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Re-Branding Moroccan Identity

Cultural Policies and the Stabilisation of
Monarchic Power

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To my dear parents
Stephan and Gabriele Wüst
and my beloved twin Eva Wüst
in eternal gratitude for their
unconditional love and support.

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List of Abbreviations

ADER – Agency for the Development and Rehabilitation of the Medina of Fès (earlier: Agency for the Dedensification and Rehabilitation of the Medina of Fès)

AFD – French Development Agency

Agence Bouregreg – Agency for the re-organisation of the Bouregreg Valley

ALESCO – Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization

AMEE – Moroccan Agency For Energy Efficiency

ANDZOA – Agence de développement des zones oasiennes et de l’arganier

AVIBAT – Victims’ Association of the Tazmamart Prison

CCDH – Consultative Council for Human Rights

CCME – Council of the Moroccan Community Living Abroad

CCR – Consultative Regionalisation Commission

CDG – Caisse de dépôt et de gestion

CERKAS – Centre de conservation et de Réhabilitation du patrimoine architectural Atlasique et Subatlasique

CNDH – National Council for Human Rights (successor of CCDH since 2011)

CNLCM – National Council for Moroccan Languages and Culture

CSO – Higher Council of Oulema

CESE – Economic, Social and Environmental Council

DGAI – General Directorate of Internal Affairs

DGAPR – General Delegation for Prison Administration and Reintegration

FAV – Foundation of Living Arts

FITUR – Madrid International Tourism Fair

FMDT – Moroccan Tourism Development Fund

FNM – National Museum Foundation

FVJ – Moroccan Forum for Truth and Justice

GIZ – Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

Habous Ministry – Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs

HACA – High Authority of Audiovisual Communication

ICESCO – Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

INDH – National Initiative for Human Development

IAI – Independent Arbitration Commission

ICTJ – International Center for Transitional Justice

IER – Equity and Reconciliation Commission

INSAP – National Institute of Archaeology and Heritage Studies

IRCAM – Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture

IRES – Royal Institute of Strategic Studies

MAP – Maghreb Arabe Presse (official Moroccan Press Agency)

MCC – Millenium Challenge Corporation

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

MMVI – Mohammed VI Museum for Modern and Contemporary Art

MUR – Unity and Reform Movement

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

ONA – Omnium Nord-Africain (ONA Group)

PAM – Party for Authenticity and Modernity

PJD – Party for Justice and Development

POLISARIO (Front) – Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro

Rabita Mohammedia – Rabita Mohammedia of Moroccan Oulema

RNI – National Rally of Independents

SDL – Society of Local Development

SNRT – National Society for Radio and Television

UCLGA – United Cities and Local Governments of Africa

UFSP – Socialist Union of Popular Forces

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNWTO – United Nations World Tourism Organization

Foreword

When I first visited Morocco in early 2018, I was blown away by the bright colours and unknown perfumes of the spice and fruit piles in the freshly renovated souks, the huge pots of pigeon poo and coloured liquids in the traditional tanneries, the freshly peeled animals skins and the beautiful babouches in the alleys, the lively hustle of people with their groceries, the delivery men with their chariots and donkeys yelling at the tourists in their way, my old, hence a bit dusty riad providing typical breakfast and tajine on a rooftop terrace that offered a panoramic view of the whole medina. It was not my first time in the MENA region, though. In 2015, still a Classics student, I had spent two months for an internship with the German Hanns-Seidel Foundation in Tunis, working on decentralisation and women's empowerment. At the peak of Islamist terror in Europe and in Tunisia, thanks to my dear friend and then-regional representative of the foundation, Dr Said AlDailami, I had learned a lot about the region, confronted myself with my own stereotypes and prejudices about its people, their religion and traditions. However, what I experienced in the narrow, labyrinthic streets of the old town of Fès corresponded so much to my prior assumptions and clichés about the „Arabo-Islamic” world in general that I felt myself catapulted into a dream of 1001 nights. Still, as a Classics student back in 2015, I had worked for a French editor of books on antiquity writing travel reports on Tunisia,¹ and completed an internship with the Goethe Institute in Brussels which had sensitised me to the role of cultural policies in the political game. With this experience in mind, I was also surprised by how differently Morocco and Tunisia dealt with their cultural heritage. While I did not have the impression, that beyond tourism purposes, the Carthaginian or even Islamic legacy did play a major role in Tunis, I was surprised to what extent the maintenance of historical monuments appeared to be a national priority in Morocco. When I left Fès to meet Dr Jochen Lobah, then-head of the Moroccan office of Hanns-Seidel-Foundation in Rabat, the contrast with Fès and even Tunis could not have been starker in my eyes – the streets were neat and tidy, the green of the grass in the parks and along the boulevards was luscious from the daily irrigation, the traffic was well organised, not chaotic and noisy at all and the drivers could compete with Northern European discipline. At the same time, seeing all the construction sites and policemen along the way, my first impression was also one of dynamic development, wealth and safety. I met Jochen at the famous Café Maure, one of the most iconic and most beautiful places of the Moroccan capital, situated in the historic city fortress, the Kasbah des Oudayas, next to the Andalusian gardens and above the Bouregreg River. We ordered

¹ Wüst (2015a, 2015b).

Moroccan mint tea and ate traditionally made cookies. At that time, little did I know about Morocco, its rich history and its complex political system. Within only a few moments, we had a deep conversation about the current socio-political trends in the kingdom. It was this conversation that first inspired me to compare Tunisia and Morocco, two countries so different in their history, political system and current developments. Around that time, Tunisia experienced its first general frustration from the slow speed of political reforms and a deep economic depression after the 2011 revolution and the terror attacks of Sousse and the Bardo Museum in Tunis. In Morocco, in turn, everything seemed to have remained the same, the monarchy appeared as safely in power and stable as before the uprisings and the boom in the country was visible (yet maybe not tangible) for everyone. When I went home from this first trip to the Sherifian Kingdom, I left the country with a lot of questions in mind and the certainty that this would not be my last encounter with the region. When I graduated from university, I therefore decided to leave behind my plans to become a teacher of Latin and ancient Greek. Instead, I started a thesis about regime stability in the wider MENA region. However, the initial optimistic plan to compare the different regime types of Tunisia, Morocco, and Mali regarding the role of cultural policies in power maintenance was soon curtailed by global events. After my first field trip weeks to Morocco in February/March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced me to leave the country and abandon the idea of a comparison. I decided to continue with a single case study on Morocco. By that time, I was not even unhappy about the choice since I had come to realise how much the kingdom provided in terms of data material. The numerous encounters and conversations I had with both Moroccan officials and civil society, as well as the extensive media analysis I conducted, allowed me to correct many of my homogeneous concepts about the country's social and political dynamics while leaving me with a lot of questions. An incident that I personally found particularly striking was the demolition of Café Maure in July 2020, the very café at the heart of Kasbah des Oudayas, which had provided me with my first academic acquaintance in Morocco two years before. While the civil society of Rabat and Moroccan media ran havoc against this decision, the Moroccan authorities claimed that the demolition happened in accordance with international regulations under which the site was protected due to its integration into the ensemble protected by UNESCO since 2012. UNESCO, however, denied having been informed about the dismantlement whereas the authorities announced that the café would be reopened after static stabilisation works and the removal of unauthentic and unauthorised architectural elements to refind its original appearance of 1920.² This incident and the way the regime seized the COVID-19 lockdowns to engineer its

² Cf. Belhaj Soulami (2020); O. Bennani (2020a); Yousfi and Lefébure (2020); Zamane (2020).

identitarian narrative about Moroccan authenticity while managing public opposition and appealing, legitimately or not, to international organisations motivated me to continue my research and learn more about the ambiguities of Moroccan cultural policies and their role in Moroccan power maintenance. By the end of 2020, however, the triangular deal between the USA, Morocco and Israel on the recognition of Morocco's claims on the Western Sahara and the normalisation of diplomatic relations between Morocco and Israel yielded a diplomatic crisis between Germany and Morocco in 2021. Once again, this entailed major problems with regard to my data collection and even called into question my shift towards a single case study. If, despite these obstacles, I still managed the transition from Classics to political science and submitted this thesis, it is thanks to some fantastic people who encouraged me to persevere on my academic journey. Feelings are best expressed in one's mother tongue. I, therefore, hope for my readers' indulgence if the following acknowledgements and credits are provided only in German.

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³ AlDailami and Wüst (2019).

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1. Introduction and Research Question

Studies into political stability have multiplied with the popular uprisings and the toppling of regimes in the MENA region since 2011. The factors that led to the protests and ultimately to the overthrow of many state leaders in the MENA region were diverse. For example, the Human Development Report of 2011 emphasised that the high unemployment rate among educated young people under 25, who make up over 50% of the population in these states, needs to be interpreted as a key factor for the political upheaval in the region (UNDP 2011, p. 24).⁴ Similarly, Jack Goldstone (2011) argued that the „sultanistic dictatorships” in the MENA region produced young, ambitious citizens by promoting their economy and education without living up to the expectations that they rose. Like Bassam Tayara (2011), Goldstone also believed that the frustrated youth no longer wanted to accept corruption and the unjust distribution of wealth, which was increasingly visible throughout the country thanks to whistleblowers and the new media. In addition to these economic factors, Gregory Gause III (2011) also emphasised the complicated relationship that many state leaders have with their military, who were no longer willing to defend their unloved leaders against the resentment of the streets, quickly spreading across the borders in a kind of new Arabism. In a similar vein, George Joff  (2011) stressed economic factors by analysing the consequences of the global economic crisis on prices and employment rates in the region. He also explained how small liberalisations with regard to civil rights, executed under foreign pressure, got out of hand as they led to large movements demanding more freedom. In later research and in light of the puzzle of why some regimes in the MENA region have crumbled since 2011 while others remain stable, questions like „How Arab Monarchies Hang On“ (Yom & Gause 2012) or „Why the modest harvest?“ (Brownlee et al. 2013) arose. Also, studies that reconsidered the „Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East” (Bellin 2012) emerged – sometimes with an implicit democratic teleology bias that still often characterises political science research. Over the last twenty years, the tenaciousness of regimes in the region has been explained by their repressive capacities (Bellin 2012; Josua & Edel 2015), their ability to forge and maintain internal, regional and international coalitions (Gause III 2013; Yom & Gause 2012), their adaptiveness to new situations in terms of authoritarian learning and diffusion (Bank & Edel 2015; Heydemann 2007, 2024; Heydemann & Leenders 2014), their capacity to co-opt relevant groups into the system (Josua 2016b; Lust-Okar 2005), the role of rent distribution from oil revenue and the hereditary nature

⁴ In this book academic literature and official documents are referenced directly in the text (except supplementary information). Media reports, public speeches and interviews are quoted in footnotes.

of the monarchies in Morocco, Jordan and the Gulf region⁵ as well as procedural adaptations (Bank et al. 2014). Other researchers evoke social reasons that made some authoritarian regimes in the region more resilient against revolution than others. The capacity of relevant societal actors to create visible symbols of popular discontent determined protest dynamics, while the refusal of such actors (like religious leaders) to give their public support for demonstrations led by marginal groups helped to prevent these cascades of protest (M. Mekouar 2016). The fact that this pattern of resilience can be observed especially in the Arab monarchies, points towards the successful instauration of a new pan-royal identity, which facilitated authoritarian learning manifesting itself in policy convergence and collaboration among these Arab monarchies in fields such as „societal policing, sectarian inflammation, media suppression” (Yom 2016). This means that societal and international components alike matter for authoritarian regime persistence.⁶ In the wake of the so called Arab uprisings, researchers have recently shown increasing interests in international engagement (Kneuer & Demmelhuber 2020a; Zumbrägel 2020), decentralisation policies (Bohn & Vollmann 2021; Demmelhuber & Sturm 2021; Houdret & Harnisch 2019; Vollmann & Bohn 2021; Vollmann et al. 2022), migration issues (S. Benjelloun 2021; Natter 2021; Roll 2018; Werenfels 2018). Also environmental policies (Nicolai 2020; Zumbrägel 2017, 2019) and even sport policies (Al-Arian 2022; Amara 2014, 2022; Amara & Bouandel 2022; Bouandel & Amara 2019; Fatès 2010) have been investigated to explain the persistence of authoritarian rule in the MENA region.

Yet, some have also looked into the cultural components of regime stabilisation. There are indications that cultural aspects such as the instrumentalisation of religion and tradition played a role in the longevity of the autocratic regimes in the MENA region before the uprisings of 2011 (Schlumberger 2010). In retrospect, however, the desire of underprivileged ethnic minorities and other cultural groups for social or political participation, free religious practice and respect for traditional ways of life also need to be acknowledged as reasons for the upheavals in the region. Within this strand of literature, questions of identity have been at the centre of academic interest. For instance, Thomas Hüsken (2011) showed how the tribal structures, privileges and traditions on which the Libyan state system had been based and which had been a guarantee of stability for a long time became increasingly unattractive for poorer, politically disadvantaged tribes and, most importantly, for young people. He argued that this finally led to cultural alienation that would culminate in the revolution of 2011.

⁵ According to Brownlee et al. (2013), this argument also applies to the hereditary personal regime of Syria. For the importance of hereditary succession in authoritarian regimes, also see Brownlee (2007).

⁶ For a more comprehensive overview, see Bank (2018)

In turn, Vollmann and Zumbrägel (2018) describe how, even in the post-2011 era, autocratic regimes like Saudi Arabia try to foster their legitimacy by forging a national identity that builds upon religion, neo-traditionalism and othering. Negotiating the place of religion and cultural diversity in modern Arab states has been an important factor for social cohesion and a crucial element in political processes ever since the uprisings in the MENA region (Grote et al. 2016). Also, in Tunisia's transition phase after the ousting of Ben Ali, the debate about the country's cultural identity was a crucial issue in the constitution writing process (Perez 2016) and in the process of determining the political orientation of the post-2011 ruling parties around Ennahda (Wolf 2013, 2017). In Morocco and Algeria, careful management of cultural diversity through procedural and institutional co-option as well as buy-offs of major linguistic groups has led to (relative) popular support for the regimes (Daoudi 2018; Moha Ennaji 2014a; Iratni 2014; MacDonald 2021; Maddy-Weitzman 2015, 2022; Wyrzten 2014). Reforms and a progressing bureaucratisation in the religious field have provided the Moroccan regime with religious legitimacy (Daadaoui 2011; Dennaoui 2024; Maghraoui 2009; Wainscott 2017; Zeghal 2008). Furthermore, the Moroccan monarchy uses cultural policies as a soft-power instrument to garner international support in the Western Sahara issue and thereby aims at fostering the monarchy's authoritarian rule (Wüst & Nicolai 2022).

In recent times, one of the most compelling concepts to understand the durability of authoritarian regimes in the MENA region through the cultural lens has been proposed by Demmelhuber and Thies (2023). They suggested the concept of „sentimentality” to deconstruct the cultural and historical references and narratives used by autocratic leaders to inspire their people with a new sense of belonging (Demmelhuber & Thies 2023). By sentimentality, they

„understand [...] a relational code of communication relying on a broad set of emotional repertoires that oscillate between the present and the past and allow certain forms of relationality between different temporal dimensions. They are experienced on an individual level but are reciprocally interwoven with the collective level; in other words, they are a social-relational phenomenon [...] The concept of sentimentality is inspired but goes beyond debates around nostalgia, foundational myths, collective memories and retrotopian thought that have entered the literature on autocracies in more recent years without reflecting on the initial debates around these terms in neighbouring disciplines (eg philosophy, and literary and cultural studies)” (Demmelhuber & Thies 2023, p. 1004).

In their study, they analysed three registers of sentimentality, namely a) the construction/stylisation of national icons, heroes and/or role models, b) spatial manifestations in cultural heritage sites where the past is re-configured to create a new national identity, and c) the propagation and dissemination via communication channels. They demonstrated that cultural and historical repertoires are instruments used by these states' regimes to „create trajectories for the national transformation into a post-oil economy, or at least one that is less dependent on resource-related businesses” (Demmelhuber & Thies 2023, p. 1004). By referring

to commonly shared experiences, values and beliefs, autocratic leaders stir emotions that bolster their image as defenders of national identity. While this conceptual approach is very convincing, the scope of its empirical underpinning is limited to the Gulf monarchies that have both sufficient financial capacities and, in the absence of significant opposition (except for Bahrain), the political space to pull these registers. It is questionable to what extent these registers also apply to non-petrol states in the region.

My research, therefore, inscribes itself in this strand of research, which examines the persistence of autocratic rule in the MENA region from a cultural point of view. To do so, I chose Moroccan cultural policies as a case study. This choice corresponds to appropriate theoretical and empirical considerations: Firstly, selecting a country with a sufficiently manifest cultural diversity was essential. This would provide my study with a promising host of analysable material. Secondly, it was necessary to identify a country with a long tradition of autocratic rule that does not build on a massive rentier system to uphold the rulers' power. In oil-exporting states like the Gulf countries, by consequence, it would be difficult to identify whether cultural policies are applied as a nice-to-have appendix to a massive buy-off policy or as an essential part of regime stabilisation. Therefore, all petrol states were ruled out from the beginning of my study.⁷ Thirdly, given my limited knowledge of Arabic and the minimal requirements for safety standards for critical academic research, especially in the COVID-19 context, it was unavoidable also to apply pragmatic selection criteria. I ended up with Morocco, an oil-poor country with limited financial resources,⁸ ruled by a hereditary monarchy with a long autocratic spell.⁹

Many studies have emphasised the prominent role of religion to legitimise and uphold the Moroccan monarchy (Aourid 2021; Boussouf 2018; Daadaoui 2011; Dennaoui 2024; Geertz

⁷ For the dynamics of rent generation and distribution from oil revenue in Middle Eastern states, see Luciano (2005).

⁸ The International Monetary Fund (2019) lists Morocco as one of the oil-importing countries of the MENA region. Yom and Gause (2012), as well as Brownlee et al. (2013) list Morocco among the states with no hydrocarbon rents. By 2021, Morocco's GDP per capita was almost half (7.303 USD) of the Arab average (13.501 USD), but it was approximately double that of Sub-Saharan African states (3.699 USD). As per the Human Development Index Morocco ranked 123 among all 191 states. Some authors, however, question the generally accepted view of Morocco not being a rentier state. Bank et al. (2014) admit that Morocco has only modest rent distribution capacities but argue that financial and military support from third countries like the Gulf states, USA and France make Morocco a semi-rentier. Yahmi (2024) argued that Morocco's economy relies on remittances from emigrants and from bargains with EU states to hold refugees back from European territories. Conversely, El Maarouf and Belghazi (2021) attract attention to royal gifts like a royal pardon that have yielded a widespread rentier mentality in Morocco, undermining and dismantling judicial ruling no matter how serious a crime.

⁹ Cf. Brownlee et al. (2013). Furthermore, the Freedom House report Freedom in the World 2024 lists Morocco as partly free, while V-Dem "Democracy Report 2024 – Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot" classifies the state system as a "closed autocracy" and the Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2024 called the regime a "hard-line autocracy". For a more comprehensive overview of Morocco's key figures see appendix 9.10.

1971; Hammoudi 1997; Munson 1993; Spiegel 2015; Tozy 1992, 1999; Wainscott 2017; Zeghal 2008). In fact, this element is paramount to understanding the mechanisms of Moroccan power maintenance. However, academia has also become aware that religion alone can no longer explain the stability of the Moroccan regime in a globalised environment with almost unlimited access to information from around the globe and a high potential for mass mobilisation through social media. Research on the monarchy's stabilisation techniques has, therefore, also focused on topics as diverse as

- social policies (Hibou & Bono 2016),
- careful opposition management (Albrecht & Wegner 2006; Lust-Okar 2005; Wegner 2010, 2011),
- decentralisation policies (Chahir 2010; Hibou & Tozy 2020; Houdret & Harnisch 2019; Vollmann et al. 2022),
- market liberalisation and neo-liberal policies (Bogaert 2012, 2018; Bogaert & Amarouche 2019; Heydemann 2007; Hibou & Tozy 2020),
- environmental policies (Nicolai 2020, 2023 (to be published)),
- sports policies (Boum 2013b; Lyazghi 2006),
- migration policies (Abourabi 2020; S. Benjelloun 2021; Natter 2021; Werenfels 2018) and
- foreign policies (Abourabi 2020; Fernandez Molina 2016; A. Iraqi 2020),
- including Moroccan soft power (Belhaj 2009; A. Iraqi 2019b; Qaissi 2019; Régragui 2013; Wüst & Nicolai 2022).

