters here.

My restricted language capabilities also limited me to articles, media, social networking pages and so forth that were primarily in French rather than Arabic sources. Much of my information and news came from the Francophone sources. I did also use Google Translate for a basic understanding of postings from social media sites, but I could not translate the hybrid Latin alphabet form of Arabic popular on these forums.

The largest limitation to my research was that subject was constantly evolving, and continues to. I arrived in Morocco before the February 20th movement had even been manifested in its eponymous protest. My research began on April 11th and this paper only considers events up to the May 1st protests. Because the movement evolved as I carried out my research, some interviews were conducted before and others after important national events, such as the Marrakesh bombings and the April 24th and May 1st protests. These events may have affected how interviewees responded to questions, so the dates of the interviews must be taken into consideration.

WHY NOW, WHAT NEXT?

Capturing, evaluating and explaining a movement in real time is nearly impossible. Nevertheless, government officials, academics, people deeply involved in the movement and regular citizens are continually attempting to answer the question: Why Now? And What Next?

Each response creates a rhetoric that attempts to explain the social movement. Through interviews with representatives of different participants and “rhetoric-builders” I have attempted to capture the existing perspectives about the February 20th movement. The assembly is imperfect, but it provides a varied group of explanations, criticisms, expectations and evaluations of the movement. Included are academics partial to the movement, government officials against the movement, self-proclaimed alienated leaders, various protesters and central organizers. Some topics are revisited by most, such as the role of Facebook, the Arab Spring or corruption within the government, while some topics and viewpoints are mentioned by some individuals. After each one I analyze

and contextualize, however each of these viewpoints are up for further interpretation and analysis as the movement develops and history solidifies an answer to those unanswerable questions: Why Now and What Next?

THE ACADEMIC

Mohammad Madani is a political scientist and professor of constitutional law at Mohammad V University in Rabat. He was introduced to me as an academic following the February 20th movement. His previous scholarship includes the book *Le paysage politique Marocain*, and he has participated in various seminars concerning the Moroccan political sphere. His interest in the February 20th movement is more than academic, he also has participated in some of the marches. I talked to him in the middle of April.

Shortly after we sat down and I explained my curiosity in the subject, he laughed and said, “I suppose the question is, why now?” It is a difficult question, almost impossible to answer, he said. But, he began to try.

“Morocco has been undergoing a silent revolution.” Demographically, the country joins the rest of the Arab world with a youth bubble. Not only are these youth distinctive in their numbers, but they also have an entirely different political, social and cultural outlook than previous generations. Many of them grew up with Mohammad VI, known as the “new reform-minded king” and did not experience the repression of the years of Hassan II. They have seen the reforms of the king and those have become part of the political expectations.

In addition to the political openness, the family structure has been deeply changed with the shift to urban lifestyles. Families have changed from large extended family

networks to small nuclear families. Also, for both economic and social reasons, family planning has become more common and more education is available for women. With this shift toward smaller families, the individual has become more important. As Madani put it, “the individual is more emancipated.” What remains to be seen, and what academics such as Madani have been waiting for, is how this new individuation will affect the political arena.

On Facebook, the individual finds a new space of expression. Facebook is a perfect medium to not only express personal interests but also to operate independently of the family, other societal forces, and most importantly, the state. Madani sees it as creating “a new public space” and, subsequently, a “new way of political participation”. Madani hesitates to credit Facebook with creating civil society in Morocco, but he believes its importance lies in that it “gives the young people a space which is not supervised by the State. The state does not watch it like it watches real space.” This virtual space has emerged as a “space for contention.”

“We can’t talk about the public sphere if there is not access to information” Madani contends. Outside of Facebook, Moroccan Internet news sources, such as Lakome.com and Demain.com, have recently been created to compensate for the deficiencies of the print and broadcast media. Through these new forums, users can create alternative information from raw video uploads to opinion pieces. This adds a parallel source of information to the controlled information of the state. Facebook has allowed the new youth of Morocco to express their individuality but also freely exchange information about politics and society, creating an alternate public space that did not exist previously.

As for the state's official reaction to the movement, Madani was unimpressed. "The king's speech was an answer to the movement, but not real. It's a formal answer but not to the main grievances of the movement." It did not signal that the king would become a symbolic leader, only a restructuring of some elements of government. Madani equates the state with the monarchy and the Makhzen , and did not see this speech or any of the king's reactions as changing their central role. Importantly, however, this speech signifies that the movement has the attention of the powerful. "Now, everyone, the parties, the king and the government are listening to what the movement says", Madani says.

The other reactions of the state, however, also interest Madani. The largest obstacle to making the February 20th movement a sustainable movement is making connections with the "popular class." Madani points out that in the Egyptian revolution, the poorer segments of society joined the middle class intellectuals who began the movement within the first week. While he says he cannot yet fully explain this issue, he hypothesizes that it is due to two issues: the complexity of the movement's demands and the state's attempts to placate the people. The first issue he hopes will be resolved with time as people begin to talk about and understand what is a "parliamentary monarchy." The second issue is the state's attempts at placating, controlling and garnering support within the population. At the time of our interview on April 18th, Madani had observed that the state was trying to address existing grievances such as raising workers wages, in order to keep the support of the labor unions, an important part of civil society. Even small groups were benefitting, crackdowns on street sellers had decreased. These tactics

were not surprising to Madani, since they were similar to the creation of government jobs for unemployed graduates. The aim, Madani explained, was to “contain the movement.”

The reactions of the parties and the media seemed to Madani to be attempting to follow the shifts in power. The media had begun to cover the movement it had mainly ignored before February 20th because, as Madani put it “the movement is marketable”; protests sell papers. The parties are taking a “wait and see” approach, shifting with small steps towards the movement. He did point out that some of the parties were nothing but a continuation of the state. If the movement continues to be “strong and compact” in the April 24th protests, the parties may shift closer.

On April 11th, he outlined his hopes, his fears and his worse fears. His hope, he said, was that this movement leads to “successful establishment of a sustainable democracy.” His fear, however, was that “the popular class will not follow the movement, but in that case the people in the middle class will find a way to make democracy.” The worse case scenario, however, is an increasingly authoritarian state. However, Madani was less hopeful than he had been three weeks prior, but still saw the February 20th movement as a breaking point in Moroccan political history.

Overall, however, he held hope for the future: “You can’t contain a generation. You can political actors.” Even if the February 20th movement did not make real gains during this time, the change and discourse they had begun would be present for generations to come. “This is new to have people fighting in the streets for democracy.” He maintains, also, that the changes the movement calls for are the best for Morocco. “Democracy is not only a grievance for elites, but it benefits all parts of society.” He

concluded, “what is important is that the movement stays unified, strong and makes the link with the popular class.”

Madani’s view on the February 20th movement has been informed on years of experience in academia and politics. He looks at the situation in the terms of political science—the state, civil society and different political systems. Although his analysis of the situation is biased towards his support of the February 20th movement, he does provide a close to impartial overview of the major players within Moroccan politics.

Madani explained the existence of the February 20th movement mainly through societal changes. He did not mention any increased adversity that may have prompted the protests. Instead, he saw demographic factors and the development of a new medium as being principally responsible. According to political opportunity theory, a concept Madani could very well be familiar with, these external factors are the best predictors of popular uprisings, not single events or increases in grievances.

Madani highlights Facebook and the free flow of information as one of the most instrumental tools that create political opportunity for protesters. The Internet as a democratizing force has been widely discussed and documented, and the role of social networking in the Arab Uprisings is another example of this relationship. It is important to note, however, that Madani sees Facebook and its popularity as being tied to the new culture of the individual in Moroccan society, so that the presence of this social medium has complemented, developed and enabled a tendency that was already present due to demographic changes. Facebook itself cannot be credited with the creation of individuality, it is a passive actor. The Internet and Facebook, however, did create a new

public space and forum for information that Madani saw as instrumental in creating, strengthening and sustaining this movement.

The concept of public space came up many times in my interview with Madani. He mentioned public space as if it were an emerging phenomenon—that public space can only exist with free access to information. Public and private space are clearly delineated in Morocco, with each one having different sets of norms and social protocol. In Madani’s use of the term public space, however, it signifies a space for open discourse and political participation. This sort of public space does not exist in Morocco, except for in the so-called “virtual public spheres” online. Otherwise, public space is under scrutiny by the state, demonstrating the control the state exercises over political discourse. This control shows how in everyday life, Morocco operates as an autocracy.