In this panoply of studies, it is clear that the success of the respective stabilisation techniques hinges on the specific national context, which is path-dependent on Morocco's history and culture. Nevertheless, the underlying cultural patterns that allow the monarchy to draw upon these elements have been underestimated. Although some authors have worked on Moroccan cultural policies writ large (Adam 1973/1974; Bayahya 2015; Belkebir 2018; Massaïa 2013; Touzani 2003, 2017), few comprehensive studies have analysed cultural policies as a means to power stabilisation.¹⁰ Yet, several authors have singled out some aspects of the matter without always explicitly referring to the maintenance of authoritarian power: The Moroccan kingdom

¹⁰ The work of El Guabli (2023) comes closest to an analysis that encompasses more than one aspect of how cultural policies contribute to fostering authoritarian power structures, namely the regime's reconciliation with Amazigh heritage, Jewish heritage and autocratic past of the Leaden Years. El Maarouf (2012) and Graïouid and Belghazi (2013) described the regime's use of cultural festivals to boost national cohesion in the context of Islamist terrorism.

is a country that, in its struggle against the colonisers and ever since its independence in 1956 (and even before), has been exposed to discussions about national identity. In these discussions, the place of Berbers¹¹ had to be renegotiated (Boukous 2016; Crawford 2005; Di Tolla 2016; El Ibrahimy 2022b; el Khatir 2013; Moha Ennaji 2014a; Idhssaine 2021; Maddy-Weitzman 2011, 2015; Sadiqi 2014a; Silverstein 2011, 2018; Wyrzten 2014). The role of Islam in politics and society had to be redefined both in dogmatic and liturgical way (Aourid 2021; Daadaoui 2011, 2017a, 2017b; Dennaoui 2024; Tozy 1999; Wainscott 2014, 2015, 2017). More recently the Moroccan state rediscovered its Jewish heritage and struggled to make it a politically usable resource (Boum 2010a, 2010b, 2018; Driver 2018; El Guabli 2023; Gottreich 2007b, 2020; Heckman 2021; Kenbib 2016; Schroeter 2008; Zafrani 2005). National discourse also revolved around the future position of Morocco's colonial heritage in its national identity (Adie 2021; Augereau, 2012; Carabelli 2010, 2018; da Silva 2012; Garret 2010; Popp & Aït Hamza 2012; Wagner & Minca 2014) and had to cope with the weight of the traumatic Lead Years under Hassan II's rule (Menin 2019; Nahhass 2017b; Slyomovics 2005, 2009, 2021; Vairel 2019). Many studies mentioned here show that the (re)negotiation of such cultural elements has been a matter of protests and contestation over the last 70 years of independence. However, despite its limited rent distribution potential, the Moroccan monarchy was among the regimes that have survived social uprisings and other forms of contestation since the 1990s up until today, including the so-called Arab Spring of 2011, without taking major damage. Considering the large cultural diversity and the potential for societal unrest it implies, I was confident enough that I would be able to observe the phenomenon of how a non-petrol state with a long autocratic spell and a limited amount of financial resources draws upon cultural policies to uphold authoritarian rule.

Hence, this study discusses how the Moroccan state uses cultural policies to ensure the persistence of the monarchy under King Mohammed VI.

I will argue that the Moroccan regime, long before the outburst of the protests in the MENA region in 2010-2012, has heavily invested in cultural policies to prevent socio-cultural grievances from becoming too dangerous for the monarchy's stability. Hence, cultural questions have been subject to political instrumentalisation already under Hassan II and have continued to serve as a tool of power maintenance ever since King Mohammed VI¹² took over

¹¹ Henceforth called by their own denomination Amazigh (sg.) or Imazighen (pl.) which means "free men".

¹² The transliteration of Arabic names and nouns follows a pragmatic approach, usually adopting either the version used by the person herself or the one most commonly used in Moroccan documents and media. In some cases, the first version used by a source is adopted for the rest of the book.

in 1999. In the 2000s, they were an essential element in the king's partial liberalisation strategy while they also played a crucial role in the simultaneous securitisation of the public sphere. The association of achievements in cultural inclusion and provision of law and order with the king helped the monarchy weather the political storm that ravaged the MENA region at the dawn of the millennium's second decade. When the 2011 regional uprisings broke out and spread to the Sherifian kingdom, the Moroccan officials again resorted to cultural policies to calm down the situation. Since then, the prominence of cultural policies targeting acute problems in society has intensified. This study provides evidence that, in non-rentier states of the MENA region, where cultural grievances are part of the socio-political landscape, cultural policies can be both a direct response to these grievances and a useful tool to accompany social and economic reforms.

2. Structure of the Book

To analyse my research question, I will have to explain how cultural policies and the stabilisation of power are related from a theoretical point of view. This, first of all, necessitates careful definitions of both terms. Beginning with cultural policies, the following chapter elaborates on the implications of a concept, which concentrates on religion, language and historicity as main categories that forge, reproduce and communicate identity. The chapter then gives an overview of how cultural policies are linked to power and power maintenance, drawing upon examples from the literature. After that, I will shed light on the terms „stability” and „stabilisation” by reporting on the current state of academic discussion. I will then elaborate on my understanding of the concept that involves a combination of legitimisation and authoritarian upgrading theories.

Chapter 4 deals with the methodological operationalisation of my conceptual framework. I explain how I combine three main sources – i.e. official documents, expert/elite interviews and Moroccan media – for an in-depth content analysis that uses a set of content markers. The chapter also elaborates on how I coped with the challenge of doing field research despite the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and within the autocratic setting of Morocco in times of diplomatic crisis and rising repression and surveillance.

Chapter 5 is supposed to help the reader understand the historical, social and political references constantly used by the Moroccan monarchy to uphold its rule. It, therefore, provides a short history of Moroccan statehood from antiquity to independence and a brief overview of the conflict lines in the Western Sahara issue. It also explores the defining elements of the Moroccan monarchy by explaining the meaning of the commonly used term „makhzen” to

designate both the Moroccan deep state and the modes of royal conflict resolution. The chapter then offers a definition of key symbols and rituals employed by the monarchy to uphold its power. This includes the monarch's prophetic lineage (*sharaf*), his believed divine blessing (*baraka*), his position of commander of the faithful (*amir al mouminine*), the oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) and the royal pardon.

Chapter 6 dives deep into the empirics of Moroccan cultural policies. The six subchapters each deal with a specific aspect that makes cultural policies an instrument of autocratic power maintenance.

Subchapter 6.1. is dedicated to the monarchy's efforts to reorganise the religious sector. It first sets out to show how the king structurally and legally reaffirmed his position as commander of the faithful in a period when rising Islamist actors and violent extremism weakened his position. The subchapter then turns to the monarchy's monopolisation of Moroccan mosques as transmitters of a shared Muslim identity centred around the king. It then goes on to explore the training of religious experts and how they are deployed to bring loyal narratives into Morocco's educational system and media. Furthermore, it offers an overview of how the monarchy tries to balance repression and co-option of potentially disloyal narratives. The subchapter then sheds light on the role of Morocco's penitentiary system in the resocialisation of radical Islamists and their reconciliation with the Moroccan monarchy. It then concludes by questioning the effectiveness of religious policies in a time when religious narratives alone cannot ensure the legitimisation of the Moroccan regime.

Subchapter 6.2. takes up this thought and argues that the monarchy has installed new actors to broaden the regime's identity discourse and lift it to a new level. The subchapter is hence concerned with the palace's new cultural mainstreaming techniques, which involve the emergence of the National Museum Foundation under the leadership of the king's key lobbyist, Mehdi Qotbi. It analyses the intention behind declaring a museum revolution that yielded the creation of museums all over the country on topics as diverse as contemporary art and Jewish heritage. The subchapter also examines the role of festivals in broadcasting royally sanctioned values of moderation and diversity rooted in an authentic but tolerant Islamic heritage. It then goes on to analyse the increasing importance of cultural tourism in validating the monarchy's economic performance and identity claims. Against this backdrop, the subchapter delves into the reasoning behind the rehabilitation of Morocco's old towns, called *medinas*, before it offers an interpretation of the neoliberal dynamics around cultural megaprojects in Casablanca and Rabat.

Subchapter 6.3. is mainly concerned with the results of the Moroccan truth commission (Equity and Reconciliation Commission), which Mohammed VI launched in the early 2000s to reconcile his people with the state and the monarchy after the horrors of his late father's „Leaden Years“. The subchapter tracks the state of implementation of the communitarian reparation programme, which also involved cultural measures to heal the wounds of oppression and marginalisation. It shows how the procrastination of memorial work and the historiographical redefinition of the past ultimately aims at appeasing societal claims through oblivion or the provision of a royally sanctioned historical narrative.

Subchapter 6.4. focuses on the state's reconciliation with one of the most active opposition groups, i.e. the communities of Amazigh activists. It traces the process of the Imazighen's gradual linguistic integration into Morocco's national identity discourse. Yet, the subchapter also highlights where public sector reforms, education and media are only half-heartedly implemented. It shows the king's political and constitutional manoeuvres to keep a fragile balance between the more conservative proponents of an Arabo-Muslim identity and a more integrative and modernist Amazigh-dominated current. The subchapter concludes by examining Amazigh cultural heritage and its rediscovery by the Moroccan state.

Subchapter 6.5. concentrates on Morocco's decentralisation efforts. It offers a close-up of the cultural implications of the state's territorial reorganisation. It examines where the recommendations of the royal reform commission differ from the ultimately executed territorial reshaping and explains this divergence. The subchapter then proceeds to offer evidence for the monarchy's redefinition of regional identities, which establishes and promotes new cultural centres with new cultural infrastructures while ignoring and curtailing existing cultural claims in the Rif. This subchapter finally shows how cultural policies are used in the Western Sahara to garner international support for Morocco's claims on the region, strengthen the local people's feeling of cultural and political belonging to the Moroccan kingdom and combat competing identity-related narratives promoted by the independence movement POLISARIO Front. In this regard, the subchapter constitutes a lynchpin that links it to the last empirical subchapter, which deals with the internationalisation of culture.

Subchapter 6.6. undertakes to prove that the Moroccan state increasingly uses UNESCO as a battlefield for its geopolitical aspirations and claims about cultural authenticity. It also examines the king's outreach activities that aim at using the global war on terror to bolster his position as commander of the faithful in other countries and vis-à-vis other religious leaders like the pope. It shows how Mohammed VI manages to broadcast his image of religious moderation and

tolerance globally and capitalise on the ostentatious promotion of Morocco's Jewish heritage and African legacy. The chapter concludes by suggesting a correlation between this cultural approach and Morocco's ongoing success in garnering international support for its claims on Western Sahara.

Finally, chapter 7 provides a summary of my empirical findings and discusses ways forward for future research.

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1. Cultural Policies – More than Luxury

3.1.1. Defining Cultural Policies as Policies of Religion, Language and Historicity

The 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions reads as follows: „‘Cultural policies and measures’ refers to those policies and measures relating to culture, whether at the local, national, regional or international level that are either focused on culture as such or are designed to have a direct effect on cultural expressions of individuals, groups or societies, including on the creation, production, dissemination, distribution of and access to cultural activities, goods and services“ (p. 5). To understand this definition, one must consider the meaning of ‚cultural expressions’ as explained in the same convention. In this regard, the document reads: „‘Cultural expressions’ are those expressions that result from the creativity of individuals, groups and societies, and that have cultural content.“ The convention goes on to define „cultural content” as „the symbolic meaning, artistic dimension and cultural values that originate from or express cultural identities.“ From the outset, the member states of the 2005 convention made clear that promoting and protecting cultural diversity is not only an end in itself. Already in the preface of this extraordinary document, they recall „that cultural diversity [...] is indispensable for peace and security at the local, national and international levels“ (p. 1). Furthermore, the member states emphasised „the importance of culture for social cohesion in general“ (p. 2). This definition – as we will see – differs from my own in that the former follows a circular argument by explaining cultural expressions to be those expressions with cultural contents. However, what is remarkable about this document is that state leaders worldwide seem to be aware of the beneficial effects of cultural policies on the social cohesion of their countries. Whether they act accordingly is another story, of course. Despite these international documents, the cultural policy field has often been neglected in systematic analyses of regime stabilisation mechanisms. This applies not only to research into regime persistence but to political science in general, where the literature on cultural policy (especially in authoritarian contexts) is scarce compared

to other policy fields of interest. One reason for this could be seen in the domination of political science concepts from the Global North and the political West. This region is dominated by consolidated democracies. In these states – to put it with Samuel Huntington (1968, p. 34) – „the replacement of a large number of traditional, religious, familial, and ethnic political authorities by a single secular, national political authority” seems to have already been carried out to a large extent. And even where cultural heterogeneity still has conflictual potential, it is mostly dealt with through some kind of federalism along cultural borders, yielding varying degrees of political autonomy to certain cultural groups, as is the case in Canada, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Spain and Italy. Hence, culture is often out of Westerners’ daily political interest (if not understood in the strict sense of arts, music and architecture as part of the *amusement bourgeois*). This may result in the stepmotherly treatment of cultural policies in political science.

Another important problem in studying the contribution of cultural policies to stabilising regimes arises from the broadness of the term „culture”. What do we mean by culture? Probably everybody would have an intuitive answer to this question. In academia, by 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn had already compiled a list of 164 concepts and definitions of the term. To my knowledge, nobody has ever seriously undertaken to update the list since then. Yet, we can be sure that the number of concepts and definitions has all but reduced. It seems vain to report all or even the most important definitions of culture. Thus, for this study, it may suffice to briefly reflect on the definition I embrace. Collective cultural identity is not a collection of static elements that stay invariably anchored within the hearts and minds of people. Rather, it is a social construct forged by a permanent discourse that ascribes certain attributes to a group, thereby conceiving of it and representing it as unfragmented and unitary, notwithstanding existing internal differences. So, what may be perceived as a sense of belonging instilled by cultural homogeneity in reality is the result of a skilful narrativisation of difference and the capacity to exclude (S. Hall [1996] 2008). Such discourses are subject to structures and power struggles over interpretive hegemony. As S. Hall [1996] 2008, p. 5) convincingly argued – identities, therefore, always run the risk of destabilisation through what they exclude. Therefore, those who weave the webs of significance that constitute the content of the discourses are in constant need of repairing and reacting to threats from outside the identity group.

Building upon this definition of collective cultural identity, I define cultural policies as those actions of powerholders that aim to achieve or maintain the interpretative hegemony in identity discourses that are related to the cultural realm.

As T. Miller and Yúdice (2002, p. 1) note, „culture is connected to policy in two registers: the aesthetic and the anthropological. In the aesthetic register, artistic output emerges from creative people and is judged by aesthetic criteria, as framed by the interests and practices of cultural criticism and history. In this world, culture is taken as a marker of differences and similarities in taste and status within social groups. The anthropological register, on the other hand, takes culture as a marker of how we live our lives, the senses of place and person that make us human – neither individual nor entirely universal, but grounded by language, religion, customs, time and space. So whereas the aesthetic articulates differences within populations (for examples, which class has the cultural capital to appreciate high culture and which does not), the anthropological articulates differences between populations (for example, which country sells new technology and which does not).” Despite this convincing twofold division, for practical reasons, I focussed on the anthropological register of cultural policy, namely policies of language, religion, and cultural heritage, in this study. The choice of these three categories can be justified in theoretical terms by how they contribute to the process of identity formation. As we have seen, cultural policies are essentially about achieving and maintaining the hegemony over identity discourses. I argue that policies that deal with religion, language and cultural heritage significantly contribute to this since these cultural categories constitute the preconditions for the creation and preservation of collective identity. Wagschal et al. (2010) convincingly assume that if identity is about creating sense and belonging, religion (and ideology) is the prime social category to reduce the complexity of the world. Language, in turn, is primordial for the communication of one’s identity towards the rest of society (cf. also S. Hall [1997] 2007, p. 1; T. Miller & Yúdice 2002, p. 6) while historicity is essential for the continuous reproduction of this identity within a community.¹³ These three identity attributes help, in a decisive manner, to constitute a group and define the community vis-à-vis the inside and outside. Controlling and/or manipulating these cultural categories through cultural policies thus bestows upon the authors of cultural policies considerable power over identity discourses, which are essential for creating a sense of belonging and social cohesion (cf. also T. Miller & Yúdice 2002, p. 8). In the context of modern nation-states, the promotion of shared identity often comes down to nationalism, a term which inherently carries an exclusionary notion.¹⁴

¹³ The need for simplification and orientation is generally accepted. See also Huntington (1996, p. 30); Luke (2010).

¹⁴ Associating nationalism not only with secular (language, history) but also non-secular elements (religion, tradition) has long been out of scientists’ scope but has meanwhile been established for a more comprehensive understanding of sources of nationalism, cf. also Brubaker (2012).

Although I fully acknowledge the role of society in creating cultural content and thus forging identity (Fuchs 1998; Klein 2009), in this study, I limit the scope of my analysis to state actions only. **With Knill and Tosun (2015, p. 11), who define policies as the content of state actions that refer to a specific field of problems, I take cultural policies to be the content of state actions designed to tackle problems in the field of culture. As such, they contribute to creating, preserving and communicating cultural identities on a group-specific, national and international scale.**

Again with Knill and Tosun (2015, p. 76), I consider policies to encompass active and passive political measures alike. Active measures comprise laws, decrees, political programmes, directives, guidelines, prohibitions, orders and instructions. Passive measures, in turn, also cover the disregard, neglect and omission of important political issues or the refusal/inability to decide on them. Both categories of cultural policies imply a certain degree of consciousness. Yet, T. Miller and Yúdice (2002, p. 2) rightly point out that in „addition to these highly deliberate practices, policy is often made unwittingly, through the permeation of social space by genres that invoke ‘a particular kind of organization of audience’ that may maintain or modify ideological systems (Volosinov 96-97) on an *ad hoc*, incontinent basis. Performativity, rather than constantivity, characterizes policy, and it is frequently made ‘on the run’, in response to unpredictable pressures.” Officials tend to rationalise and justify their actions retrospectively. This is one of the reasons why, next to the policy level of analysis, I also needed to consider the rhetoric and narrative level. I will talk about this conceptual problem in more depth in chapter 3.3. of this book. Overall, my concentration on state actions was not to deny a possible situation of competition or rivalry between state and society in cultural production, nor did this approach preclude me from accounting for any societal influence on state actions or even cooperation between societal actors and state institutions. My choice for the concentration on state actions has two reasons. For one, I am interested in whether state actors perceive cultural policies as a viable means to assure the persistence of their rule, i.e. the stability of the Moroccan monarchy. In the second step, I wanted to find out how they conceive these policies and how they try to implement them to reach their goals. This implies looking at how certain policies come about to be: Do they react to demands from societal groups – which brings bottom-up tendencies back into the picture? Do they take international trends into account or even give in to foreign pressure? Or are they the outcome of ideological considerations? Another reflection pertains to the accessibility of the field. Since, due to practical and security reasons and most importantly due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, I was not able to cover the whole territory to examine all relevant actors on the ground, I decided to refer to state actors only. They tend to be more

centralised and are thus often easier to follow up on during the implementation process. Of course, this state-centred perspective also has implications for the relevance of my findings. I might have missed some features of cultural productions especially in situations/regions where the state is weak and societal actors have a much bigger impact in forming group identity than formal state institutions. These societal actors are not necessarily less important in setting up structures of informal institutions that support the system or even substituting it in places the state cannot reach (Erdmann et al. 2011; Helmke & Levitsky 2006). This is a pitfall that is hard to avoid. Yet, as I will explain in more detail in this book's methodology section in chapter 4.1.2., I tried to account for this possibility by carefully analysing state and non-state media that cover larger parts of the Moroccan territory and function as important antennas for dynamics on a sub-state level. Other critics of my approach might point out a lack of reference to the arts or the aesthetics (T. Miller & Yúdice 2002). Indeed, Wagschal et al. (2010), to whom I owe a lot of my concept of culture, are not at all concerned with the arts or a notion whatsoever of aesthetics. Yet, I am convinced that this need not be seen as a gap in the definition but rather a concession to constraints in terms of research resources and conceptual parsimony. Max Fuchs (1998, pp. 330–331) defines cultural policies as policies of the cultural through the media of arts and aesthetics.¹⁵ Fuchs is right in attributing to culture a strong communicative notion in which the arts play a crucial role. In so far as they are designed to be seen by others than the artist, they are – at least to my understanding – instances of identity (re)productions (cf. e.g., T. Miller & Yúdice 2002, p. 1) and means of identity communication at the same time (cf. e.g., S. Hall [1997] 2007, p. 1). These functions of the arts are important elements in my concept of culture, too, although my focus will remain on religion, language and cultural heritage. Most obviously, however, this definition also includes some aspects of the arts in the sense that the promotion or marginalisation of certain artistic expressions is indicative of the treatment of the cultural heritage of a country. This means that policies of aesthetics, including the promotion of modern and contemporary arts or the support for theatres, can demonstrate openness and/or tolerance for innovation. Conversely, neglecting them may be a sign of protectionist behaviour favouring traditional national cultural (material/immaterial) heritage. This is why the analysis of national museums was paramount for me, as they are reified tokens of the Moroccan regime's positionality in this question.