The autocratic nature of the Moroccan state is further proved in Madani’s assertion that the state is the monarchy and the Makhzen. This definition excludes the legislature, political parties and the judiciary, fundamental components of the state in a democracy. Clearly, the representative portions of the government are almost powerless, leaving the people out of the government. Madani sees democracy as the form of government that is best for Morocco. Interestingly, rather he said that democracy would not only benefit the elites but also the poor, reversing the traditional way that democracy is conceptualized. Democracy is seen as something that empowers grassroots, marginalized people, yet it is being fought for by the “elites” of Moroccan society. These elites are not the powerful circle of the Makhzen that benefit from the autocratic regime, but the ones who are elite in a socioeconomic sense—educated, middle class, urban dwellers—who provide support for the February 20th movement.

In most conceptions of resource mobilization theory, human resources usually are exactly these elite—ones who are conscientious and demand change with secure enough finances to support the cause. The February 20th movement is experiencing an interesting reversal of this reality, in that they now need to mobilize the rest of the population. This population does not have financial capital to contribute but they provide the human mass that immediately threatens political parties and by extension, the regime. As Madani mentioned, in order to mobilize this group they must understand the somewhat complicated idea of a “parliamentary monarchy” as opposed a “constitutional monarchy”. Essentially, the February 20th movement is trying to make the population aware that they are living in a autocracy not a democracy. It is not by mobilizing financial resources but by creating a popular consciousness that the February 20th movement can truly threaten the regime. As Madani concludes, however, this generation made up of individuals and empowered by the freedom of information cannot be controlled forever.

Madani outlines the forces driving the movement and the obstacles. There are major societal and demographic forces that have created the February 20th generation, while the state is conscientiously opening the political system enough to maintain power. In Madani’s evaluation of the February 20th movement, its existence is not surprising and neither is the states reaction. However, the success of its call for democracy depends on the people.

THE GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Bouaya, interview.

I interviewed Mohammad Reda Bouaya, director of the National Institute for Youth and Democracy the day after the April 24th protest. This interview was first translated by a student whose grasp of English was not sufficient so we resorted to using Google Translate to translate his French to English until luckily, a man who had lived in America for twelve years dropped by and served as a translator for the remainder of the interview. Although the language barrier was a hindrance to our understanding of each other, it also forced each of us to be very direct in our questions and answers. He assumed the role as a representative of his organization and deigned to give personal opinions about my questions.

Bouaya explained that his office is responsible for “the development and training of youth political leaders and the integration of citizenship in the society”. The institute gets funding from the Moroccan government through the Ministry of Youth and Sport, as well as through Fredreich Edbert and sometimes from USAID. These organizations both are Western with mission statements that state they are interested in promoting democracy. The programs are nondiscriminatory in terms of ideology—it works with youth involved in political parties from the left, right and center and as well as for politically active youth in universities, schools and government ministries.

Bouaya’s also used external forces to explain the February 20th movement. He immediately explained that, “we are a developing country. We have social, political and economic problems.” He went on to enumerate the social problems including a high unemployment rate and low incomes. The general idea he tried to convey was that the February 20th movement was voicing grievances that had long been part of society.

Bouaya could not give his personal viewpoint but did outline the organization's stance on this on the February 20th movement which consisted of explaining the right to protest in Morocco. He enumerated them as such: "First, all people have the right to peaceful protest. Second, all people have the right to express their expectations and problems while respecting the views of others. Third, this is a country with laws and you must respect the laws of the country." There is openness for political contention in Morocco, Bouaya explained, "the youth can participate and express their opinion through the right forms of communication and dialogue."

Bouaya sees the February 20th movement as being successful in gathering support from different segments of society and recognizing the social and economic problems. It's weakness however, is that it is doing nothing but copying the Arab Spring. "Morocco is different" he said. Bouaya is alluding to the idea of Moroccan exceptionalism, which believes that Morocco's relative stability and liberal society is proof that it does not have the same problems as the rest of the Arab world. The problems can range from such varied issues as despotism, human rights abuses or Islamic fundamentalism. "They're just shouting" Bouaya continued to say to describe the participants of the February 20th movement. "They just want to get on TV," he said. On the whole, he took a pessimistic view on the future of the movement, firmly saying "there is no future for the movement."