¹⁵ cf. Fuchs (1998, pp. 30–31). In his book *Kulturpolitik als gesellschaftliche Aufgabe – Eine Einführung in Theorie, Geschichte, Praxis*, he wrote: „[Das Kulturelle ist derjenige soziale Bereich,] in dem über einen Austausch von Symbolen Bedeutungen kommuniziert werden im Hinblick auf ihre je subjektive Relevanz, also als ‚Sinn‘“. Cultural policies for Fuchs therefore means the following: „Kulturpolitik ist Politik des Kulturellen mit den Medien der Kunst und des Ästhetischen“.

3.1.2. Why Cultural Policies Matter for Regime Stability

3.1.2.1. Religious Policies and Power

Culture has always been used for political ends. In the European Middle Ages and the autocratic states of the 18th century, for instance, cultural policies - promoting the arts or architecture - were deployed to legitimise the rulers' reign by underlining the god-given nature of their mandate to rule (Vestheim 2012). Until today, strong symbols are often rooted in religion and tradition (Koesel 2014). Yet, since modernisation puts religious and traditional authorities under increasing pressure (Huntington 1968), regimes have engaged and still engage in creating *Ersatzreligionen* to compensate for the kind of emotional satisfaction religions can provide (Behrens 2007 [1997]). These constructs often incorporate symbols and other features such as „myth and cultic life”, including rites, liturgy, chorales, music and sacral language (Behrens 2007 [1997], p. 231), which they adopt or adapt from „real” religions, but also create new ones which trigger similar affectional responses. As noted by Maier (2007 [1997], 278ff.), fascism and Marxism, studied through the lens of religion, created real religious feelings such as passion and religious zeal. And by rediscovering the „dreadful and uncanny, *tremendum et fascinosum*”, these ideologies even allowed for new-old emotional experiences such as „fascination, terror and provocation” that had been believed forgotten under the rationally enlightened approach to religion of precedent centuries (Maier 2007 [1997], p. 278). It is this collective emotional experience centred on a certain idea and/or person that rulers wish to evoke when they create such religion-like constructs. This mixture of mimicry and syncretism of „real” religions amounts to what Emilio Gentile (2006 [2001]) called *religions of politics*. He distinguished two kinds of religions of politics:

(1) *political religions* and

(2) *civil religions*.

Although the distinction between these two categories is seldom clear-cut,¹⁶ it can still serve as a heuristic to analyse acts of power. Gentile defined the concepts as follows: „A *political religion* is a form of sacralization of politics that has an exclusive and fundamentalist nature. It does not accept the coexistence of other political ideologies and movements, it denies the autonomy of the individual in relation to the collectivity, it demands compliance with its political cult, and it sanctifies violence as a legitimate weapon in the fight against its enemies

¹⁶ Gentile (2006 [2001]) like Behrens (2007 [1997]); Bernholz (2007 [1997]); Linz (2000 [1975]); Maier (2007 [1997]) reserved this term for totalitarian regimes, while he held civil religion to be a property of democracies. Since he acknowledged that the distinction between the concepts is not clearcut, I do not see the point in linking them with specific regime types.

and as an instrument of regeneration. In relation to traditional religious institutions, it either adopts a hostile attitude and aims to eliminate them, or it attempts to establish a rapport of symbiotic coexistence by incorporating the traditional religion into its own system of beliefs and myths while reducing it to a subordinate and auxiliary role“ (Gentile 2006 [2001], p. 140). Furthermore, political religions usually provide an ultimate ground of meaning, establishing a finite reality. From this, a programme of action is derived that – if followed with eagerness – promises some kind of salvation (Behrens 2007 [1997], 230 and 232). This was the case in totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, which were characterised by their ideological monism and the monopoly of power as well as the complete subordination of the population (Behrens 2007 [1997]; Gentile 2006 [2001]; Maier 2007 [1997]). By contrast, „a *civil religion* is a form of sacralization of a collective political entity that does not identify with the ideology of any particular political movement, acknowledges the separation of church and state, and, although postulating the existence of a supernatural being in the theistic sense, it coexists with traditional religious institutions without identifying with any particular religious confessions. It acts as a shared civic creed that is above all parties and all religions. It tolerates a high degree of individual autonomy in relation to the sacralised collectivity and generally elicits spontaneous consent for compliance with its commandments of public ethics and collective liturgy“ (Gentile 2006 [2001], p. 140). A typical example would be patriotism in the United States of America, which claims to be centred on individual liberty and equal chances while building on national pride fed by everyday rituals of singing the anthem and worshipping the stars-and-stripes.

If state leaders evoke religious feelings without being convinced that what they preach is the truth, and if the rituals only follow a functionalist end to rally support, then we might call such measures „*sacred veiling techniques* (sakrale Verschleierungstechniken)“ (Behrens 2007 [1997], p. 231).¹⁷ Either way – be it actual religion, veiling technique, political religion or civil religion –the above-mentioned literature shows that Karl Marx’s famous dictum, which called religion *opium for the masses*, has not lost in significance. Religion has just changed its appearance and draws upon new actors (Vorländer 2013). It may come in secular disguise, which we may call ideology. Value and demand management, which is necessary to obtain the same outcome as an actual religion, can be practised in basically all policy fields. This makes it difficult to assess the successful translation of claims to rule into stabilising policies departing from only one policy field or one subcategory of cultural policy.

¹⁷ Actually Linz (2000 [1975], XXVII f.) doubts – with some exceptions – that rulers and elites are ever ideologists enough to believe what they preach.

3.1.2.2. Language Policies and Power

In very general terms, the language situation in a country often mirrors its power hierarchies. Dominant cultural groups tend to impose and promote their conception of a national language and define its pure and correct expressions. In this context, language standardisation is an important tool for defining rules to access certain goods provided by the state, be it education or administrative services. Standardisation is about prescribing specific binding rules concerning spelling, meaning and pronunciation of vocabulary, grammar, or stylistic questions, often codified in specific dictionaries or other language manuals. Often, this goes hand in hand with rendering inferior other colloquial or dialectal forms of language (Fairclough 2015, 84ff.). The literacy level, i.e. the degree of mastery of the formal rules and the distance from other non-recognised language forms to a good share, determines personal success (Fairclough 2015, 89ff.). For instance, in many formerly colonised countries, the linguistic legacy from colonial times continues to significantly impact the socio-political landscape and, more particularly, power relations. In the aftermath of the colonisers' departure, many countries engaged in language policies to promote local languages to ensure the creation of a national identity (Kamwangamalu et al. 2013b; Wyrzten 2014). In the larger Maghreb region, including North Africa and Sudan, this trend was linked to pan-Arab and pan-Islamic movements, which perceived Arabic and Islam as the salvation from colonial divide-and-rule policies of the French, British and Italian¹⁸. Therefore, Islam and Arabic were used as unifying elements to revise these policies, which were said to have favoured some minority tribal and cultural groups such as Amazigh and Christians over majority communities. These policies were often supported by the international community and international organisations like UNESCO and ISESCO in particular (Daoudi 2018; Medici 2018). While Arabicisation policies formally imposed Arabic as the dominant language in education and public life, marginalising cultural minorities, the success of such policies, to this day, depends on the policymakers' political will and capacity to really change the institutions inherited from colonial times (Kamwangamalu et al. 2013b). Often, the powerholders are comfortable keeping these structures instead of introducing new ones, thereby keeping educated elites relatively small and the number of people aspiring to political participation manageable. Code-mixing and code-switching are common, and high school drop-out rates are widespread in milieus, where support for disadvantaged pupils who don't have opportunities to practice the dominant language at home cannot be provided. As a consequence, this policy approach has often engendered considerable frustration

¹⁸ On these policies see especially the insightful article collections in Di Tolla and Francesca (2016); Moha Ennaji (2014b); Kamwangamalu et al. (2013a)

of an unemployed youth who is victim to the educational system and the economic crisis of their countries. Furthermore, it has created a profound identity crisis, resulting in long-lasting tensions between marginalised groups and the defenders of dominant cultural identities linked to Islam and Arabic (Benrabah 2014; Daoudi 2018). This combination of socio-cultural and material inequalities (Crawford 2005) finally necessitated adaptive measures that would ensure the persistence of the ruler's grip on power. In some countries like Sudan, the fight over language dominance has resulted in the separation of North and South Sudan, each pursuing its own language policies (Abdelhay et al. 2013; Makoni et al. 2013). In other countries, governments have taken pre-emptive measures that would keep social currents advocating for more inclusive reforms in check.

3.1.2.3. Historicity Policies and Power

As noted by Alagappa (1995a, 17f.), the production of shared values can only succeed if they „draw upon history and culture”. This is why Wagschal and colleagues have coined the term historicity. This term may be conceptualised as ritualised references to the past in the form of traditions or constantly reproduced narratives around material and immaterial heritage that claim historical authenticity and validity in the presence and actively involve the community as a group. In Lowenthal's terms, „the past validates the present by conveying an idea of timeless values and unbroken lineages and through restoring lost or subverted values” (cited in Graham et al. 2000 [2016], p. 19). Those values or traditions need to be shared. Cultural heritage must be recognised as such and needs to be defended by the community as a symbol of their identity and a beacon of their belonging together. In this context, authenticity is a precious currency since it has the potential to draw the image of closeness between the ruling elite and the ruled. Authenticity is a descriptive and normative term. On the one hand, it describes an unmistakable and clearly identifiable authorship, which, on the other hand, receives a normative dimension with the social values of credibility and truthfulness attached to it. As such, it is subject to a communicative and social negotiation process where, especially in moments of (identity) crisis, these values are called into question and require proof by the person, groups or institutions that claim authenticity (C. Kohl 2017). In traditional or conservative societies, such proofs can be provided through traditions and references to historical artefacts or clothing. Sometimes, they may be invented in accordance with the audience's imagination (C. Kohl 2017). This imagination may correspond to clichés, which – at least in post-colonial times – often stem from colonial stereotypes (Said 1978). With regard to the Arab world, Mohammed ‘Abed al-Jaābri, one of the most influential representatives of contemporary Arab political and social thinking, shows how much the Arab-speaking world is pre-occupied and haunted by the obsession with

authentic heritage (turāth), especially in relation to what he called contemporaneity. He insists on the „constant invitation to use it as an ideological weapon against external threats”, against colonial „intrusion and aggression”, and in the contemporary competition with Western culture. According to him, Arabs nowadays suffer from the „dramatic feeling of the depth of the abyss separating the heritage and its cognitive ideological and normative content from the thought of the contemporary world with its scientific, technical, normative achievements and its rational and behavioural standards”. They therefore constantly look for reconciliation with their heritage which is not limited to physical remnants like „old ruins or some collection of engravings, symbols, customs, dances and songs” but is perceived as a „living culture in which language, literature, religion, and thought are deeply ingrained in hearts and minds, thought and behaviour” (al-Jaābri & Abdel-Nour 2011, p. 181). However, the encounter with the West through colonialism has led to a disjointed history that isolates arts and sciences, which, today, forces Arabs to constantly borrow from the West while feeling the weight of the past that prevents Arabs from having a „clear and complete picture of the totality of Arab thought, its conflicts and the stages of its developments” (al-Jaābri & Abdel-Nour 2011, p. 184). He, therefore, called upon Arabs to liberate themselves from the feeling of needing to reconcile contemporary thought with Arab heritage. He pleaded for rewriting Arab history and reviving „temporality and historicity at its junctures and in its roots and branches” (al-Jaābri & Abdel-Nour 2011, p. 184). At the same time, Arabs need to emancipate from their heritage without running away from it, and appropriate the present for „Arab authenticity, then, is not to be had by harkening back to the *Jāhiliyyah* period alone, nor is it to be had by looking at what followed it without considering what preceded it. Arab authenticity, whether in the sphere of culture or any other sphere, is what Arabs made and continue to make every day, every hour. Authenticity is not a buried, hidden treasure, nor is it a raw given. Rather, it is a feature that characterizes all specific/particular creative activity” (al-Jaābri & Abdel-Nour 2011, p. 185).

However, despite this passionate plaidoyer, governments continue to strive to create and use the appearance of authenticity and make it work as a political currency. Governments – and autocratic ones in particular – use historic policies to draw up Potemkin villages of legitimacy facades, as Backes (2009, p. 292) put it. He argued that the intensity of historiographical engagement hinges on the amount of traditional authenticity rulers can rely on. Dynastic autocrats, like in Saudi Arabia, can build on their religious authority as keepers of the holy sites and their traditional power over the tribal communities. Therefore, they do not need to invest too extensively into manipulating the national legacy. Due to their ideologically grounded lack

of tradition, other regimes, such as Lukashenkas Belarus or the former Soviet Union, need/needed to engage far more in faking the historical picture.

Historiography, or rather historical texts, „may embellish all heritage. And histories do not merely illustrate or eulogize but explain a people’s special genius” (Lowenthal 1994, p. 53), be it in national-patriotic, ethnic-chauvinistic or other ideological terms. In some cases, rulers use such patterns to justify their strife for universal dominance (Bernholz 2007 [1997]). This makes cultural heritage a part of cultural politics and elevates cultural policies to an important element in a state’s repertoire of exerting and legitimising its power while bearing a risk of social fragmentation.

The use of cultural heritage as an instrument for the construction of ideology and nationalism supporting the governing regime is nowadays widely acknowledged in academic comparison of political governance (Silberman 2009 [1995]; Trigger 1984, 2009 [1995]). As a matter of fact, under authoritarian states, investments into archaeological excavations and the promotion of cultural heritage may even be higher than under more liberal and democratic regimes, which are more reticent to intervene in cultural policies for ideological reasons (P. L. Kohl & Fawcett 2009 [1995]; Koshar 1994). Autocratic regimes tend to use cultural references to prove the ancient roots of the nation, to underline the continuity of settlement of certain ethnic groups in a specific region or to showcase the civilisational achievements and cultural-moral superiority of a people. These frames, which are attached to such policies, set out to build and spread an impression of social cohesion rooted in and conditioned to cultural unity. A special category of heritage policies is the application of the UNESCO world heritage label. It has become a desirable attribute to seek and showcase international recognition for a nation’s cultural uniqueness and civilisational achievements. The UNESCO label can serve as a selling point to attract tourists from abroad. The preservation and promotion of the diversity of material and immaterial cultural heritage as enshrined in the UNESCO conventions can be seen as an internationally accepted framework of values that are perceived vastly positively as a provider of identity and driver of sustainable development, peace, security and social cohesion. In academic research, however, the concept of cultural heritage itself and the process of „making“ cultural heritage – also called patrimonialisation (> French *patrimoine* = heritage) or heritagisation – are often seen more critically. The concept has been criticised for implicitly dividing culture into categories of elements worth preserving and others of lesser social or historical value. Furthermore, cultural heritage often tends to freeze a certain status quo of cultural elements. Regimes often prefer the image of a ‚great/memorable’ past that these elements provide over a dynamic, inclusive evolution of culture. Tomlinson (1991, 90f.) goes

as far as to speak about „totalisation of cultural memory”. It is a “naturalised” result of globalisation processes through cultural institutions like the state and the media to validate influences and borrowings from other „cultures” as authentic local produce. Since, most often, the declaration of an artefact, building, custom, ritual, etc., as (material/immaterial) cultural heritage is initiated and driven by state actors, political and economic interests may lurk beneath efforts to preserve and promote local/national culture. For Ortner (1989, p. 200) and C. Michael Hall (2009, p. 122), cultural politics are, therefore, „the struggles over official symbolic representations of reality that shall prevail in a given social order at a given time. One could argue that they are the most important kind of politics, for they seek to control the terms in which all other politics, and all other aspects of life in that society, will take place”. Cultural heritage policies are thus seldom impartial and more often subject to power relations that may favour one part of culture over another. They are part of the very power struggle that strives to produce ideology by creating meaning (Ortner 1989). This often signifies a preference for majority over minority culture and thus a perpetuation and even deepening of social, political and economic inequalities. Whether national (e.g., Ministry of Culture) or international (e.g., UNESCO), decision-makers work as gatekeepers. They also constitute watchdogs of heritage rules established by those in power. Scholars have pointed to the consequences and potential downsides of promoting the touristic attractiveness of heritage places and objects. First of all, there are the consequences for the objects themselves. From a material point of view, they may run the risk of wear and dematerialisation through overuse, overpopulation, pollution or vandalism. From an immaterial point of view, objects and places are threatened with becoming ‘soulless’ museified items that have lost connection to their original purpose or have become alienated from their original cultic or social value. Furthermore, during renovation and restoration processes, cultural heritage may be standardised or falsified in its appearance to correspond with and appeal to tourists’ (false/unrealistic) imagination of the place, object or custom (Timothy & Nyaupane 2009b). Often, the communities have a black-or-white choice. Either they cooperate and support the state-sponsored vision with a chance of benefitting economically from the influx of tourists. This choice would render such measures a tool of co-option. Or the communities go into opposition. Hence, the standardisation or falsification of cultural heritage often comes with repression against communities who stand in the way of cultural mainstreaming. These consequences include gentrification, pushing or expelling “old” populations from historical buildings they own or occupy but do not have the means or knowledge to restore according to (imagined) traditional construction norms. The new owners, upgrade the buildings and transform them into cultural commodities, i.e. heritage sites for

touristic exploitation (Copertino 2014). This element becomes particularly relevant in urban contexts. The most obvious aspect in this regard is the use and reuse of architecture as material cultural heritage in the context of new urban planning projects. Due to its prominent visibility in the public space, architecture is an important symbol of political change and the programmatic (re-)interpretation of national identity coming with new power holders. It is intrinsically cultural in that it always bears meaning and ideology, both historical and contemporary ones. As Cavalcanti (1997, 80f.) noted :

„All these schemes involved the modernization of the pre-existing urban structure of a historic centre by means of cutting wide and straight avenues through densely built-up quarters. In some cases, modernization brought about an improvement in the city's infrastructure, such as a traffic system and sanitary conditions. In others, modernization is associated closely with urban aesthetics and beautification. Each leader set out to celebrate a political order by means of the construction of urban and architectural settings conceived to embody the ideology on which a new era is based and to commemorate the political achievements and purposes of his autocratic regime. The monumental urban and architectural settings were built to display political power expressing the prestige and grandeur of autocratic regimes and their leaders. Usually, the search for national grandeur as a motive for intervening in the built environment of historic centres is soon closely associated with the individual person of the leader who is portrayed by the official propaganda apparatus as the incarnation of the country's moral virtues, power, discipline and authority as well as the embodiment of the country's political achievements. The individual will of the leaders of autocratic regimes to intervene in the built environment of historic centres through the exercise of absolute political power granted them the means to realize their personal aspirations and impose them on society.”

These urban development programmes in authoritarian states often come with authoritarian, i.e. non-inclusive, ways of planning, as Cavalcanti (1997) shows for Bucharest under Ceaucescu: Real estate, often at strategically well-situated and exposed sites, is expropriated and historic buildings and areas are demolished to obtain the necessary space to carry out the plan. The financial means to implement the project are dictated, and the new buildings' design, scale, material and form are judged and approved by a small and exclusive elite circle (Cavalcanti 1997).