The only effect Bouaya could see that the February 20th movement had on the monarchy is that it quickened the pace of reform. The constitutional reform, he explained, "Sooner or later it would happen through the government." As for the political prisoners who had been released on April 14th, their release was preprogrammed." He continued,

aided by our newfound translator, “We’ve been having freedom of speech since the 1960s.” When I asked about the years of lead, he corrected himself, changing to 1996.

As for corruption it is a reality of Moroccan politics, “it’s a problem with the rotten Moroccan mind.” This stretches from the government to the February 20th movement since “most people in the February 20th movement are corruptible.” The king, however, does not suffer from the Moroccan mind according to Bouaya. I asked him why people think that the king is not corrupt if the people he chooses to surround himself with are. First, he immediately reminded me that “I never said the people around the king are corrupt.” Then, he said that while some of those around the king are corrupt, the monarch himself is good.

Throughout Bouaya’s interview emphasized the structural causes of Morocco’s social, economic and political problems. He understood the grievances of the people of the February 20th movement to be valid. These problems, however, were not due to governmental policies but a result of its status as a developing country. The monarchy and government cannot be held accountable for structural problems since these stem from issues outside of their control. As for issues within the system, such as corruption, he blamed those upon a cultural mentality that was endemic to Morocco. These are useful points of view to take since while it does not ignore the issues of the society, it places responsibility on forces beyond any one actor’s control. This transfer of blame gives the state impunity from its own failings and makes protesting the state illogical.

A liberalized autocracy earns its name because it has the trapping of a democracy but continues to exhibit autocratic behaviors. Accordingly, Bouaya continually emphasized the democratic nature of Moroccan society while ignoring autocratic tendencies. Each of these rights and responsibilities he listed adhere to the ideals of democracy and the implication was that the February 20th movement was to act as any other political organization in a democracy. It is important to note that in each of the three rights he listed, the agent was always the protester, who had both the right to contention, but also the responsibility to respect the laws. There was no mention of the government's responsibility to answer the demands of the protester. While Bouaya was using the rhetoric of democracy, he was implying that there is little responsibility that the state has towards the citizen, yet the citizen must respect the state.

For a liberalized autocracy to remain successful, it must maintain its legitimacy. In Morocco this means not only the traditional legitimacy of the king but also his role as a reform-minded king. Adding to this rhetoric of Morocco as a democracy, he continually routinized the February 20th protest movement and made it clear that the state was acting independent of the demands of the movement. All of these actions are simply part of the democratic transition process that the king started as he took power. This political opening in response to protests is a classic tactic of a liberalized autocracy. Furthermore, he belittled the protesters themselves, making it clear that their true aims in protesting was glamour and were corruptible. Obviously, such people could not viably criticize the king or even critique it. This argument legitimizes the king's centrality in the state by maintaining that it accurately representing the needs of the people.

Bouaya constructs a paradigm of the Moroccan political system that firmly maintains the monarchy as the legitimate arbiter of power in Morocco. He does recognize issues in Moroccan society, but those are caused by structural issues outside of state control. Furthermore, the protesters do not present a viable alternative to the state's power and their critiques are misguided and methods are improper. All of these elements create a vision of the state that reinforces the dominance of the monarchy in a liberalized autocracy.

THE OUSTED LEADER⁵⁵

Said Benjabli is the self-proclaimed leader of the February 20th protest movement, which is a self-proclaimed leaderless movement. His claim rests on the fact that he was the first one to create the February 20th movement Facebook group, although technically he only changed the name from "Moroccan's Communicate Directly With Mohammad VI." His legitimacy has been recognized by the United States State Department, who flew him to America recently to participate on various panels and allow him to experience the nation. He is also frequently quoted in foreign papers as a representative of the movement. As the movement has progressed, however, Benjabli has been ostracized, even losing his administrator status of the group he created. Benjabli was there from the beginning, but his methods did not follow with the rest of the movement.