3.2. Regime Stability – Approaches to a Fuzzy Concept

3.2.1. Defining Authoritarian Regimes and Middle Eastern Monarchies

For a long time, authoritarian regimes have been defined in opposition to both democracy and totalitarian regimes. The classical definition goes back to Juan Linz (1964, p. 297), who stipulated that „[a]uthoritarian regimes are political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism: without elaborate and guiding ideology (but with distinctive mentalities); without intensive nor extensive political mobilization (except some points in their development); and in which a leader (or occasionally a small group) exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones”. While Linz, for analytical purposes, defended defining authoritarianism as a distinct category setting it apart from the

other two regime types and although his definition continues to be an influential heuristic, nowadays, most researchers into authoritarianism prefer placing regimes along a continuum ranging from ideal type definitions of democracy like Robert Dahl's (1971) to closed hegemonies like totalitarian regime. This opens discussions about hybrid regimes which unite democratic aspects with authoritarian elements. To do this, researchers recur to indices like the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, Freedom House reports, or the V-Dem democracy reports, which, inspired mainly by Dahl, define cut-off scores regarding criteria such as electoral freedom, participatory procedures, government autonomy, access to and freedom of information, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, rule of law etc. (Roller 2016). The eight monarchies in the Middle East and North Africa¹⁹ have been described as a subcategory of authoritarian regimes. They all not only reign but rule as personalistic rulers. They all enrich themselves by appropriating national wealth sources while distributing parts among elites and societal allies. They also promote a „mentality (not quite an ideology) [...] based on anticolonial leadership, religious prestige, or 'traditional' privilege" (Lucas 2004, p. 108). Yet they „vary in terms of the relationship between the regime coalition and society. Dynastic monarchies rest on a narrower social base, but with oil rents enabling the regime to buy social support. The ruling family, however, has greater autonomy and corporate identity in this type of monarchical regime. Linchpin monarchies – generally lacking such significant rents – rely on a wider social base of support" (Lucas 2004, p. 117). While the six Gulf monarchies fall under the former category, Morocco and Jordan are part of the latter. In Morocco (like in Jordan), the state and society centre around the king as linchpins. At the same time, their authority is placed above all political divisions and beyond tribal, ethnic, religious or regional issues, which allows the monarchs to allow a degree of pluralism and to integrate even conflicting identities under the nation's unifying symbol of the king (Lucas 2004, p. 107). While their families hold important positions in the country and benefit from its wealth, they only have limited influence on factual decision-making. At the same time, the king works as the supreme arbiter between competing elites (Sunik et al. 2013, p. 4). In turn, parties, parliaments, governments and societal actors, including loyal opposition, enjoy relatively wide space for mobilisation and have access to channels of consultations. Also, they can more easily be brought into coalition or cohabitation with royalist forces. The balance of liberalisation and coercion is part of a political bargain of „divide and rule" between the kings and the society, which holds the monarchies in place despite unpopular policies while providing them with the necessary space to re-calibrate and adjust their methods if need be (Lucas 2004, 113f.). Although, according to Geddes et al. (2018,

¹⁹ These monarchies are Oman, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan and Morocco.

p. 210), since 1946, twelve monarchs have lost dictatorial control over their countries (with seven having ended through coups, three by popular uprisings and one through insurgency), monarchies remain the most durable regimes (Kailitz 2013, 49ff.), including in the Middle East and North Africa. This finding was confirmed during the 2011 uprisings in the region, where all monarchies survived, unlike many (formally) republican regimes in countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Libya or Yemen.

To analyse and explain the stability of monarchies like Morocco, it is essential to have a clear understanding of what stability means. There have been multiple ways to conceptualise regime stability. Some have put forward the absence of violence within a polity, the latter's longevity or the existence of a legitimate constitutional regime (Hurwitz 1973). Others advance that (in)stability is the degree of occurrence or non-occurrence of variation in the pattern of change perceived to be normal for a political entity (Sanders 1981, p. 66). Others again suggest the absence of change to the „identifying characteristics” of a regime (Dowding & Kimber 1983; Svensson 1986) or the degree of regularity in the political behaviour of a polity to be stable (Ake 1975). More complex definitions account for the coincidence of formal and informal structures (Margolis 2010) or the „congruence of authority patterns” (Eckstein 1992).²⁰

Like most researchers today, I prefer to stick with a more straightforward definition that can be seen as more or less synonymous with regime survival, regime durability or Ted Robert Gurr's (1974, p. 1484) simple function of persistence and adaptability. Hence, in this study, these terms will be used interchangeably.

The problem with the term stability is that – if at all – we can assess it ex-post only when a system has proven resilient in moments of crisis. Regime stability is, hence, tightly related to the term regime resilience, i.e. the counterpart of vulnerability or the capacity to withstand challenges and threats (Hess 2016). This is why, nowadays, the academic attention has shifted to a more dynamic understanding of the phenomenon, asking how stability comes about, i.e. the process of stabilisation. Andreas Schedler (1998), for instance, uses the term „consolidation” to denote the avoidance of breakdown and regime erosion.²¹ The most influential model of stabilisation strategies was developed by Johannes Gerschewski (2013).

²⁰ For other summaries of stability definitions, see Hurwitz (1973) and Margolis (2010).

²¹ “I think we should return to the concept's original concern with democratic survival. We should restore its classical meaning, which is securing achieved levels of democratic rule against authoritarian regression. That means we should restrict its use to the two ‘negative’ notions described above: avoiding democratic breakdown and avoiding democratic erosion”, cf. Schedler (1998, p. 103).

He proposed three „pillars of stability” comprising repression, co-optation and legitimization.²² Despite intense discussions about the explanatory power of Gerschewski’s model (Gerschewski 2017; Kailitz & Tanneberg 2015; Lueders & Croissant 2014, 2015; Schneider & Maerz 2017), it has become a starting point for many studies that dig deeper into one of the three mechanisms that contribute to the stabilisation of a regime. The following section explain how Gerschewski’s concept interacts with the approach adopted by this study.

3.2.2. Criticism of Current Research on Regime Stabilisation

In modern states, every power relation has an underlying idea of legitimacy (Graf Kielmansegg 1971, p. 389). Rulers make their claims to legitimacy based on hereditary succession as in the case of monarchies, on participatory inclusion of the people, on economic performance or on ideology and religion (Kailitz 2013). Yet, none of the ideas of legitimacy are self-legitimizing, but they need to be translated into a specific set of rules of procedure that allow for their justificatory underpinning (Graf Kielmansegg 1971, p. 383). In 2017, Christian von Soest and Julia Grauvogel laid out a very promising concept of regime legitimization, integrating Max Weber’s classical idea of three legitimate political systems (rational-legal, traditional and charismatic rule) and adding three more aspects. Their concept concentrates on six basic strategies of legitimization that incumbents can employ to justify their rule. Soest and Grauvogel distinguish between identity-based and non-identity-based strategies. Within the first category, they list references to foundational myths, ideology and personal charisma. The use of seemingly democratic procedures such as elections and parliamentary debates falls within the second category, just like claims of good performance and the reference to successful international engagement. The strong point about the approach to legitimization by Soest and Grauvogel (2017) is that they acknowledge that cultural traits actually matter for regime fostering. Furthermore, they consider engagement on an international level an asset in obtaining international support. With this, they integrate findings made by Kneuer (2013), who argued that foreign policy achievements can be essential to legitimise authoritarian power domestically. This finding has been confirmed by empirical studies (e.g. Del Sordi & Dalmaso 2018). Despite this theoretical strength, the concept of Soest and Grauvogel (2017) has other weaknesses. Although they admit that all the elements they enumerate interact, it does not appear logical to me why, say, procedures – i.e. the introduction of participatory elements or

²² A similar concept was advanced by Margolis (2010). Margolis accounted for four instruments, which consist of (1) enforcing compliance of the population by coercion, (2) promoting regime resilience through reforming the formal rules, (3) creating consent by enhancing legitimacy, and (4) changing the authorities. Taken together, Margolis (p. 336) comes up with the following operationally redefined concept: „Political stability is the health of authority, resilience, legitimacy, and replacement in a political object“.

institution building – should be treated as a legitimisation strategy in its own right. Institutions usually have a function and serve a purpose – be it to execute some service for the population, to repress or to diffuse ideology. In all cases, they would rather be instruments of either incumbents’ performance or ideologisation. The introduction of new procedures is therefore either instrumental or responds to demands from society – be they articulated openly or fulfilled in anticipation. Performance, in turn, can catalyse legitimisation just as performance needs institutions to work. Either way, performances and procedures are rather modes of strategies than strategies of their own. Furthermore, Soest and Grauvogel (2017) fall short of accounting for repressive or co-optive means to legitimise power. Generally, what they call claims to legitimisation are narratives used by power holders who wish to communicate claims of strength and convey an image of the justifiability of their rule to manage potential threats to their regime. Often, they may transmit an image of elite cohesion and popular support to discourage contestation from within parts of the society’s elite and underline the futility of social upheaval. From this angle, legitimisation can also be seen as threat management that essentially encompasses the management of threat perceptions through legitimating messages (Schedler 2013, 47f.). Hence, in state politics, all that exists are actions by power holders that form the political game, i.e. performances that are interpreted by those affected by them. In the case of states, only the interpretations of state performances by the target population make an act of force an act of repression or an act to uphold security and law and order (Alagappa 1995a, p. 19). This leads us to an essential critique point that applies to most stabilisation concepts presented here. Most authors are right to insist on the importance of repression, co-option and legitimacy (and its procedural sister of legitimisation) in regime stabilisation. However, these studies have one thing in common. They analyse these modes separately, pretending they are distinct categories that do not interact, which does not correspond to the empirical reality.

Co-option, for instance, is an element that reappears in most of the concepts of stabilisation. If we treat it separately from legitimisation, which has often been done²³ – what about situations where buying votes as a result of path dependency is expected by the population, and authorities not inclining to this tradition would delegitimise themselves and thus jeopardise the stability of the system? Samuel (Huntington 1968, 59ff.) showed, for instance, how shifting normative paradigms make traditional behaviour a criminal one. He explained that, in traditional societies,

²³ See for instance Gerschewski (2013) or Haldenwang (1999). The latter treated cooption as a means to divert attention from failed performances by preventing the articulation of legitimisation demands by satisfying particular interests. However, by treating co-option as a strategy to relieve the system from strains and prevent the delegitimation of the system as a whole, Haldenwang acknowledged that co-option may positively impact the legitimacy level. Consequently, I do not see the point in separating this concept from the legitimisation process.

no „distinction existed between obligation to the state and obligation to the family. Only when such a distinction becomes accepted by dominant groups within the society does it become possible to define such behavior as nepotism and hence corruption. [...] Corruption is thus a product of the distinction between public welfare and private interest which comes with modernization“. In many societies, both paradigms, traditional and „modern“, may co-exist and concur. Bribing as an act of co-option, in this case, can hardly be treated separately from legitimation. It would even be a legitimating measure, a fact recognised by researchers such as André Bank (2004) and Maria Josua (2016a). The same goes for repression: In the context of the pre-2011 MENA states, for instance, Brownlee (2002, p. 55) argued that „the U.S.-led ‚war on terrorism‘ has significantly boosted the legitimacy of domestic repression as regimes receive a ‚green light‘ to crack down on political opposition movements, regardless of their tactics and goals“. This means that the question is not so much about „repression + legitimation“ or even „repression vs legitimation“, but about framing repression in a way that it convincingly appears necessary and thus contributes to the generation of regime legitimacy.

Some researchers have tried to solve these obvious problems either by adding a side-note acknowledging an overlap between their stabilisation elements with legitimation being an all-embracing category (Albrecht & Schlumberger 2004, p. 376) or by stressing that only in working together, legitimation, repression and co-option can lead to stability (Gerschewski 2013, 2017). However, these solutions are not satisfactory. To put it with Mariya Omelicheva: „From the theoretical standpoint, if most forms of power in our societies are discursively constituted, the decisive influence on the ‘minds’ and ‘hearts’ of the people is discursively rather than economically or coercively controlled. To put it differently, a major component in the exercise and maintenance of power is discursive, and is based on various types of presentation or framing, as well as the acceptance, negotiation and challenge of arguments” (Omelicheva 2016, p. 17). This shortcoming has also been noted in 2015 by Josua and Edel (2015). They pointed out that repression should be examined as a multifaceted phenomenon and not be treated separately from regime legitimation. The sources and degree of legitimacy before a crisis determine the availability of alternatives to coercive measures and the likelihood of repression being successful and/or acceptable during the crisis. In their article, Josua and Edel further call for more research to elucidate how repression and legitimacy are intertwined. This study is one contribution in the same direction. However, Edel and Josua themselves also took up this strand of research in 2018. They convincingly affirm that the narratives accompanying coercive measures matter for how they are perceived. Over time, these narratives may vary since power holders tend to learn from their countries’ history and neighbourhoods

and from international trends. The grounds that legitimate repression may recur to nationalist and blaming frames or employ national security concerns and the global war on terror as a pretext.

In a similar vein, Dukalskis (2017) analysed the way autocrats combine coercion and legitimisation. He built upon Andreas Schedler's theory that in authoritarian regimes, some or all institutions of representation (e.g. legislatures, courts and decentralisation, etc.) and some or all institutions of pluralism (e.g. elections, parties, media and civil society, etc.) may be appropriated by the regime to be transformed into „institutions of domination” (Schedler 2013, 57ff.). These institutions help control „the boundaries and content of the authoritarian public sphere” (Dukalskis 2017, p. 29). They become repressive, economic, and ideological institutions that serve as infrastructure to create, transmit and preserve the regime's DNA (Dukalskis 2017, pp. 29–36; Schedler 2013, 56ff.). Through these channels, powerholders occupy and restrain the public space and pass on their legitimating messages to the citizenry. These messages can take the form of propaganda, serve the construction of ideology, portray its own invincibility, blame regime errors and failures on third actors, divert the audience's attention to an idealised projection of the future or conceal “undesirable aspects of the state's rule” (Dukalskis 2017, p. 61).

KhosraviNik (2015) showed that media are crucial in legitimising authoritarian regimes' presentation of a national cause. In such contexts, conservative press close to the regime engages in the construction of a peaceful and righteous „Us” and a homogeneously hostile „Them”. They refer to „predicational themes which denote glory and strength and defiance of” the Iranian nation. These frames have the potential to resonate with the target group if this group shares the same interpretation of history and the current situation (KhosraviNik 2015, p. 254). Revolutionary and anti-colonial rhetorics, as well as narratives of resistance and defence against foreign exploitation and Western double standards or aggressive behaviour, are other recurring topoi that are often employed in a generalising and vague manner to legitimise the national cause and delegitimise the Other. While the intensity and ideological pervasiveness may differ in more liberal media, even these outlets would respect red lines and present the official version of the national cause, sometimes in a more nuanced yet not transgressing way (KhosraviNik 2015). Overall, only if the regime manages to monopolise the public discourse will it be able to „naturalise” its own version of reality and make its ideology thrive within society. To put it with Norman Fairclough: „[If] a discourse type so dominates an institution that dominated types are more or less entirely suppressed or contained, then it will cease to be seen as arbitrary (in the sense of being one among several possible ways of ‘seeing’ things) and will come to be

seen as natural, and legitimate because it is simply the way of conducting oneself” (Fairclough 2015, p. 113). The less visible (or identifiable) propaganda is, the more likely it will convince (Fairclough 2015, p. 108). In times of internet and social media, however, public space is – at least most of the time and in most of the countries - a contested space where struggles over information and its meaning take place. This makes naturalisation a matter of degree, which varies according to shifts in the „balance of forces” within the socio-political contest for power (Fairclough 2015, 113f.).

Either way, state leaders’ capacity „to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society“ (Lipset 1960, 64f.) affects – at least to a certain extent (Booth & Seligson 2009) – the persistence of the incumbents’ rule. This is because legitimacy has an **affective notion**. This means that it relies on a person’s **conviction of rightfulness**. As Beetham has shown, state actions are legitimate only inasmuch as „they can be *justified in terms* of people’s beliefs“ (Beetham 1991, p. 11), which are influenced by a variety of sources ranging from ideology, tradition and religion to science, experience and economic interest. Like Lipset (1959, p. 86) and Demmelhuber and Zumbrägel (2017, p. 50), I hold that the conviction of rightfulness is the **result of an evaluative process** in which state actions are subject to scrutiny with regard to these beliefs. At the end of this process, a person either casts its support upon the incumbents and thereby confirms the validity of their legitimacy claim, or the person disagrees and contests the regime’s claim to legitimacy. However, there is a wide range of tacit support or non-explicit contestation between these two extremes. Those – at least in authoritarian contexts – serve the goals of the ruling elite who do not necessarily need ideological alignment, as long as they can maintain the image of enjoying wide support (Marquez 2016) and hence create an estimated legitimacy (Haldenwang 1999, 474ff.). In the case of open support or opposition, however, this is where the cycle of legitimization is closed, and the feedback loop can begin once again. Depending on the population’s reactions, incumbents either reconsider and adapt their legitimacy claim or feel reassured and pursue their path. Since the effects of incumbents’ efforts – i.e. (tacit) support or (tacit) contestation – hinge on factors that are never fully controlled by those who undertake them (Ferrarotti 1979, p. 110), it would not be wise to restrain our analysis of stabilisation only to those efforts which finally do result in gained recognition and support.

3.3. Combining Authoritarian Up-grading and Legitimation Theory with Cultural Policy Trends

Besides the exceptions mentioned above, which try to combine legitimation and repression theory, there is hardly any integrated approach to the phenomenon of regime stabilisation. To account for the multifaceted effects of state actions – co-optative, repressive, legitimating – it appears useful to take a step back and have a closer look at the actions themselves, their design and the motives behind them. In stabilisation research, one model seems particularly promising. To analyse the use of cultural policies for autocratic regime stabilisation, I suggest using a modified version of Steven Heydemann's (2007) concept of *Authoritarian upgrading*. It considers the societal level by acknowledging the role of civil society and the need to bind societal actors to the system. Heydemann's concept also looks at the management of contestation, thus accounting for the need for coercion/repression and co-option alike (Josua 2016b). Furthermore, Heydemann integrates the economic sphere by attributing a considerable share of stabilising effects to economic reforms. He also does not neglect the crucial need to control media and communication technology to manipulate public opinion (Dukalskis 2017; Schedler 2002, 2013). Finally, he underlined the importance of factoring in entanglements with the international community, which enables us to capture external legitimation and possibly incidents of authoritarian promotion and diffusion for domestic regime stabilisation (Kneuer 2013; Kneuer & Demmelhuber 2020b). This also includes actions that support the Moroccan soft power (Nye 2004, 2008) through nation branding and public diplomacy actions (Anholt 2005; Cull 2008, 2019; van Ham 2008).

However, while his model acknowledged the control and instrumentalisation of media and communication technology, it does not sufficiently account for the fact that the concrete actions in his five categories may often be attached to narratives that try to manipulate the way the actions are to be perceived by the general public or a specific target group. Often, the upgrading effect of the actions hinges on the very pertinence of their narrative encapsulation (Doudaki & Boubouka 2020; Dukalskis 2017; Edel & Josua 2018; KhosraviNik 2015). Therefore, I suggest combining Stephen Heydemann's model with Maria Josua's concept of legitimation (Josua 2017), which allows to organise the analysis of up-grading strategies in three modes, namely the legal mode, the policy mode and the symbolic mode. While the legal mode encompasses formal regulations, legal reforms, and judicial actions, the policy mode includes elements such as institution building, subsidies/patronage, and classic policy programmes. Finally, the symbolic mode looks at the narratives conveyed by speeches, interviews, and other symbolic gestures of goodwill. These considerations bring about the following analytical concept (Figure

1). Combining upgrading strategies and stabilisation modes that are active within these strategies can help us to ask the right questions, collect the relevant data and structure it accordingly. Obviously, all authoritarian up-grading strategies are interwoven and interdependent. Since one or more of these strategies and modes can be at play simultaneously, overlap or even concur, it is not always possible to treat them separately. Hence, the analytic categories served as a heuristic that I used as an orientation for structuring my material, yet not in an inflexible manner.

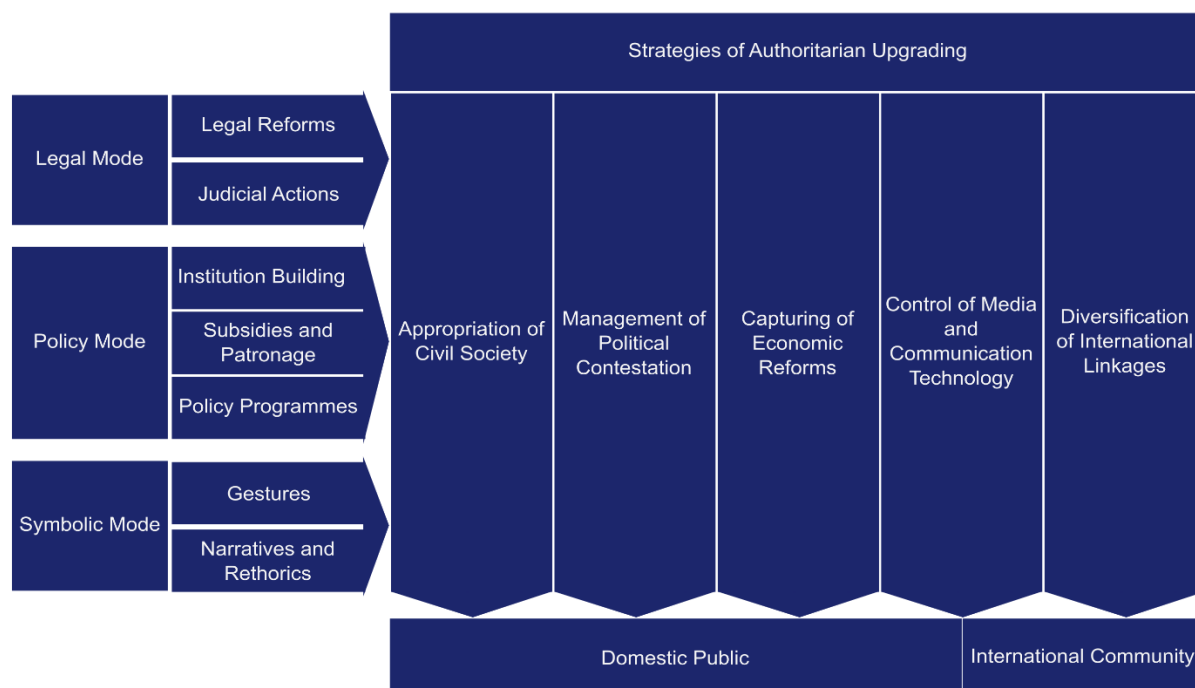


Figure 1: Conceptual framework building upon Heydemann (2007) and Josua (2017)

It goes without saying that when elaborating on examples of cultural policies that elucidate the upgrading strategies, cross-references to other up-grading strategies and examples were necessary. This is also why I avoided structuring my thesis chapters into upgrading strategies. However, most chapters are logically associated with one or several upgrading strategies. To avoid repetitions and redundancies, examples will only be treated in detail under one chapter title. This will also help to keep the inner coherence of each empirical example and avoid disturbing the narrative flow for the readers' comfort. With Svensson (1986, p. 137), I argue that the stability of a regime „can only be demonstrated during a crisis, where challenges are threatening the continuity of the [...] regime, and where both a breakdown and a transformation of the [...] regime is avoided". My definition, therefore, does not exclude the change of a system per se but rather argues with Gurr (1974) that adaptability is part of the equation. Crisis are moments when regimes are challenged, confronted with their own failures, or encounter contestation and opposition. They are valuable points in time where we can expect to glimpse

what the regime is ready to change or sacrifice of its political priorities and governance approaches.²⁴ They bring to the forefront the continuities in a nation's self-perception and its major evolutions, which manifest themselves in most evident ways in partial adaption, complete rewriting or maintenance of formal laws (Depaigne 2017, 86f.; Jacobsohn 2006), changes in political rhetorics or educational narratives (Fukuyama 2018, 124ff.; Gerschewski 2018, p. 658) or the intensity of legal prosecution and law enforcement.

Since the content of each upgrading strategy and stabilisation mode widely correspond to the categories explained at length by Heydemann (2007) and Josua (2017), the following paragraphs focus on how their frameworks can be applied within the cultural policy field. These explanations are based on existing literature about using cultural policies in mostly authoritarian contexts.

3.3.1. Appropriating and Containing Civil Society

Under this category, Heydemann (2007) treated a regime's ability „to exploit rather than resist broad social, political, and economic trends both to blunt the challenges they might contain and to generate political resources that bolster regimes' hold on power". Rather than curtailing any civil society initiative entirely, the regime blends repressive, regulative and co-optative measures that prevent them from growing a capacity that could threaten the regime. Leading figures of groups that focus on human rights, accountability or electoral reforms are intimidated and harassed while establishing legal frameworks for associations that regulate the margins within which activism is tolerated by imposing restrictions on financial sources and an obligation to register an NGO with national authorities. At the same time, the regimes often make sure that legal regulations remain opaque so that NGOs have no choice but to operate within legal ambiguity and always risk overstepping hardly defined red lines (Heydemann 2007, pp. 5–8). On the policy level, Heydemann (2007, pp. 7–10) describes that regimes actively create fragmented civil society environments where NGOs must compete for scarce public resources. At the same time, regime elites promote and subsidise NGOs to pre-empt voices that would criticise coercion against civil society. Despite their privileged relations with the incumbent regime, these semi-official proxy organisations also do not enjoy the autonomy that would allow them to make contributions outside their narrowly defined activity portfolio. The latter normally lie within apolitical areas that do not threaten the regime. Oftentimes, regime elites are themselves founders and sponsors of such co-opted NGOs that work on youth,

²⁴ This may be the reason for why researchers in legitimacy are particularly interested in the moments of political crisis, cf. for instance Alagappa (1995b) and Josua (2016a).

women, environment, education, tourism or cultural conservation. In these areas, however, the NGOs provide important services to citizens and manage to attract national and international attention and funding for societal questions. By observing and keeping an ear on the broader population and virulent public opinions, these organisations can channel relevant information to transport them to the power holders. Beyond harnessing the advocacy and watchdog functions of their loyal civil society associations, incumbents also benefit from the enhanced legitimacy these actions garner for the regime in areas like human rights activism. Regimes have appropriated the human rights field by creating official institutions that pretend to monitor and promote human rights on behalf of the state (Heydemann 2007, p. 10).

3.3.2. Managing Contestation

Under this category, Heydemann (2007) concentrates on strategies of coercion and repression that discourage and silence political opposition groups, mainly in the context of elections. He describes what a few years earlier Schedler (2002) called the „menu of manipulation”.²⁵ It is about using the dominance of state resources to mobilise the own power base while preventing opposition parties from working, informing and campaigning properly, harassing/incarcerating critical candidates, intimidating voters and curtailing the political weight of parliament. At the same time, through incremental and nuanced reforms, regimes manage to accommodate pressure from inside and outside of the power circles and the country and diffuse criticism (Heydemann 2007, p. 12). I will broaden the scope of this strategy to include all kinds of regime opposition, which does not necessarily have to be organised in parties but also involves groups that are bearers of cultural identities diverging from the officially sanctioned ones. In fact, many regimes pass legislation restricting or prohibiting religious symbols and garb, blasphemy, proselytising, or any engagement in cultural and religious activities, including assemblies or the production and distribution of information materials. In many countries, religious or cultural organisations must register to practice or hold services. Sometimes, registration is denied or delayed, thereby forcing cultic or cultural practices into illegality. On arbitrary occasions, authorities then raid, shut down or destroy churches, mosques and other places of worship (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2024). As Sarkissian (2012) shows, in many authoritarian countries, autocrats tend to enforce regulations that restrain the free practice of religion. These policies, however, are motivated by political rather than religious considerations. There is a narrow line between the still acceptable measure of cultural

²⁵ For a short overview on Schedler’s argument see chapter 3.2.2.

repression and the risk of secession and revolution. Here again, cultural policies may be useful tools for remediating the danger of upheavals. We know that the acceptability of repressive acts depends on the depository or reservoir of legitimacy, which can serve as a source of diffuse support (Easton 1965). It also hinges on the justificatory underpinning of the very repressive acts (Edel & Josua 2018). Especially since 9/11, Arab leaders have cracked down on cultural groups by using the global war against terrorism as a pretext that would find approval and often even active support from Western partners (Albrecht & Schlumberger 2004, 376f.).

3.3.3. Capturing of Economic Reforms

Virtually every person strives for recognition (Hegel 1986 [1970], 145ff.). This is because humans not only define themselves in a self-organised, independent way but also in relation and contrast to others. We define ourselves and are defined by others in types and with regards to our role in society and our place within a larger collective identity group (Wendt 2012, 224ff.). Our consciousness thus also depends on what others see in us and whether they recognise the type we attribute to ourselves and accept the role within a specific group. On a societal level, this strife for recognition is important for a country's cohesion and stability. Francis Fukuyama, therefore, wrote that „economic grievances become much more acute when they are attached to feelings of indignity and disrespect. Indeed, much of what we understand to be economic motivation actually reflects not a straightforward desire for wealth and resources, but the fact that money is perceived to be a marker of status and buys respect“ (Fukuyama 2018, p. 11). What Fukuyama explained here is the principle of the convertibility of different forms of capital into one another. In Pierre Bourdieu's terms, recognition means the capacity to benefit from symbolic capital in terms of credibility, reputation, honour or prestige that can be gained from either economic capital (e.g. wealth), social capital (e.g. social standing) or cultural capital (e.g. education) (Bourdieu 2015). Capital, however, is often characterised by its scarcity and unequal distribution. Grievances are, therefore, a token of inequalities in the distribution or accessibility of capitals that are convertible into symbolic value. So, when isolation, poverty or a lack of educational degrees hinder the conversion of social, economic or cultural capital into symbolic benefit (i.e. forms of social recognition), defection from the system and loss of legitimacy might be the consequence. This is why Lipset (1960, p. 71) makes the question of economic and political citizenship one of decisive importance for the stability of regimes. Wondering about the striking durability of autocratic regimes in the pre-2011 MENA region, Steven Heydemann (2007, 13ff.) argued that many states, where the public sector traditionally provides plenty of opportunities for patronage, have

benefitted from selective economic reforms such as tariff liberalisations, privatisations, introduction of income taxes or deregulation of the banking sector. The state's encouragement for private investors to found enterprises and create jobs yielded overall growth in trade volume and foreign investments and enabled infrastructural projects and reforms in higher education and the health care systems. This partial economic empowerment of the private sector entailed a limited yet significant boost in these countries' economies, which the rulers could exploit for legitimisation purposes. At the same time, incumbents still benefit from their political privileges to extend their economic networks nationally and internationally and generate the economic resources necessary to uphold the upgrading systems. Also, they manage access to economic opportunities which reward loyal and marginalise disloyal behaviour. However, liberalisation policies are a double-edged sword. This development in the MENA region went hand in hand with a decline of the public sector, which, however, did not always lead to more employment in the private sector. Quite the contrary was the case, since more frequently, a complete drop-out of the job market or a turn towards informal jobs was the result, increasing the unemployment rate, especially among the youth and thereby causing grumbling frustration (Heydemann 2007), which might be seen as conducive to the social uprisings in 2011 (Joffé 2011). Oftentimes, autocratic leaders tie their legitimacy claims to a constructed cultural narrative. In order to have their new version of authentic culture be recognised and validated, powerholders seek support from the citizenry and the foreign public. Cultural policies that aim at promoting (cultural) tourism to attract foreigners and a domestic public alike often engineer national culture in a way that complies with the tourists' expectations. In a highly competitive market, this often comes down to fulfilling the tourists' imagination, thereby perpetuating the orientalist gaze tourists and local communities alike have inherited from colonial times (Daher & Maffi Scariati 2014; Said 1978, 1994): Since tourists from Western countries often have a preference for material heritage such as monuments or museums, governments heavily invest into refurbishing urban areas treating cities as theme parks rather than inhabited and creative environments risking to annihilate everyday life (Cavalcanti 1997; C. Michael Hall 2003). While the emphasis on monuments and museums is often driven by the tourists' expectations, on the cultural policy-making level, the choice of what to renovate in cities or peripheries and what to show in museums is highly dependent on the dominant political ideologies. The responsible institutions, in turn, ensure that these ideologies are systematically embedded into the mode of presentation or the presented objects themselves. Through their financial power, tourists make local communities participate in a system they would not support otherwise and where they are not necessarily represented themselves. The strife for economic benefits abets

forms of coercion and co-option readily applied by the powerful to make communities comply with their development plans (C. Michael Hall 2003). The rulers' bet involves the tourists' narration of their holiday experiences: the tourists' version of reality will enjoy the natural credibility of eyewitnesses among their circles of influence back home. This mechanism bears a large exploitable soft power potential for rulers who wish to polish their image and gain foreign legitimacy. In the tourism context, the benefits for the regime can be twofold. With Soest and Grauvogel (2017), it can be argued that a positive image gained from international engagements constitutes a goal in itself since foreign popularity and legitimacy can be turned into domestic legitimacy through mechanisms described by Marianne Kneuer (2013). Furthermore, investments in tourism – if rightly deployed – can increase local populations' revenues (Graham et al. 2000 [2016]; Timothy & Boyd 2003; Timothy & Nyaupane 2009a). If the local development coming with economic success is ascribed to powerholders' engagement by the population concerned, this may benefit the regime in terms of output legitimacy. Therefore, we need to take it seriously when states promote tourism. We should acknowledge the role tourism – and cultural tourism in particular – plays in up-holding political rule.

3.3.4. Control of Media and Communication Technology

Under this category, Heydemann (2007, pp. 18–23) treated the question of how Arab leaders deal with the new media and communication technologies. Mobile phones and the internet allow civil society and opposition to circumvent state censorship, inform each other and mobilise outside state-controlled contexts. While this development has put authoritarian regimes under massive pressure, incumbents have also learned to harness the advantages of technological advancements. First, promoting new media is in itself a tool of legitimation. It demonstrates the innovative and open nature of the regime, seemingly contributing to overcoming the tradition of repression by introducing modern technologies. Furthermore, Morgenbesser (2020, 4f.) argued that autocrats use modern technologies and media to collect information about social grievances and preferences or produce and disseminate information that neutralises potential threats and stirs cognitive dissonance. However, these technologies also pose a risk to autocratic authorities since they tend to weaken the state's monopoly of information, straining or technologically outrunning security apparatuses' capacities to control access, content and use of data (Heydemann 2007, 20f.). Regimes try to counter these limitations through regulations that monitor and constrain users' autonomy and privacy. By using software and physical controls, they limit people's free access to the internet and block

or reduce access to internet sites deemed inconsistent with the country's religious, cultural, political or moral values (Heydemann 2007, 21f.).

From a cultural policy perspective, we also need to consider museums and festivals as communication tools since they are repositories of the collective memory. Demmelhuber and Thies (2023) showed that museums allow the regimes in the Gulf region to propagate a romanticised and nostalgic national identity narrative that bridges the gap between the past and present. New museums are built, and existing museums are redesigned to become more interactive and invite citizens to actively appropriate and propagate the official history narrative. These institutions are based on intergenerational memory effects and allude to sentiments about collective suffering and belonging that are constitutive for nation-building under the leadership of the incumbent regime (Demmelhuber & Thies 2023, 1012f.). In Qatar, for instance, „visitors are perceived not as ‘simple’ receivers but as positive, engaging contributors to the museum collections and narratives. Also, perceiving the museum as an educational tool, where a culture of learning is intensified within its spaces, helps embrace the concepts of social justice and cultural democracy” (Alraouf 2016, p. 91). In this context, architectural designs (and designers) and urban settings are also very important as they showcase modernity while expressing appreciation for traditional Islamic architecture (Alraouf 2016). The scenography of the museums also demonstrates their role in non-economic nation-building that integrates different strands of the population (Mitchell 2016). They use cultural heritage „to validate the authenticity of tradition” and hence project a myth about „nation-ness that predates the introduction of a formal state entity” while linking the emergence of the state to the political leadership of the ruling dynasty (Jeong 2016, p. 173). In some contexts like Saudi Arabia, narratives about the historical entitlement to rule can also be blended with religious aspects of history and the (spiritual) responsibility of the nation vis-à-vis the rest of the world (Cassola 2016).

In a similar vein, festivals and other cultural events have been described as instruments „deployed by dominant political forces to uphold the dominant political system”, especially in urban contexts (Belghazi 2006, p. 99). In the Gulf monarchies, incumbents create and incentivise festivals since they allow the convened public to live and relive memories. Using Orientalist stereotypes, the festivals portray a relatively homogeneous society and provide the audience with participative and immersive experiences of shared belonging to an imagined social community (Demmelhuber & Thies 2023, 1013f.).

Although the introduction and celebration of public holidays can be (re)invented, contested and fought over, they usually demonstrate unity and social coherence, commemorating shared historical events to carve national identity. As cultural symbols, they render history heritage. Furthermore, they communicate the nation's values and aspirations to the rest of the world, becoming an important economic factor in national economies (McCrone & McPherson 2009). In multiethnic countries, allowing regional holidays and decentralised modes of celebrating national holidays can ensure that they resonate in the regions and among local populations to allow nation-building (Stewart 2021).

3.3.5. Diversification of International Linkages

Under this category, Heydemann (2007, pp. 23–25) treated the economic and political ties autocratic regimes weave with other authoritarian countries within and beyond their own region, like China or the Gulf states, to undermine Western diplomacy and mitigate the effects of Western pressure (including from donor organisations like the World Bank) for democratic reforms. These anti-Western coalitions generate cooperation and exchange agreements, which allow these regimes to increase their autonomy. Furthermore, the active promotion of non-democratic values or authoritarian diffusion can be essential to securitise the political environment of an autocrat on a regional level. They keep democratic influence on the country at bay by assimilating the gravitation zone around the authoritarian regime. They pressure or inspire neighbouring countries to adopt similar policies and structures as they do themselves. Thereby, these regimes become Authoritarian Gravity Centers (Kneuer & Demmelhuber 2020b).

My own research under this analytical category will, however, go beyond the inter-authoritarian relations and look at Morocco's broader international network. With regard to the analysis of cultural policies in foreign politics, one concept of international relations proved to be of particular great explanatory power, i.e. the concept of soft power. Joseph Nye first proposed the differentiation between hard and soft power at the end of the Cold War and, thereafter, continuously developed it. Power, „one's ability to affect the behaviour of others to get what one wants", can be achieved via coercion, inducement and payment, or attraction (Nye 2009, 160). While hard power is rooted in traditional, usually material resources and takes the form of military or economic dominance, soft power is attractive power. It is „the ability to affect others to obtain the preferred outcomes by the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuasion, and positive attraction" (Nye 2011, 19). Where hard power uses force, payments, threats, sanctions, or bribes as the primary currencies to coerce cooperation and support, soft power arises from „the values an organization or country expresses in its culture, in the

examples it sets by international practices and policies, and in the way it handles its relations with others” (Nye 2004, 8).²⁶ In short, a country’s soft power relies on its culture, values, and policies, provided that they are considered attractive, consistent, inclusive and legitimate (Nye 2009). In practice, governments mobilise these soft power resources through public diplomacy, bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, in order to appeal to foreign governments and populations. While general and multilateral diplomacy belongs to the traditional scope of diplomacy and encompasses the direct engagement of official international actors, public diplomacy is ‘an international actor’s attempt to manage the international environment through engagement with a foreign public’ beyond governmental bodies (Cull, 2009, p. 12). Careful listening to the preferences of target audiences, openly communicating foreign and domestic policy decisions, and establishing long-term relationships with individual foreign political or public actors are the key dimensions of successful public diplomacy (cf. Cull, 2019; Nye, 2008). De facto, public diplomacy includes a host of complementary measures employed both by state and non-state actors, including disaster relief, scholarships, exchange programmes, military-to-military contacts, seminars and conferences, broadcasting (for example, by opening national media to foreign publics), development assistance, advertisement and propaganda, symbolic events, or institutions working abroad. If managed carefully, these politically driven measures may forge a nation brand, which can be understood as a consistent global reputation. This reputation is founded on a variety of factors, such as the attractiveness of the country in terms of its exported goods, its adherence to norms such as the protection of Human Rights, the perceived hospitality of its people, the global appreciation of its culture and heritage, its domestic and foreign policy, and its appeal to tourists, investors, and migrants (Anholt, 2005, pp. 116 ff.). Cultural diplomacy is a central element of public diplomacy but constitutes a powerful practice of its own. A nation’s culture is cultural diplomacy’s central currency and is particularly valuable for constructing a positive outward image or nation brand. It attempts ‘to maximize a nation’s soft power of culture and values’ in order to incite admiration or appreciation for the sending nation (Cull, 2019, p. 62). The toolbox of cultural diplomacy comprises further measures such as cultural gifts (sponsoring cultural activities or building theatres, etc., on foreign soil) or the organisation of cultural conferences, festivals, and exhibitions abroad. States may moreover build cultural capacity through agencies of foreign cultural action (e.g., the Institut Français, the Goethe Institut, or the Confucius Institute) and by providing language courses or creative scholarships to students of the host country, thereby enabling intercultural dialogue.

²⁶ To „counter the misperception that soft power alone can produce effective foreign policy“, Joseph Nye argued that true power in international relations can only be obtained by combining hard and soft power. Together they form ‚smart power‘, see Nye (2009). Cf. also Wilson (2008).

Governmental and non-governmental actors capitalise on their country's culture to contribute to a positive outward image or specific nation brand by which a foreign public can be influenced to obtain a desired policy outcome (Anholt, 2005; Cull, 2019, p. 120 ff.; Van Ham, 2008).

3.3.6. The Modes of Regime Stabilisation

While the strategies of regime maintenance described above are useful for knowing where to search and what to look at, the regime stabilisation modes helped me ask the right questions. Inspired by Josua (2017), I will describe these modes in more detail in the following section.

3.3.6.1. The Legal Mode

Since hardly any government can survive nowadays without the appearance of legal and moral rightfulness, the legal mode accounts for the tendency of modern governments to respect – at least on the surface –²⁷ the people's demand for legality (Beetham 2013)²⁸. Hence, claims to legitimacy explain why a given power relation should be considered valid, i.e. why the rulers have a right to rule (Beetham 1991, 2013). This is very much about the question of how the ruling elite makes the people feel represented. Therefore, legitimacy claims are about national identity or about how the people, the collective „we“, are defined. Indicative for this can be (preambles of) constitutions and other supreme legal codes since a „constitution is concerned with the definition of the people, in particular the origin of the power of the state (definition of sovereignty) and the resulting definition of (a) community(ies) and citizenship (definition of the individual as a citizen). In this view, the following elements are of particular interest: recognition of (a) state culture(s) or religion(s), recognition of minority rights, and recognition of plural source of law“ (Depaigne 2017, p. 82). Such information can also be deduced from speeches of high officials and school manuals or from „red lines“ that may not be legally enshrined but nevertheless (severely) sanctioned if infringements occur. Most of the time, though, these red lines and rules of conduct are enforced through judicial actions. Lawsuits and the tribunal decisions emanating from them are therefore crucial to repress or integrate, discard or incentivise, discourage or empower specific identity groups or certain kinds of cultural production.