Benjabli has had a long experience with political and digital activism. His activist credentials include a long involvement with the PJD, which ended with a five-month

⁵⁵ Benjabli, interview.

prison sentence after he protested a new education law by ripping an exam paper. During that time he decided to leave the PJD after developing his own idea of secularism, explaining that “you develop your own ideas in prison, you can’t develop your ideas as part of a group.” Before his involvement with the February 20th movement he was the president of the Moroccan Bloggers Association and now he is a writer for Hespress.com, which he says is the top news site in Morocco.

The beginning of the February 20th movement surprised Benjabli. After the name change, Said watched his group increase to 15,000 members in 20 days. At first, he chose to be anonymous in the creation of his page, because he knew that he would become a target of the government. He only revealed himself at the end to “give the page credibility.” Immediately after identifying himself, he became the object of slander produced by, according to Benjabli, the government and opposition groups who “named me gay, nonbeliever and traitor.” As it became clear that what had began on Facebook was going to be a movement, there rose various groups with differing conceptions of what the future of the movement should be. His ideas were not accepted by most of the February 20th movement and though a process that Benjabli did not specify, he was ousted from his role in the movement. Now, he takes a highly critical stance on the way the movement’s strategy, organization and future.

Benjabli also explains the beginning of the February 20th movement with outside factors. As Madani did, he sees the freedom of information that the Internet provides as a key catalyst for the emergence of the protest movement in Morocco. The Arab Uprising provided the inspiration, “we are now seeing that Morocco is living in the past. We want to live in our times.” He further explains that the combination of free information and a

modernized mentality means that the ineffectiveness of government has now become unacceptable to the general population. This has created a frustration in the population that is aimed entirely at the government, “We know there are many problems. We also now know the solutions. We can see the problems, we can see the solutions, and we see that the government does nothing. There are resources, intelligent men, and the government does nothing.” The final piece is that there is no longer violent oppression to protests, “now the government cannot kill hundreds. There has been a change in mentality.” Benjabli attributes the February 20th movement with an opening of society, state and information, which has created a new mentality in Morocco that is supportive of protest movements.

To Benjabli, leadership has always been a problem with in contentious Moroccan politics. Before the beginning of the Arab Spring, Benjabli attempted to bring together different groups such as political parties, labor unions and human rights groups with “no results” He outlined the reasons for his failure. First, “I am loser man.” Second, the prevailing mentality of “ideology before goals”, which he labeled as an “Arab and Moroccan problem.” Third, “people like things clear with a plan”, which is challenging when unifying differing sectors of society. The fourth reason for failure, was “we need more time.”

This organizational strategy according to Benjabli, is not sustainable. Benjabli contends that “leadership is necessary for in movements that want change. Without leaders we are only pawns of the parties.” Without leadership, the February 20th movement is vulnerable to being manipulated, which Benjabli believes is happening now as children of political party members rise to prominence within the movement and try to

enact their parent's policies. While the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions were led by "real activists" the youth of the February 20th movement are "fake heroes." The February 20th movement he believes "N'est pas normal," meaning it is not authentic.

"We are making a new revolution with old tools," as a result of the dependency on previous generations. He points to the graphic style adopted by the movement saying it tries to evoke bygone revolutions, "What is the color of the February 20th movement? Black. The color of freedom should be yellow, or green, or blue, but not black." Some of the protesters even refuse to have their photos taken, which Benjabli finds ludicrous, "We are a Facebook revolution, we can't have a Facebook revolution without pictures. It is not creative, just like other generations." In order to be truly successful, the February 20th movement must embrace a new ideology.

Despite these failings of the movement, Benjabli remains hopeful. He does not believe that real change will come with the constitutional reform, but instead will come in the next two or three years. He, as Madani, believes that the February 20th movement represents a change in the mentality of contentious politics in Morocco.

Benjabli provides insight into the creation of a movement through Facebook—the viral mushrooming of members, the power and pitfalls of anonymity and the lack of cohesion that ousted him from his role. He gives a first hand account of the state's attempt to discredit individuals of the movement, though importantly, no one spoke out against the movement's right to exist, again demonstrating the balance Morocco maintains between democracy and autocracy. He emphasizes, however the power of free information in not only creating a new movement but also a new consciousness among

the population. This sort of mass dissemination of information is what interconnected social networks thrive on. This change in mentality is what Benjabli believes is to be the legacy of the February 20th movement, even if they do not achieve their immediate goals. This new type of movement seems to Benjabli to be creating a new form of political society.

Benjabli was, as a whole, critical of the organizational strategy of the February 20th movement, seeing this as its major weakness. His assessment of the lack of leadership questions the effectiveness of the fluid, diffuse networks of organization that loosely bind ISMs. His experience of being ousted from a leadership position may have colored his perceptions of the movement, although this does not make his criticisms invalid. As a result, the movement is liable to be corrupted by outside forces, lack a guiding strategy to allow it to negotiate the state's tactics and creates a reliance on traditional concepts of revolution.

Benjabli's disappointment in not succeeding in uniting different sectors of the activist community earlier was palpable, but in outlining these failures, he was contextualizing the success of the February 20th movement. As young protesters they are automatically charismatic. Also, as a leaderless movement without an ideology, they are united by their demands, which provide enough clarity that other activist organizations are eager to be supportive rather than be divided by ideals. The existence of dissonance among protest groups also speaks to the influence of liberalized autocracy on even oppositional, extra-institutional politics in Morocco. By specializing within an autocratic system, the state does not perceive the movement as a threat to its legitimacy and the state is more likely to meet the demands of the people. While this empowers individual

movements, it allows the state to “divide and rule” as Brumberg outlined. By completely eschewing an explicit ideology, the February 20th movement has been able to accomplish what other movements have not, and unite all facets of contentious politics.

THE YOUNG ACTIVIST⁵⁶

Omar Radi is 25 years old, but he has been involved in politics for ten years. He first joined the anti-globalization group ATTAC when he was sixteen, since then he has been involved in such widely publicized campaigns such as the one against the Ramadan fast and also with the Casablanca Tansiquiyat, where he was part of the ten people who first proposed the February 20th movement. He now works as an independent journalist, writing for Les Echos and volunteering his services for Lakome.com. He has become something of a spokesman for the movement and its supporters, frequently participating in debates covering topics such as civil liberties in Morocco or the future of the constitutional reform. Radi shrugs off his involvement the movement, saying “I’ve been a militant activist for many years, it corresponds.” I met him at the April 24th protest, and we later met to interview on April 26th and May 6th.

Radi explains the February 20th movement as being partially inspired by the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia and also being facilitated by the freedom of information and organizational capacity of Facebook. He sees the February 20th movement as coming from a long history of protest in Morocco, saying for years “the only way to make change in states like Morocco is to protest.” It is only recently with the February 20th movement that there has been a change across protest movements, “now there is a new mentality

⁵⁶ Radi, interview.

that we need to strengthen and we need to unify.” The unity comes from the demands of the movement, which this is not surprising since, according to Radi, these demands surfaced in the 70s and include “freedom of expression, freedom to create political parties and ending antidemocratic practices.” Since then, different political organizations have specialized in certain demands, but on Facebook “the youth synthesized them and published a call.” The February 20th movement is able to rally so much support from political groups with such opposing ideologies specifically because these demands are “common points of all the ideologies.”

Radi sees connections between these demands and global movements. To him, the demands themselves are universal rights. His conception of these values as universal stems from his opinions of globalization; he supports a non-exploitative globalization, believing that the transfer of technology and ideas across cultures is good. He names “democracy, justice and equality” as universal human rights, and ones that Moroccans, as well as all other citizens, are entitled to. He mentioned that he personally had been inspired by other activists such as the 2001 Argentina uprisings in the wake of the economic crisis and also the Battle of Seattle, but others drew inspiration from other sources. Radi, however, is not interested in theories. He sees them as byproducts of academia that do not necessarily explain reality. Most importantly they are not useful in guiding the actions of movements.

As for the leaderless organization of the February 20th movement, Radi sees it as nothing new, and merely a matter of practicality. “How do you organize 100 different February 20th movements in 100 different cities? If we spend all of our time trying to form a hierarchy and talking about leadership, we will not get anything done.” After all,

“if there is a head of the organization, the state can kill, well, neutralize the head.” It is more than a matter of survival to Radi, goals are simply more important than creating an ideology. He points out that the February 20th movement is not only protesting but holding meetings across the country, creating change and proposals. As a side note, he mentioned that he had the idea to have a picnic next to the secret detention center of Temara.