²⁷ Many authoritarian states make use of democratic window-dressing for the international community and Western donors sensible to the respect of human rights and democratic procedures as a condition for the payment of development funds as has been argued for the authoritarian states in MENA region, cf. Albrecht and Schlumberger (2004).

²⁸ The urgency with which people tend to call for legality, of course, differs from country to country, as Mazepus (2017) argued.

3.3.6.2. The Policy Mode

The analysis of the policy mode is based on the assumption that all governments need to live up to their promises, at least to a certain degree. They need to deliver since their survival also depends on the population approving of their efficacy and performance (Booth & Seligson 2009) in providing welfare gains (Gilley 2009), stability, security (Alagappa 1995a, p. 19, 1995b, 61f.), opportunities for leisure and personal development through education, jobs and other immaterial goods such as recognition (Fukuyama 2018). Therefore, I will pay attention to actual policy programmes, subsidies and incidents of cultural patronage. The following questions will guide my analysis of this mode of political stabilisation: How are the policies designed? What is their aim and purpose? How is their intended effect logic supposed to work? How much money is allocated for their implementation, and how is it distributed? Who are the political actors involved? Who are the benefitting individuals and groups? By looking at the content of the state actions first and then shifting the attention to the people involved in and affected by them, it is possible to detect both performative and procedural aspects of the regime's efforts to stay in power. To analyse this, it will be essential to look at institutions. In this work, „institutions” shall be used in narrow terms, designating stimulating, enabling or restricting (yet not determining) contexts of action, comprising political institutions as well as informal, i.e. more societal, institutional factors (Mayntz & Scharpf 1995, 43f.). Since this study focuses on state-driven actions of regulation and domination, I follow the actor-centred institutionalism approach developed by Renate Mayntz and Fritz Scharpf. This approach concentrates on corporative actors, which often take the form of organisations in a state context. This term comprises political institutions such as ministries, public authorities or state-sanctioned proxies.

As described above, political institutions can be „institutions of representation”, „institutions of domination”, or „economic institutions” (Schedler 2013). Andreas Schedler (2013, 61ff.) divides „institutions of representation” into (1) formal institutions of power division, including legislatures, courts and decentralization, and (2) formal institutions of pluralism, such as elections, parties, media and civil society. In authoritarian regimes, some or all of these institutions may be appropriated by regimes and be transformed into „institutions of domination” (Schedler 2013, 57ff.) that help control „the boundaries and content of the authoritarian public sphere” (Dukalskis 2017, p. 29). They become repressive, economic, and ideological institutions, serving as infrastructure to create, transmit and preserve the regime's DNA (Dukalskis 2017, pp. 29–36; Schedler 2013, 56ff.). Through institutions, regimes pass on their legitimating messages, which can assume the form of propaganda and the construction of

ideology. Hence, looking at this input side of the legitimation process, institutions are instrumental in shaping the political arena. In Alagappa's reasoning, it is through institutions regimes can maintain an asymmetry of power while forging ideological unity: By „determining rules and allocating resources, [institutions] structure the social context for action and mold behavior. The application of these rules and resources, over and over, creates standards of behavior that are internalized and routinized. In this way institutions influence social reproduction, including the development and perpetuation of legitimating norms” (Alagappa 1995a, pp. 15–16). These findings are corroborated by studies on formal authoritarian institutions of a seemingly representative nature, such as legislatures, elections, parties or courts. These institutions are often perceived as mere democratic window-dressing and are regular – if not permanent – objects of authoritarian manipulation (Schedler 2013). However, they go beyond mimicking Western democratic institutions. They are important in creating support by allocating spoils and rents, scrutinising public opinion, bargaining policy concessions, allowing for elite rotation or managing contestation (Albrecht & Schlumberger 2004; Gandhi & Przeworski 2006, 2007; Geddes et al. 2018; Lust-Okar 2005; Magaloni 2006; Wright et al. 2015). Furthermore, the functionality and robustness of coercive apparatuses have proven decisive in carrying out containment measures in the context of popular uprisings (Bellin 2004, 2012). Promoting existing institutions, creating new ones or curtailing and abolishing others is, hence, an essential mode of governance. We should be aware that incumbents hardly ever have full control over all parts of the polity. For instance, one of the key messages of Booth and Seligson (2009) is the assertion that the level on which a legitimacy deficit occurs matters for regime stability. This means that especially the distrust in national state institutions has less implications for regime endurance than discontent with local officials or economic performance. Furthermore, it is important to note that formal institutions alone cannot ensure the legitimacy and, hence, the survival of a regime. Helmke and Levitsky (2004, 2006) and Erdmann et al. (2011) have underlined the importance of informal institutions, which are defined as „socially shared rules, usually unwritten that are created, communicated and enforced outside officially sanctioned channels“ (Helmke & Levitsky 2006, p. 5). These institutions can – yet need not (depending on their nature) – complement or even substitute state institutions. This implies that at least in cases where these societal factors are complementary or even substitutive, claims to legitimacy and their underlying ruling idea can be effective through other – i.e. informal – institutional means even despite the weakness of political institutions themselves. Whether they succeed in doing so is, of course, part of a different story

and will not be dealt with in the context of this study. Here, I shall limit myself to formal institutions and – even more precisely – political institutions.

3.3.6.3. The Symbolic Mode

For modern societies, Seymour Lipset (1960, 68ff.) and Juan Linz (1980 [1978], p. 48) both elevate the existence and continuity of a secular political culture, composed of such things as national rituals and myths, public holidays and national anthems, flags and language, to a litmus test of regime legitimacy. The establishment and up-holding of such strong symbols, therefore, constitutes an indispensable strategy for power holders to legitimise their rule. Conversely, every disruption of historically anchored symbols bears the risk of destabilising the regime because it may entail frustration and cleavage with the supporters of the old system unless a broad common basis for the change exists (Linz 1980 [1978], p. 48). As Rodney Barker (2001) shows, legitimation consists, above all, of acts that try to ascertain to the rulers themselves what entitles them to rule. This also explains why most national rituals and symbolic acts occur outside the public space and within inner power circles. They let ruling elites share experiences that show them the exclusivity and particularity of „their club” and thereby tie them closer together and make them identify with each other by rendering them more similar in their aspirations and in their attitudes towards the ruler. This makes these rituals constitutive of any regime striving to sustain itself (Barker 2001).

In many authoritarian states, however, the symbols and rituals also reach beyond the scope of the inner power circle. This is important because the abovementioned strategies may not necessarily engender this ideological common ground within the population. They merely constitute actions of power, i.e. regime performances in the first place that only represent one side of the medal. They are not neutral since they are intentionally designed by their authors. Yet, governance acts are also what people make of them. As already explained above, I am convinced that legitimacy is always output-based. Based on these observable regime performances – in favour or against the public – people make their evaluations and interpretations. Rulers may try to influence or manipulate the way people see their actions. They can suggest interpretations by sending out what Dukalskis (2017) called legitimating messages. These messages are instrumental in what Vollmann and Zumbrägel (2018, 266ff.) dubbed „ideational identity management” (*ideelles Identitätsmanagement*). It allows the dominants to forge beliefs or attach new meanings to values and moral guidelines that enable them to fulfil the people’s expectations. This happens through symbolic actions that frame a collective identity (*wir-Identität*) by bolstering internal coherence and binding important social groups to the system. This framing of collective identity often uses discourses of nationalist patterns that

refer to common history, territorial unity and political sovereignty. Furthermore, it may help to impose the ruling ideology by absorbing and neutralising the interest of other groups or by transforming the ruling ideology through „disarticulation of the ideologies of subordinate groups and rearticulation of the relevant elements into the ideology of the dominant group” (Alagappa 1995a, p. 17). Such narratives can be of great use for regimes who wish to communicate claims of strength and legitimacy in order to manage potential threats to their rule. They may often transmit an image of elite cohesion and popular support to discourage contestation from within the society’s elite and underline the futility of social upheaval. From this angle, legitimation can also be seen as threat management that essentially encompasses the management of threat perceptions (Schedler 2013, 47f.) through legitimating messages (Dukalskis 2017; Dukalskis & Gerschewski 2017).

The analysis of the symbolic mode, hence, involves looking at the narratives in royal speeches and interviews given by palace and government officials to international media as well as national outlets, both close to the regime and more independent. Furthermore, political gestures by palace and government officials will be included, such as inauguration visits to museums and exhibitions. As explained above, this will help to account for the discourses which play an important role in framing state actions, such as cultural policies towards the national and international public (Dukalskis 2017; Edel & Josua 2018; KhosraviNik 2015). In my analysis, I will be guided by the following questions: Which role do nationalist argumentation patterns like anti-colonialism, glory and grandeur of the Moroccan history and the multiethnic composition of the nation play? How are other countries (or the international community as a whole) presented? When are blaming and othering frames preferred over narratives of partnership and cooperation? How are errors or setbacks explained or veiled? My analysis will be limited to those symbolic acts that precede, accompany, or retrospectively explain actual legal or policy actions. This will allow me to analyse the topics and language employed to frame the motives and goals behind these actions.

4. Research Design

4.1. Collecting Data on Moroccan Cultural Policies in Times of COVID-19

When I began my PhD, I started with the idea to conduct a study to compare cultural policies in three North and West African countries, including Tunisia, Morocco and Mali, against the backdrop of the 2011 uprisings, the so-called „Arab Spring”. However, with the spreading of COVID-19 in early 2020, the overall research atmosphere in Morocco deteriorated dramatically. By the beginning of March 2020, this would entail private rather than professional

consequences. For instance, I was thrown out of the shared flat by my landlord, who wanted to quarantine alone after filling up his grocery stock, hoping to sit out the crisis in self-isolation. Also, my girlfriend, my German colleague and I observed and occasionally experienced mistreatment of Asians and Europeans, who – at that early stage of the pandemic – were held responsible for the propagation of the virus in Morocco by a larger public. This resulted in spitting attacks or other kinds of harassment in the streets, making research (and the stay in Morocco itself) an uncomfortable experience on a personal level. When the COVID-19-related border shutdowns took place in March 2020,²⁹ we had to leave the country in a rush and find our way to obtain a seat on one of the last flights to Europe. Back in Germany, my data collection plan was shattered by the total uncertainty about future opportunities to continue my fieldwork. This necessitated abandoning the original research design and required much „research resilience” (Rahman et al. 2021). After months of hesitation, I decided to abandon the comparative approach and concentrate on a single case study about Morocco. There, I had at least been able to conduct some parts of my initially planned fieldwork before the lockdown. A second adaption pertained to my methodological framework. Before the pandemic, extensive archive work had been scheduled to recuperate the legal and policy documents necessary to evaluate the legal and policy mode in its historical evolution. This part was supposed to be supplemented by excursions to relevant heritage spots to document and observe policy changes and operationalisations by myself. Furthermore, semi-structured guideline interviews with state officials and experts in the field had been planned to account for the narrative level in the symbolic mode of my concept. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, media reports and government communications have occupied a much larger (if not dominant) role as data sources in my study than originally foreseen. I was obliged to rely on the material available online in the incomplete electronic archives provided by the ministerial websites and national/international newspapers. Paradoxically, this limitation does not only come with disadvantages. The advantages that were unnoticed before are related to the symbolic mode. The online archives and digital media tend to show and report what the ruling elite wants us to see and hear. They decide on the regulations and policies towards which the public should direct their attention, and they emphasise some aspects of these initiatives while omitting others. Consequently, if listened to and observed carefully, they can contribute significantly to our understanding of the regime’s self-perception and argumentation lines.

²⁹ Le Monde (with AFP) (2020); Sibaha (2020).

4.1.1. Using Official Documents as a Data Source

One of my primary data sources consists of official documents. Document analysis helps analyse historical facts (Mayring 2016, 47f.). The advantage of using official documents as a data source resides in the fact that the data does not need to be generated prior to the analyses, which mitigates the risks associated with interview data such as the interviewer's and interviewee's personality (including psychological disposition, sympathy and other emotions) on data quality (Mayring 2016, p. 47). The main deficits of document analysis, in turn, pertain to questions of authenticity and pertinence of the documents. Another problem is linked to the selection process, which is related to accessibility questions and the researcher's preferences. For this case study, I concentrated on legal texts, policy documents and royal speeches/messages, which I retrieved from the Official Gazette (Bulletin Officiel) or the web pages of the parliament, ministries and other executive institutions, including the Ministry of Culture, the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Finance, the Moroccan decentralised institutions, local/regional development agencies or the National Museum Foundation. I also used the official web archive *maroc.ma* and the website of the national press agency MAP. Most of the documents in this category have a strong strategic character, providing insight into the reasoning of the Moroccan state and the monarchy in particular. Among these documents, royal speeches and messages occupy a special place since they constitute the kingdom's overarching political vision, giving binding orientation for all government actions. On their basis, all major policy programmes or legal reforms are conceived. They are pronounced by the king or people mandated by the royal palace to speak in the king's name on special occasions like official royal visits to inaugurations, foreign policy events or national holidays (e.g. Throne Day on 30 July; Anniversary of the Revolution of the King and the people on 21 August; Anniversary of the Green March on 6 November).

Other reservoirs of official documents I relied on include digital archives of consultative state organs such as the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture, the Court of Audit, the National Council for Human Rights, the Economic, Social and Environmental Council, the Higher Council for Education, the Council of Moroccan Communities living abroad, and the Special Commission for the New Development Model. Their documents are concerned with stock-taking or analytical accounts of Moroccan cultural policies. All of these document reservoirs are officially sanctioned and, therefore, guarantee maximum reliability. Beyond Moroccan archives, I referred to the digital archives of UNESCO and other United Nations sub-organisations like UNDP. The latter documents mostly deal with the conservation of cultural heritage or its inscription on international protection lists. With very few exceptions, all

documents I used were official French or English translations of the Arab originals. Although I might have missed out on nuances of the Arab originals, I still base my analyses on official French or English versions with officially approved wordings, which is crucial to warranting the reliability and validity of my interpretations. Where English translations were not available for this monograph, I translated from the French (and less frequently Arabic) original using the support of artificial intelligence like Google Translate and mostly DeepL. The documents were mainly chosen based on theoretical considerations. I usually came by the documents through cross-references within other documents or through interview partners and secondary data from other researchers, which mentioned and confirmed their relevance and pertinence.

4.1.2. Generating Data within the Moroccan Media Landscape and Beyond

By 2014, 45% of Moroccans aged 25 and older were uneducated. Yet, a study conducted in 2015 and cited by Benchenna et al. (2017, p. 391) as well as Benchenna and Marchetti (2021, 665f.) yielded that 67% of the respondents representing literate Moroccans aged 15 or older claimed that they consumed online press.³⁰ This emphasises the relevance of online media in the Moroccan context. Studying Moroccan cultural policies based on online newspapers was, therefore, a reasonable choice, even more so during COVID-19. The information obtained from media analysis was essentially threefold. Usually, I used them as a point of departure when they referred to new policies, programmes or laws. I would then dig deeper into the issue and try to collect information about the respective policy, programme or law and possibly find official documents proving their existence. Other articles, in turn, published interviews with prominent people whom I did not have access to, like royal counsellors or other high-ranking government officials. In these cases, the interview content and wording substituted the conversations I could not conduct myself.

Finally, it became obvious that the media outlets under scrutiny often followed official discourses, paraphrasing official content from the national press agency Maghreb Arab Press (MAP) or even repeating their news verbally. One former intern at the MAP reported the amusement expressed at some editorial board meetings about the verbatims adopted by other Moroccan newspapers from MAP reports without investing their own journalistic effort or quoting the MAP.³¹ Hence, I took such articles as both a simple source of information and as evidence for the media control I talk about in the fourth category of my stabilisation concept and at the narrative level of the symbolic mode in my analytical framework. Of course, the

³⁰ 17% favoured the printed press, and 26% read both, cf. Benchenna and Marchetti (2021, p. 666).

³¹ Informal conversations, Jewish literature in the Maghreb, 1.

richness of data retrieved through this media analysis approach also comes with a selection bias. I ran the risk of falling short of accounting for legal provisions and policy programmes, which were less prominently promoted but potentially more influential on an operative level. This limitation may have been even more significant since my lack of Arabic knowledge made me rely primarily on either francophone or anglophone media. My selection of newspapers included *Le Matin*, *TelQuel*, *Albayane*, *Médias24*, *Yabiladi*, *bladi.net*, *Hespress*, *le Monde diplomatique*, *l'Économiste*, *HuffPost*, *Morocco World News*, *Atlasinfo*, *Le360*, *le Siteinfo*, *Aujourd'hui le Maroc*, *La Vie Éco*, *la Nouvelle Tribune*, *Les Éco*, *le Desk*, *le Reporter*, *la Libération*, *Quid.ma*, *H24 info*, *l'Opinion*, *la Relève* and *MarocHebdo*. Some of these newspapers are only available online. Many of them only rely on loose professional structuring with a limited number or no professional journalists and often face economic weaknesses resulting from limited entrepreneurial backup and reduced benefits from online advertising. While these structural and economic shortcomings may harm their journalistic qualities, these outlets can act more independently and relatively freely from any risk of censorship (Benchenna & Marchetti 2021; Zaid et al. 2020, p. 231). Others, like *Médias24* and *Le360*, whose founders are considered close to the monarchy, or the most popular online outlet, *Hespress*, are well-endowed since they are linked to bigger companies (Benchenna & Marchetti 2021). Beyond Moroccan media, also international news platforms like *Reuters*, *Jeune Afrique*, *Middle East Eye*, *Middle East Monitor*, *Atalayar*, *al Jazeera*, *le Monde*, *la Croix*, *le Point*, *Algérie patriotique*, *Jerusalem Post*, *Haaretz*, *Algemeiner* were consulted. I concluded subscriptions for three of the above-mentioned newspapers (*TelQuel*, *le Desk*, and *Jeune Afrique*) since they deliver particularly insightful and well-researched articles. To a lesser extent, I also consulted some French-speaking TV shows on television channels, including *Medi1 TV*, *2M* and other public channels of the SNRT. They all capture a specific part of the regime's communication efforts. These efforts target a well-educated francophone/anglophone domestic public or speak to Moroccan nationals living abroad (Benchenna & Marchetti 2021, p. 666) in France, Israel or elsewhere. They also target an international public with a specific (often) professional interest in Morocco – all in all, a public that we can presume to have needs and interests different from those 'ordinary' Moroccans have. At the same time, the international traffic on these web pages of most francophone media does not represent much more than 20%. By contrast, on some websites, the audience from France alone represents 20,9% at *H24.ma*, and 35,9% at *Medias24.com*, ranking second behind the Moroccan public. At *Yabiladi*, which used to explicitly target the Moroccan expat community and has only recently broadened its scope, the

French public (35,8%) even represents the largest share of readers (Benchenna & Marchetti 2021, p. 666).