Radi explains that the February 20th movement makes many of its decisions in a highly decentralized manner. There are weekly meetings of coordinations of the February 20th movement in many of the major cities. At these meetings, a few people volunteer and then are elected to lead the meeting, where they cover topics that are proposed, also, by the mass. There are a few officials within the movement, but mainly to operate the logistics, such as a communication officer who connects the different coordinations, represents the movement to the press or releases statements, such as the open letter to the performing artists of Mawazine. This anarchistic form of organization evolved organically, according to Radi, and is enabled by Facebook.

I should note, however, other activists I talked to do not agree upon that Radi’s explanation of how the February 20th movement operates. These differing viewpoints on the organizational strategy of the February 20th movement may be a result on the fact that they don’t have one. Since this movement is constantly evolving and has only been in existence for a few months, it may be too soon to define its strategy.

Overall, Radi is very optimistic about the future of the February 20th movement. However, he mentioned that there is the possibility that if the king begins to answer with repression, the movement could “radicalize” and there could be violence. Barring that

possibility, the movement does not want to become a political party “they just want to [support] the change and after that reorganize the political scene.” Their role would be to give credibility to some parties, to support other parties, perhaps even create other parties, according to Radi. While he did not specify a guiding ideology for this new role, he said it would merely be “the change they want.”

Radi takes an interesting position among activists. He is the archetype of a member of an ISM, in that he is steeped in a globalized political discourse, applies them to his immediate context and then uses the Internet to mobilize. As both a print and online journalist Radi takes an active role in disseminating alternative information to the Moroccan population. As an activist, he applies the lessons from international organizations to the Moroccan context, melding strategies to create innovative forms of protest. While Radi does not exemplify all members of the February 20th movement, an archetype that does not exist, his brand of activism has shaped the way in which the movement relates to the state.

This education makes the ISM form of organization seem very logical. The Internet enables expansive, horizontal organization so that hierarchies become irrelevant. Without this form of communication organizing 100 different coordinations in 100 cities would necessitate the creation of a chain-of-command. To Radi, it is self-evident that the construction of a hierarchy would distract from the overall goals of the movement. The precedent of goals over organization and ideology, as I have mentioned, allows the movement to create a unified front.

The future political role Radi proposes for the movement defies easy categorization. It seems contradictory—it is concerned with politics, but is not a political party. It could be called a civil society organization, but how can such an organization be sustained without a guiding ideology? The best description may be that F20 would operate as a civil society organization and later develop an ideology that extrapolates from their demands. It could resemble the universal rights that Radi mentions without being placed on an ideological spectrum. The possibility of further repression leading to radicalization and violence, however, demonstrates that despite the successes of the movement, the state still exercises some control over the future of the movement. Radi presents the new logic of protests created by the paradigm of ISMs and extends it to a new political opening in Morocco.

CONCLUSIONS

The case on February 20th is not yet closed. A true conclusion on the topic must wait for years to determine the impact of this movement. Throughout this paper I have tried to connect the events of the movement to broader theories in order to provide a framework to analyze it. I have demonstrated how Morocco shows many of the characteristics of liberalized autocracy. It uses many of the strategies to maintain and centralize power: fragmented dissonant oppositional politics; strategic political reforms and openings; and claims to legitimacy both by representation of the people, tradition and religion; all of which pose real challenges to efforts towards full democracy. In lieu of the

emergence of an active political society with enough power to contest the monarchy's a liberalized autocracy can maintain power indefinitely.

Political opportunity, however, can come from outside of the regime's sphere of influence. The Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions provided an example to Moroccan activists, a threat to the monarchy and challenge the long-held notion of endemic Arab autocracy. This opening in the political sphere allow for the emergence of the February 20th movement. This movement adapted the strategies of ISMs to Morocco's reality. Social networking sites create "virtual public spheres" that allow free alternative information to reach a large audience. This creates a new consciousness, spurring the people to mobilize. The organization of the movement is highly decentralized, depending on local nodes called "coordinations." The movement is united by goals that are spread through the Internet, eschewing any certain ideology.