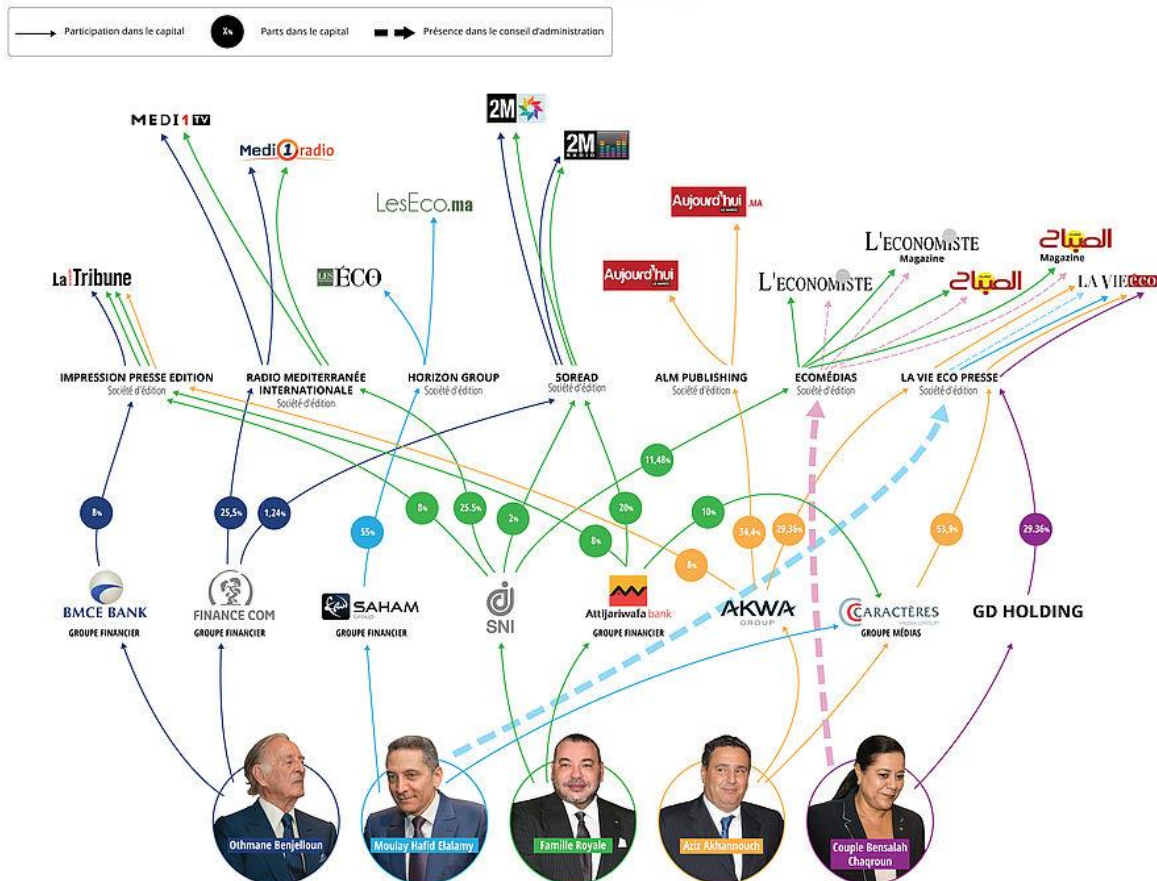
However, the spectre of Arab newspapers and broadcasting media could only be accounted for insofar as they were referred to and cited by the French and Anglophone media outlets. Yet, I am confident that the broad selection of analysed French and Anglophone media fills the gaps, at least to a certain extent. Furthermore, we need to assume that, like their Francophone counterparts, the Arabophone media outlets often refer to the same sources, most importantly the national press agency MAP. The MAP is indeed the official communication channel of the Moroccan regime. While the late King Hassan II had a routine of being interviewed and is widely considered a charismatic PR professional, his son Mohammed VI is far less experienced. He hardly ever grants interviews to the public. Benchenna and Marchetti (2021, p. 668) argued that „to discover the official word of the sovereign, the media must therefore be satisfied with press releases disseminated by the national Maghreb Arab Press (MAP) or solemn declarations without vis-à-vis disseminated by the Moroccan media.” Between 2011 and 2023, the MAP was headed by the late Khalil Hachimi Idrissi, an award-winning journalist with excellent connections to the palace who had worked for *Maroc Hebdo* and founded *Aujourd’hui le Maroc* in 2000. „According to the Press and Publications Code, any media organization in the broadcast industry cannot hold an investment in the capital of more than one print media company. Any person owning 30% or more of a newspaper company has to declare it to the National Press Council. Any newspaper or magazine that owns 10% or more of the capital of another newspaper or magazine has to declare it to the National Press Council. Internet service providers (ISPs) cannot own part of the capital of another ISP” (Zaid & Ibahrine 2021, p. 314). Yet, according to a study dubbed Media Ownership Monitor conducted by the Moroccan newspaper *le Desk* in cooperation with Reporters without Borders (2017a), some Moroccan newspapers are partly or completely owned by individuals or companies belonging to or closely associated with the regime (Figure 2).³² To facilitate the readers’ orientation within the media outlets cited in this work, the following paragraphs will give a short overview of some of the most frequently quoted newspapers and TV channels as well as their affiliation with people or corporate actors associated with the palace.³³

³² For similar findings see Benchenna et al. (2017) and Bouziane (2020).

³³ For more comprehensive introductions into the Moroccan media landscape see Benchenna et al. (2017); Benchenna and Marchetti (2021); Cherribi et al. (2020); El-Issawi (2016); Zaid et al. (2020); Zaid and Ibahrine (2021).

MÉDIAS ET POUVOIRS UN CARTEL D'INTÉRÊTS

MEDIA
OWNERSHIP
MONITOR
Maroc



Sources : Tribunal de Commerce de Casablanca, OMPIC.

#QuiDetientLesMedias

le Desk
LE POUVOIR AUX LECTEURS

REPORTERS
SANS FRONTIÈRES
POUR LA LIBERTÉ DE LA PRESSE



Figure 2: Network of media ownership³⁴

The royal family, with her *Al Mada* holding and the partly owned *Attijariwafa Bank*, is a major shareholder of *L'Économiste*, *Medi1*, *2M*, whose CEO is Faïçal Laraichi, the former son-in-law of the late King Hassan II and current head of the state-owned National Society for Radio and Television (SNRT). *Ajourdhui le Maroc*, *La Vie Éco* and *la Nouvelle Tribune* are partly owned by Aziz Akhannouch, the second richest person in Morocco (after the king), long-time agriculture minister from 2007-2021 and since then prime minister in the king's government. Other shareholders of *La Vie Éco* and *Les Éco* and *l'Économiste* include the influential business couple Bensalah-Chaqroun, with Miriem Bensalah-Chaqroun having served as president of the *Confédération générale des entreprises du Maroc* between 2012-2018 earning her the Orders

³⁴ Le Desk and Reporters Without Borders (2017c).

of National Merit for her patriotism and the Legion of Honor awarded by King Mohammed VI. Also, businessman Moulay Hafid Elalamy is one of the shareholders. He is a member of the National Rally of Independents (RNI party) and served as secretary general of the royally owned *Omnium Nord-Africain* (ONA Group) and as Minister of Industry, Trade, Investment and Digital Economy between 2013-2021. In his former position, he was close with Abdellatif Filali, who was the brother-in-law of then crown prince and later King Mohammed VI and who, for many years, served as Foreign and Prime Minister in the king's cabinet. In turn, Othman Benjelloun, chairman of Africa's second-largest bank, BMCE and the *Finance Com* holding company, owns shares of *La Nouvelle Tribune*, *Medi1* and *2M*.³⁵ On the palace's demand, Othman Benjelloun injected millions of Dirhams as fresh capital into *Le Matin du Sahara*, a favourite newspaper of the regime, to save the outlet from bankruptcy in 2001.³⁶

The latter outlet, today published under the name *Le Matin*, is the oldest French-language newspaper in Morocco and was founded in 1971. It is the country's most widely distributed French language newspaper, with an average of 20.000 copies per month in 2016 and an outstanding share of copies distributed within state institutions. The creation of the newspaper fell into the years when the partisan press was dominant in the news sector, and the state had not yet invested in the print business. At that time, Moulay Ahmed Alaoui, who was the Palace's spokesperson, and Ahmed Benkirane, former Minister of Information and former Commerce Secretary, forced a French media company out of the business and took over its newspapers, renaming them *Maroc Soir* and *Le Matin*. Ahmed Benkirane was soon excluded from the directing body of the paper, leaving it all to Alaoui. The latter is a close friend of the king's advisor, André Azoulay. His tenure at the head of *le Matin* lasted 22 years until he died in 2022.³⁷ Under his leadership, *Le Matin* became the state's unofficial media outlet³⁸ and can be considered one of the news sources that are best informed about the inner proceedings of the *makhzen*.³⁹ By Moroccan historians and researchers into Moroccan human rights policies, the newspaper is described as *Hofberichterstattung* (reporting of the royal court), which has no interest in innovating or shedding light on uneasy details about the monarchy's past (Hegasy 2017b, p. 96).

³⁵ Le Desk and Reporters Without Borders (2017d).

³⁶ Le Monde (2004); S. Smith and Tuquoi (2001).

³⁷ MAP (2022f).

³⁸ Le Desk and Reporters Without Borders (2017b).

³⁹ I.e. the intrasparent network of actors associated with the royal palace. Cf. chapter 5.2.1.

Morocco World News is another online newspaper I intensively used. The outlet is considered close to the regime; some observers even call it a „makhzenian source” (A. R. Smith et al. 2016, p. 221). It concentrates on the Moroccan state’s perspective on foreign policy, sports and culture and has a particular focus on the Western Sahara issue.

The news portal *Le360.ma* is also closely linked to the Moroccan establishment. It was co-launched by Aziz Daki, a gallery owner, art critic, and close friend of the king’s former private secretary, Mounir Majidi. Upon the outlet’s launch, Daki also invested in the Edit Holding group, which nowadays owns the website and provides it with one of the most extensive human and material resources of all online media. Unsurprisingly, in its ethical code, the newspaper fervently commits to the red lines defined by the Moroccan regime (Benchenna & Marchetti 2021, 673f.).

TelQuel is a French-language weekly created in 2001 by journalist Ahmed Réda Benchemsi. In its early years, it was known as one of the rare independent press outlets, daring to criticise the political power and breaking societal taboos by asserting progressive views in an otherwise conservative country. Since 2003, the outlet has been sued several times for investigative reporting. In 2009, *TelQuel* and the French newspaper *Le Monde* prepared a poll to assess the popularity of King Mohammed VI, which triggered the regime’s anger and provoked the complete censorship of the issue. In the wake of this incident, *TelQuel*’s founder, Ahmed Reda Benchemsi, left for the United States, along with most of the early investors of the newspaper, to become a Human Rights Activist.⁴⁰ With a new editorial team, *TelQuel* continues to publish in print and online versions, yet in a far less critical tone. It still counts among the most professional and reliable newspapers in Morocco.

Jeune Afrique is a francophone pan-African newspaper created in 1960 by Béchir Ben Yahmed in Tunis. Since then, the outlet has become one of the best informed and professionally working media for political, economic, social and cultural news on the African continent. The editorial team is based in Paris, France and is headed by French journalist Francois Soudan, while Amir ben Yahmed is the newspaper’s CEO. In 2014, its total paid circulation averaged 53.475 copies. The outlet used to publish weekly until May 2020, when its print version was turned into a monthly. Since 2000, the newspaper also publishes on its own website and offers digital subscriptions.⁴¹ In 2021 – i.e. almost three years after my first subscription with *Jeune Afrique* – the Algerian official press agency APS accused the newspaper of „crony journalism” in the

⁴⁰ Le Desk and Reporters Without Borders (2017f).

⁴¹ [JeuneAfrique.com](https://jeuneafrique.com) (2024).

service of the Moroccan regime, especially in the context of the diplomatic imbroglio between Algeria and Morocco after the violent incident of Guerguerate in autumn 2021.⁴² They criticised the newspaper and its chief editor, François Soudan, for being „The Makhzen’s media pistolero” and for seeking financial support from the royal cabinet.⁴³ In March 2024, Algeria refused an Algerian citizen who works as a journalist for *Jeune Afrique* to set foot on Algerian soil because the magazine allegedly takes a „hostile stance” and „intolerable” position against the country and in favour of Morocco.⁴⁴ Despite these accusations, *Jeune Afrique* still needs to be considered one of the most balanced, professional and independent international news outlets on Moroccan politics, providing in-depth interviews with high-ranking officials and detailed background information that was otherwise hard to come by in times of COVID-19-related travel restrictions.

As mentioned above, I also consulted a few Moroccan television channels apart from newspapers and information platforms. As of 2023, the average television consumption per day and person was 3:44 hours (during Ramadan, 4:46 hours).⁴⁵ In May 2024, over 31 million Moroccans had at least one encounter with a national Moroccan channel on a daily basis. Among the channels most watched by Moroccans were the first national channel, al Aoula, with an accumulated audience share of 38,4 %, and the second channel, 2M, with an accumulated audience share of 44,8%. Nowadays, both channels are controlled by the National Society for Radio and Television (SNRT).⁴⁶ Through its holding SNI and the Attijariwafa Bank, the royal family financially controlled over 20% of 2M. Another popular channel is MEDI1 TV, a broadcaster that used to be privately owned but strongly financed by Othmane Benjelloun and the royal family (Le Desk & Reporters Without Borders 2017c) before it was fully acquired by the state to be integrated into the national broadcasting system in 2021.⁴⁷ In 2019, during Ramadan, the national channels, for the first time, cracked the record of a share of over 83,1% of the audience during prime time.⁴⁸

The press generally enjoys a relatively high level of freedom when reporting on economic topics and social issues. Yet, it is far more strictly monitored with regard to political topics and even more so if the monarchy itself is concerned. After the death of King Hassan II in 1999, the

⁴² For details, see chapter 6.5.2.3.3.

⁴³ Nassima (2021).

⁴⁴ Loum (2024).

⁴⁵ Centre Interprofessionnel d’Audience des Médias (CIAUMED) (2023).

⁴⁶ CIAUMED (2024b).

⁴⁷ Goff (2021).

⁴⁸ Elafrite (2019b).

liberalisation phase of Mohammed VI's early years also brought new wind to the ossified media landscape, which had practised self-censorship and had limited itself to tightly controlled partisan reporting. In an attempt to break with the past, the monarchy granted unprecedented space to the press, tolerating that the rule of the former king was criticised and the wrong-doings of the old regime as well as the flaws of Mohammed VI's new government led by Abderrahmane el Youssoufi were investigated. With the press code of 2002, new outlets entered the scene, and the growth of the internet facilitated the emergence of new online media (Zaid et al. 2020, 228f.). Also in 2002, the HACA (High Authority of Audiovisual Communication) was created as a „fully impartial institution' whilst under the tutelary protection of the king". It was mandated with the mission to accompany the liberalisation of the audiovisual sector by evaluating applications, providing licences for the creation of new audiovisual media and overseeing the public service broadcasting division (Cherribi et al. 2020, p. 241). Yet, the 2003 terror attacks provided the regime with new pretexts to control civil society and introduce anti-terrorism laws, which – while not directly targeting the press – still exerted pressure upon the media. While more daring reporting flourished during that time, many newspapers faced heavy lawsuits and exorbitant fines. This increasingly pushed some critical outlets into bankruptcy or made them accept to be tamed in their editorial lines in exchange for survival (Zaid et al. 2020, p. 229). By 2011, the media situation had grown grim again. Despite the freedom of the press and the freedom of publication and expression being guaranteed under the new constitution of 2011, reality looks far different (El-Issawi 2016). While today there is more information about the monarchy in the press, the palace cannot be considered an ordinary source but rather tends to hand-pick journalists who are granted access to selected information and pushed towards a specific editorial line (El-Issawi 2016, p. 20). Beyond this controlled openness, the authorities monitor, harass, arrest and press charges against journalists who try to report, question or even criticise one or several of the following topics: the king (and more particularly his health condition), the royal family, the monarchy as the country's political system, the narrative of democracy, the role of Islam as the official state religion with the king as its supreme authority, or the status of Western Sahara. Although the update of the press code in 2016 was announced to provide journalists with more freedom from coercion and repression, the situation hardly changed (Zaid & Ibahrine 2021, p. 312). For instance, the regime enforced a complete blackout for mainstream outlets during the 2017 Rif protests (Zaid et al. 2020, 229ff.). As argued by El-Issawi (2016, p. 5), „continuous shifts and mutations in the traditional national media are aggravating the fragility of journalists' already volatile working conditions. The lack of opportunities for professional advancement and weak job stability are encouraging

a wave of migration to other professions. Today, self-censorship habits are widespread, and journalists fear retribution not only for what they produce but also for their political views.” This treatment of freedom of the press intensified during and under the pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, the Culture Ministry put the printing and distribution of newspapers on halt. Frequently, dubious charges about sex or tax crimes, espionage or terrorism are used to intimidate, silence and detain critical journalists. In May 2020, for instance, *Akhbar al-Youm*’s editor-in-chief, Soulaïmane Raïssouni, was detained on suspicion of sexual assault and later sentenced to five years in prison. In July 2020, Omar Radi, a reporter at the news site *Le Desk*, was accused of rape and collaboration with foreign intelligence agencies. In December 2020, Maati Monjib, a renowned journalist for *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, who has experienced harassment and surveillance from the authorities, was arrested on suspicion of money laundering.⁴⁹ In April 2023, Hanane Bakour was sued for a Facebook post in which she had criticised the conduct of the 2021 municipal elections in Guelmim-Oued Noun. In October 2023, journalist Abdelmajid Amyay was accused of defamation against a regional prefecture, and other press members, including Taoufik Bouachrine and Rida Benotmane, were held in solitary confinement in 2023. In September 2022, the international media rights group Global Voices published a report about Moroccan authorities’ use of the Pegasus spying software to surveil journalists and their mobile phones in Morocco.⁵⁰

Benchenna and Marchetti (2021) also reported on harassment against some online outlets. They especially target outlets that do not (entirely) respect the red lines, do not receive public (and even private) support, and cannot harness the same economic benefits as their more complying comrades. The intelligence services paid them multiple visits looking for exploitable weaknesses in their organisations or irregularities in the employees’ contracts. The outlets also faced hacking attacks and attempts to slow or shut down their internet connections.

4.1.3. Conducting Interviews in Morocco and the Digital Realm

To balance out the shortcomings of using only francophone and anglophone news outlets and possibly censored official media, I added digital interviews with state officials and activists to my bouquet of data sources. These interviews took the form of elite and expert interviews. Elite interviews target individuals belonging to an exclusive group to which only those with exclusive contacts and networks have access (Bogner et al. 2014, p. 12). Experts, in turn, are defined by Bogner et al. (2014, 12) as people whose specific practical or experiential knowledge

⁴⁹ Freedom House (2021).

⁵⁰ Freedom House (2024).

relating to a clearly defined problem area allowed them to forge interpretations of reality that can structure the specific field of action for others in a meaningful and action-guiding way. Obviously, both categories intersect where experts have reached influential positions – e.g. in administration – which enable them to penetrate the exclusive circles of the elites. Following Bogner et al. (2014, 18ff.), interviewing these experts/elites allowed me to get access to my interlocutors' technical knowledge as well as their specific expertise about certain political or social processes, like the sequence of actions, decisions, interactions or organisational/political constellations. Finally, the interest in interviewing these individuals also resided in their capacity to provide interpretations about events and social/political patterns and share their priorities and strategic goals. Yet, the area and level of expertise are subject to the researcher's ascriptions, which raises questions about the researcher's positionality. According to Krell and Lamnek (2024, 368f.), sample representativity in qualitative research can be approximated through typologies of actors. My selection of interview partners was, hence, guided by my research interest and the theoretical framework established before entering the field. However, it was adapted several times along the way as (cross-)references to new actors revealed actors that had previously not been part of the rough sample. The latter was created through a mapping of relevant actors in Morocco's cultural policy field, which was conducted prior to my fieldwork. Since my interest focus lay on state policies, I concentrated on state officials representing the royal palace in cultural affairs like royal advisor André Azoulay or other strategically working political institutions like national ministries, including the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Housing, the Ministry of the Interior or the Ministry of Tourism and Handcraft as well as institutions that belong to them like regional departments or sub-institutions like the *Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams Murshidin and Murshidat* or *Mohammed VI Institute for Qur'anic Lectures and Studies* (both part of Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs). Furthermore, I was interested in officials belonging to the *Higher Council of Oulema*, the *National Museum Foundation* (FNM), the *Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture* (IRCAM), the *National Council for Human Rights* (CNDH) or the *High Commissariat for Former Resistance Fighters and Former Members of the Liberation Army*, which work independently of the government and take care of specific tasks in limited areas of the cultural policy field like the development of religious rulings, the upgrading of Morocco's museum heritage, the revitalisation of Amazigh culture, the symbolic/collective compensation of (former) victims of arbitrary state violence or the memory of Morocco's struggle for independence. Other than that, I turned towards agencies and institutions executing state policies in the cultural field like the

Agency for the Development and Rehabilitation of the Medina of Fès (ADER, for the Fès-Meknès-region), the *Agency for the re-organisation of the Bouregreg Valley* (henceforth called Agence Bouregreg, for Rabat and Salé) and the al Omrane Holding, which are all mandated with preserving and upgrading Morocco's cultural heritage on an operational level. Interviewing representatives of the Association Essaouira Mogador and the Association Casamémoire, I also integrated non-state actors into the sample who can arguably be called cronies of the Moroccan state given their privileged status in executing state policies.