As of now, the February 20th movement has had some measurable success in challenging the Moroccan regime, though it has not succeeded in dismantling it. First, it has created the biggest grassroots mobilization in Morocco's history. It has succeeded in uniting social movements across the political spectrum through their demands for a full democracy. Second, it has forced the monarchy to respond to their demands either directly or indirectly—the creation of a constitutional reform commission, the release of political prisoners, the raising of the minimum wage, the monarchy's disengagement from SNI—addressing economic, social, human rights and corruption problems. There also have been responses in the political realm with the radicalization of parties. Additionally, with the emergence of the protest movement, there also has been an opening of the media in Moroccan society with traditional media becoming more critical

of the regime and online news sources gaining prominence. These changes all point to a creation of a fledgling active political society.

It must be noted, however, that many of these changes may be part of the “unvirtuous circle” that Brumberg alluded to, they may be temporary openings of a regime under pressure. The constitutional commission is expected to follow the guidelines of reform set by the king, as will the other political parties, social and civil society organizations that are invited to contribute. The release of political prisoners, while significant, only constitutes a small portion of the population of prisoners thought to be unjustly held. Also, the unity achieved by the February 20th movement is tenuous at best and could fracture the movement prematurely. As of yet, the monarchy has not installed any major structural changes, or seceded any meaningful powers.

Nevertheless, it appears that the February 20th movement may have a lasting impact on the balance of power in Morocco. As Langman notes, the decentralized organization of ISMs, their primary existence on the Internet and their broad, sweeping goals have meant that they live for an unusually long time. While this does not ensure any success, it does point to the potential for creating a new force within the politics of Morocco. Some of the more durable changes of the February 20th movement can be found on the Internet. Social networking tools, which seem to have installed themselves as part of the fabric of society, can double as a new public space for political discussion. The new media outlets such as Lakome.com and Mamfakinch.com could become online institutions that provide news, opinion and discussion outside of state control. Finally, the young organizers of February 20th have learned the important lessons of organizing, mobilizing and navigating the politics of protest.

These changes are admittedly ephemeral and vulnerable to suppression by the state. Though, while a liberalized autocracy has many repressive characteristics, it still derives its legitimacy from an appearance of freedom and democracy. On May 25, 2007 the state-owned Maroc Telecom banned access to YouTube, allegedly because of some posting that were critical of the king and pro-Polisario. After a general outcry and condemnation by Human Rights Watch and other watchdog organizations, the site was back on. The Internet and a citizen's unfettered access has become an unalienable right, and if the Moroccan state attempts to block it, it risks its legitimacy. The Internet combined with group of activists, may be able to lead to a change in the general consciousness of the Moroccan citizen.

As of yet, there is no proof of a new mentality among Morocco, but there is sentiment of hope that can be gleaned from the interviews. Madani, Benjabli and Radi all pointed to a changing mentality in Moroccans as the most significant contribution of the February 20th movement. As Madani said, "you cannot control a generation." While the movement may fracture, be co-opted by the state or simply fizzle, out the demands and its promises will remain in this generation's consciousness. The February 20th movement has introduced a new form of social mobilization, a new unifying rhetoric for demands and a new imperative for change.

In closing, I will tell a small story. I took a late night train home from Marrakech to Rabat on the night of April 20th, exactly two months after the first protest. At one o'clock in the morning, the car was a mixture of sleeping passengers, teenagers glued to their computers, old women chatting among each other and a few men in the back singing and smoking cigarettes. The men came into the car, still lively and one asked loudly if

anyone was sleeping. If they were, it didn't matter because he began to wax poetic on some subject of great importance. With my minimal Arabic, most of what he said is a mystery to me, but I could pick out some phrases "20th of February", "King", "constitution" and "democracy." This sparked a conversation among his friends, with the car beginning to stir. Gradually, fellow passengers began to contribute each seemingly unable to resist. Then one older woman stood up, said "Excuse me, but...", gave her opinion and the entire car entered into debate. What exactly was discussed that night, I don't know. I got off at the next station. But this opening of public space into one of political discussion is the legacy of the February 20th movement.

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