Following the recommendations by Bleich and Pekkanen (2013) about transparency in interview research, the next section will provide the reader with more details about the circumstances and reliability of my conversation data. Overall, of the persons I contacted, 105 persons granted interviews, informal or background conversations. Some other appointments were cancelled by the interviewee at the last moment or were no-shows. On my side, I had to cancel one interview with a high-ranking official of an important religious think tank due to a collision of appointments. Unfortunately, moving the conversation to another date was impossible since my interlocutor insisted on meeting me in person, which was not feasible given my travel bookings. Three interviews were aborted during the conversation, including one with a royal advisor due to sudden illness, one due to the COVID-19 lockdown announcement and one due to an urgent appointment. The interviews were acquired either through cold calls or snowballing. The most challenging task was to win interview partners among the parliamentarians of the governing coalitions and opposition. In total, I had four interviews with parliamentarians: one member of the (lower) Chamber of Representatives from the Mouvement populaire, one from a left-wing party of the same chamber. From the (higher) Chamber of Councillors, I convinced one high-ranking politician from the ruling PJD and one individual representing the Moroccan business federations. One politician who is very active in Amazigh policies declined, cancelled or rescheduled interviews several times. Hence, for the parliamentary perspective on the role and dynamics of cultural policies in Morocco, saturation could only be reached through the two additional information sources. The main problem certainly was the COVID-19 pandemic, which entered the field before I could properly start contacting people and building trust among the parliamentarians across the parties, whom I could have used for further snowballing. This was particularly regrettable regarding the PJD camp since many of my interviews dealing with Amazigh- or Jewish-identity questions could, therefore, only be treated from an Amazigh, Jewish or modernist perspective while a more conservative view defending Morocco's Arabo-Islamic was largely missing. I balanced this shortcoming by recurring to background conversations with local researchers and specialists,

secondary data from other academics and extending the set of newspaper articles in that area. However, due to my limited language knowledge of Arabic – I could only use French or English articles and talk to experts who speak these languages too. Yet, people mastering either one of these languages tend to represent a more liberal and modernist view as well. High-ranking ministry officials were also hard to persuade to grant interviews, especially those from the Ministry of the Interior, the Habous Ministry, and the Housing Ministry. The same applies to Morocco's regional and local development agencies like the Agence Bouregreg in Rabat or the SDLs in Casablanca. To address this problem, in most cases, I either turned towards former officials or targeted a lower level of decision-making or institutions that execute orders from the ministries. The most valuable source, though, was, once more, media reports.

Some interlocutors started to talk about their experiences without me asking any questions. In such cases, the „interview” rather took the shape of a narrative interview or an informal conversation. Yet, generally, the interviews were semi-structured guideline interviews (cf. appendix 9.2.), which usually included the following standard questions: 1) From your perspective, what are the main challenges and priorities in cultural policies in Morocco? 2) In your opinion, who are the main actors in the cultural policy field? 3) What were important cultural policy changes over the last 20 years? 4) From your point of view, what brought these changes about?

Then, I usually continued to ask questions tailored to my interlocutors' professional/academic profile and their field of expertise. I would ask them about their (institution's) role in certain cultural policy areas or specific decision-making processes to learn more about their motives and considerations as well as the political/societal influence they may have been exposed to. To learn more about yet unaddressed issues, at the end of an interview, I would sometimes ask what my interlocutors would change about Moroccan cultural policies if they had all the necessary political and financial means. Sometimes, this question made my interlocutors more comfortable to share criticism or describe shortcomings and potential room for improvement. At the end of our conversations, I always asked my interlocutors about their consent for quotation and about further contacts with people who could elucidate points other than the ones raised in the current interview.

Most of the time, it was possible to establish a sufficiently confidential and trustful atmosphere so that interviews proved to be a valuable tool to either confirm or supplement media information or get access to documents otherwise not retrievable online. Often, interviewees would refer to people, events, programmes, royal speeches, or documents which I had not

encountered or read about before. Some interlocutors were even ready to forward documents that constituted the fundament of their work or informed their decisions. Many also assisted in establishing contact with other relevant people in the field, facilitating contact snowballing. Some also intimately spoke about their or their superiors' motives and strategic considerations when deciding about specific policies.

Unlike during my very few interviews in Morocco in the pre-lockdown time in February/early March 2020 and during the inter-lockdown phase in late July/early August 2021, most of the time, it was even possible to tape record the interview at full length and quote from it. Most of the time, the digital interviews were conducted via end-to-end encrypted WhatsApp calls where (usually) my interviewees and I did not see each other. From a methodological viewpoint, beyond the pragmatic upsides of reduced travel costs, digital or phone interviews have the advantage that the interviewer's access to the expert is more efficient and that his influence on the expert is reduced. At the same time, the expert's feeling of anonymity and safety increases, which has beneficial effects on the interviewee's openness (Misoch 2019, 171f.). I experienced these advantages myself during my online research. Instead of receiving me in their offices, exposed to collegial attention or surveillance, some officials would comfortably talk to me from their safe spaces at home via a private phone or PC. Also, we were relatively undisturbed due to the absence of ringing phones or people entering the room. The more abstract constellation often helped my interlocutors forget about the tape recorder and speak more freely. Most likely, not seeing each other during phone interviews allowed me to harness the advantage of the perceived higher anonymity and of the „faceless researcher” who is less threatening or intimidating with his researcher equipment and attitude (Self 2021). Yet, whenever recording was denied or technically impossible, I took notes during the interview or compiled a summary of the most relevant information afterwards (cf. appendix 9.3.)

The downside of the digital interview setting is obviously linked to the impersonal character of interviews. As described by Misoch (2019, 173f.), I had less control over the interview situation and had less influence on the interview direction without appearing rude when interrupting my interlocutor. As highlighted by Self (2021), face-to-face interviews are considered the gold standard of interview research since they allow the interviewer to read, interpret and react to body language and other forms of non-verbal communication, i.e. so-called social cues. Quick and sympathetic reactions and adaptations to signs of impatience, irritation or anger can avoid misunderstandings and make conversations less stressful. In one case particularly, a face-to-face encounter could have allowed me to anticipate or at least call help when my interlocutor collapsed during the interview. However, this was impossible since his sudden illness happened

behind a black screen, leaving me with worries and growing frustration when suddenly the sound was switched off. The interviewee was only heard from again days later through his wife apologising for the sudden end of our conversation and explaining the circumstances, i.e. my interview partner's urgent need to be hospitalised.

Another source of bias lay at the interviewee level: only those experts and government officials young or (digitally) experienced enough to accept interviews via Zoom, Skype, or WhatsApp could be interviewed. Furthermore, I needed to acknowledge that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many potential interview partners had priorities other than assisting in the research of a random foreign student – a finding that is valid for both episodes of interview research in 2020 and 2021, digital and face-to-face. Elderly people, for instance, were very careful and sometimes reluctant to meet people outside their families for health reasons. Some also preferred meetings in public spaces where the risk of being eavesdropped on was particularly high, and the noise level made communication and recording more complicated. Others again had young children to be taken care of or were preoccupied with economic concerns, knowing that, by that time, many people risked losing their jobs and job revenues due to national lockdowns in Morocco.

This selection bias added itself to the selection bias linked to my own language limitations. Due to my lack of knowledge in Arabic, Darija or Tamazight, interviews were conditioned to the mastery of French (or, in some cases, English) on behalf of the potential interviewee. However, this restriction – at least to my feeling - did not prove to be a major impediment in most of the cases since the target group of my interviews belonged to the well-educated Moroccan elite anyways, which – except for some people in the religious or Amazigh field – were perfectly francophone or anglophone thanks to good French/English training at school and study/work experience abroad. Still, I am aware of the double language hurdle on my and my interlocutors' sides and the problems this entails. Few of the interlocutors seemed to struggle with formulations and to look for the right French word to adequately express their thoughts and be as precise as possible. I addressed this issue by avoiding taking verbatim quotes from their interviews. Furthermore, I balanced the selection bias pertaining to language by systematically using secondary literature written by Moroccan scholars who do not have a language barrier. I also spoke with other Arab/Darija/Amazigh-speaking experts and meticulously compared their findings and sources with my own.

Another limitation of digital interviews is the often unstable internet connection at interlocutors' private homes and their choice of interview spot (Roberts et al. 2021; Self 2021). If my

interviewees decided to call from the street, a café or their garden at home, background noise and connection breakdowns impacted the mutual comprehensibility and the quality of the type, sometimes leading to (lengthy) annoying interruptions or repetitions. If the situation and the overall atmosphere of the conversation allowed it, I either interrupted my interlocutor and kindly asked to repeat the last phrase or asked a similar follow-up question, which would then help fill in the gaps. In some cases, however, this was not possible at all or only at the risk that my interlocutors got annoyed with me. Then, I accepted the gaps and continued the conversation under these far-from-ideal circumstances. Later, I then filled in the lacunae from other sources through triangulation with other interviews, media reports as well as (participant) observation.

A final limitation pertains to the time factor. Some interlocutors could not (or pretended not to) remember the exact context and details of certain events/decisions – especially when their time in office dated from long ago or when their timetables were too busy with events to remember everything. They, hence, confounded dates, names or locations. In many cases, I was able to correct these errors through cross-checking during the triangulation process. Nevertheless, it is impossible to rule out all possible errors, especially when my interlocutors were the only (available) witnesses or sources. Table 9.1. in the appendix shows the categories and sub-categories into which I classified my interlocutors, and provides details about the format, length and status of my conversations and interviews I conducted for this study. Some statements from these conversations and interviews are quoted and paraphrased in this book. Given the anonymity required by the circumstances under which this research was completed, the table also features codes that identify the interlocutors. Furthermore, appendix 9.2. provides an example of my interview guidelines while appendix 9.3. offers a transcript sample of a recorded interview and a photo of my handwritten notes taken during an interview without recording device.

4.2. Finding the Key to the Material – Qualitative Data Analysis

To analyse my data, I used a qualitative approach, which is particularly useful for single case studies (Mayring 2015, p. 23). It can be applied to either build or verify theories/hypotheses, gain in-depth insights and check the plausibility of already established arguments, analyse social and political processes, and classify material, for instance, as a basis for subsequent quantitative analyses (Mayring 2015, pp. 22–25). My study is located at the intersection of theory-building and theory-testing. As a method of analysis and interpretation, I used qualitative content analysis, which adapted perfectly to my conceptual framework. It was particularly useful in analysing how political, legal and symbolic actions are framed.

While there is no consensus about what qualitative content analysis involves exactly (Schreier 2014b), I used the procedure suggested by Schreier (2014a) as an orientation. It is a procedure to describe selected text meanings by defining them as relevant codes that appear repeatedly within and across the material and help to structure and categorise the data (Schreier 2014b). In the context of my research, text is widely understood as any written data, including transcribed interviews, speeches or video material (cf. appendix 9.3). Yet, the special circumstances of my research within an authoritarian setting full of uncertainties often made it difficult to define clear codes (especially for unspoken and hidden messages) and to classify material within clearcut categories since the same phrase could mean different things depending on the speaker, context, body cues, gestures etc. Furthermore, given that some analytical units may overlap or be narrowly intertwined, they represent moving targets. Therefore, I prefer to think of my sub-categories as content markers rather than codes. Nevertheless, the methodological flexibility combinations of concept-driven and data-driven approaches provide within a qualitative content data analysis process (Schreier 2014a, p. 171) was a huge advantage compared to quantitative or other qualitative methods. Table 9.4. in the appendix shows my raw notes and thoughts on some media reports. Table 9.5. in the appendix then presents the reader with typical, yet not mutually exclusive, examples of the content markers used to analyse my data material from all sources, i.e. royal speeches/messages, legal/policy texts, media reports and interviews. In contrast to the quotes provided in this book's empirical chapters, where I limited myself to providing an English translation to enhance reader friendliness, the examples in the appendix are given in their original language (mostly French) to enable the reader to precisely grasp the relevant wording for the analytical entity. To define my analytical units, I used my conceptual framework as a hermeneutical tool. I classified my material within one of the five categories of authoritarian up-grading strategies and added one residual category with overarching frames that appeared in all of the other categories. Following Schreier (2014a, p. 174), the five categories of my conceptual framework were adopted as the theory-driven part of my content analysis frame. Within these categories, the data was analysed along the questions described under the modes of legitimation (legal mode, policy mode, symbolic mode). These questions provided a loose set of content markers, a sort of heuristic that adapted to the data. It helped me to achieve a detailed reading of the material and identify the relevant information and narratives provided by its authors. The relatively broad nature of the questions I confronted my material with allowed me to remain open for new categories to emerge from my material and adapt my further analysis accordingly. A preliminary analysis of the first interviews I conducted during my initial field trip to Morocco in February/March 2020, the subsequent months of (COVID-

19-induced) internet media research and another round of literature review yielded a deeper understanding of what could be expected from my material. This allowed me to sharpen the research question to its current shape and orient my analysis towards other theory-driven sub-categories that helped to better describe the benefits of cultural policies for regime stabilising purposes, as the following overview will show.

Researchers like Demmelhuber and Thies (2023) or Elshahed (2014) had already drawn my attention to the way autocratic leaders in the MENA region exploit their museum heritage for regime legitimating purposes, which encouraged me to persevere and dig deeper in this direction at a moment when I had already made timid steps into this direction. These considerations resulted in the introduction of nation-building sub-categories. These were placed under the first analytical category pertaining to the appropriation of civil society. It involves content markers dealing with themes like „national identity”, „the contribution of diversity to national unity”, „the constants of the nation”, „participation and inclusion of civil society”, „democratisation”, „the historical bond between the king and his people”, and „patriotism/national pride”, „the spreading of Moroccan values” and „loyalty/allegiance to the king”. The general idea of this category is to use symbols of national identity and references to national unity as tokens of belonging. The content markers about the inclusion of civil society and democratisation refer to participatory frames, which the regime uses to strengthen people’s feeling of being actively involved in a nation-building process.

Furthermore, I am aware that classical post-independence nation-building dynamics involving the struggle between dominant unitary identities and local or ethnic identities pose challenges to regime stability even decades after independence and can dominate the identity discourse in autocratic contexts such as Russia and post-Soviet countries (Bowring 2019; Hutching & Tolz 2015; Omelicheva 2016; Stewart 2021). Against the backdrop of Morocco’s independence struggle and the widespread Arabo-Islamic identity discussion in the MENA region since Egypt’s Gamal Abdel Nasser, concurring identities emerged to contest this unitary ideology – a trend that autocratic countries like Morocco could hardly afford to ignore. In fact, the Amazigh dimension of Moroccan identity has already amply been discussed in academic research as a threat to the Moroccan regime. The monarchy’s response to this challenge has been analysed, not the least in the context of the 2011 uprisings (El Guabli 2023; El Ibrahimy 2022a; Moha Ennaji 2005; Errihani 2013; Maddy-Weitzman 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2022; Sadiqi 2014a; Silverstein 2018; Wyrzten 2014). For this study, I built upon the existing literature and concentrated on the identifiable trends within the state’s policies and identity discourses towards the Imazighen, with a special focus on regime-fostering elements. While the fortunate

literature situation provided a solid base to formulate confident expectations about the likely outcomes, the more explorative approach I took with regard to the underresearched recent developments yielded some surprising results. The literature informed the introduction of some coding themes under two categories, i.e. content markers about the contribution of cultural diversity to national unity, which falls under the category of appropriation of civil society, and content markers about social cohesion and reconciliation between the state and the people.

The latter elements fall in the second analytical category regarding the management of contestation. It is concerned with content markers like „national security”, „national stability”, „social cohesion”, „reconciliation”, „the fight against terrorism/obscurantism or extremist views”, „repression and coercion”, „the immunisation of the society”, „autocracy, tyranny, dictatorship, a strong man”, the „enhanced efficiency of non-participant and non-democratic procedures” or the maintenance of „red lines”. Narratives about security, repression, coercion or red lines are natural elements in this category. Conversely, at first glance, the promotion of social cohesion and reconciliation would also fit into the first category. Yet, it turned out that people need to be reconciled and brought back together only where society is divided, like in Morocco. This involves eliminating the source of division, i.e. all kinds of extremist views or dissidents who cross the regime’s red lines. The themes about autocratic rule or non-democratic procedures refer to top-down governance methods, which tend to discard opposition views.

The third category refers to harnessing the benefits of economic reforms. It involves content markers, which pertain to „the valorisation of Moroccan culture”, „the economic development of a region”, „the attractiveness of a site or region for tourism”, „the creation and improvement of tourist infrastructure”, „financial effectiveness”, the „creation of job opportunities/stable revenue” and the „improvement of people’s living conditions”. The overall idea behind these content markers is that they are all concerned with improving the economic situation of Moroccan citizens. Another part of this idea is a governance and management element about upgrading national funding mechanisms to enhance the effectiveness of cultural policies as a driver for the development of a city, a region or the state. Building upon theoretical considerations (Graham et al. 2000 [2016]; Timothy & Nyaupane 2009c) as well as my own modest touristic experience in Morocco, I furthermore expected the touristic dimension of cultural policies to emerge as a means of development provider and a tool of performance legitimization. This explains the prominence of content markers relating to tourism under the economic reform category.

Under the fourth category, I classified elements that pertain to the control of media and communication technology. It involves content markers about „the creation and use of national media”, the „programme of national broadcasters”, „media consumption quotas and consumers’ preferences”, the „instrumentalisation of media”, their „specification books (cahiers de charge)” and „the communicative or educative role of museums, festivals or heritage sites”.

The fifth category is generally concerned with Morocco’s international engagement. Naturally, this category is very much inspired by the findings of Cull (2008, 2019) and Nye (2004, 2008, 2011) about the role of soft power and cultural diplomacy, which explains the introduction of the content marker „Moroccan soft power”. Furthermore, the category includes content markers about „Morocco’s position in the world or within the concert of nations”, „Morocco as a bridge builder between civilisations”, „Morocco as an African country”, „Morocco’s radiance” beyond its borders, and „Morocco’s leadership role regarding universal values and cooperation”. Apart from this, some academic literature deals with the use of cultural policies as a means of settling territorial questions that are intrinsically linked to regime legitimacy by co-opting the international communities, as we have seen in Palestine or China (Cesari 2010, 2014; Oakes 2013). Knowing about the conflict around the internationally disputed status of Western Sahara, I suspected that such dynamics would most likely become relevant in the Moroccan context as well. This explains the introduction of content markers that involve „international organisations” and „foreign countries’ recognition of Morocco’s claims on the Moroccan/Western Sahara”.

Other strands of literature did not provide sufficient ground to deduce similar hypotheses. Yet, they have inspired my data generation and data analysis process since they gave me a direction as to where and what to look for. The most prominent aspect in that regard concerns the role of religion in regime legitimation, which is a pattern we find in many other country contexts in the Middle East (Vollmann & Zumbärgel 2018) and beyond (Depaigne 2017; Koesel 2014). As outlined in the introduction, this aspect has long been described as a driving factor of Moroccan regime legitimation (Daadaoui 2011; Geertz 1971; Spiegel 2015; Tozy 1999; Wainscott 2017). Therefore, my idea was rather to exploratively analyse whether or to what extent the Moroccan regime continues to almost exclusively rely on Islam as a socio-political glue binding the king as a descendant of the Prophet Mohammed to his people. This explains the introduction of an overarching content marker category about the king’s religious authority as *amir al mouminine*. Other elements within this residual category involve „gratitude towards the king”, „the king’s enlightened leadership/vision”, and the „king’s high orientation”.

4.3. Implications of Research on Regime Stability in an Autocratic Context

Researching in Morocco means working in an autocratic setting. Even before the 2011 uprisings, this meant that researchers of the MENA region had to work in legal grey zones when they collected data in the field (Bohn et al. 2021), with surveillance or actual coercion looming large around the corner (Clark 2006). The 2024 Freedom House report lists Morocco as partly free with poor ratings in the field of political participation and rule of law, while the V-Dem „Democracy Report 2024 – Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot” classifies the state system as a „closed autocracy” with some achievements in the liberal and deliberative components, but poor scores regarding liberal and electoral democracy, as well as in egalitarian and participatory components. Also, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2024 called the regime a „hard-line autocracy”. According to Glasius et al. (2018, 37ff.), being aware of a regime’s red lines is crucial to knowing how to behave as a researcher. Beyond diligent preparation based on academic literature and conversations with experienced researchers, this also required a permanent risk assessment during my fieldwork. It involved carefully reading up-to-date media and (participant) observing my environment.

For an accurate understanding of Morocco’s official narratives, it is imperative to acknowledge the authoritarian context in which all political agency in Morocco takes place. The king’s vision must be considered a binding orientation for social and political life. While these royal orientations are important landmarks for Morocco’s policy-making,⁵¹ public discourse is constricted by red lines about the king’s personality, his reading of Islam, the importance of the Western Sahara and the royal version of ‘democracy’. Some red lines are legally enshrined,⁵² while others are respected by social convention. By consequence, a resilient authoritarian political system such as Morocco strongly builds on encompassing strategies of repression and legitimization, which politicises art and culture in a top-down fashion and impedes the development of a freely working creative industry.⁵³ Despite these worrying developments, Morocco still has to be considered one of the most open countries for foreign researchers, allowing them to enter with tourist visas (Glasius et al. 2018, p. 21) and letting them conduct their field studies as long as they do not cross red lines. However, like in other countries of the

⁵¹ Interview, Jewish heritage, 5; Interview, Festival industry, 2; Interview, Cultural heritage, 5.

⁵²For example, article 267-5 of the penal code reads “Anyone who undermines the Islamic religion, the monarchical regime or incites to undermine the territorial integrity of the Kingdom shall be punished by imprisonment of between six months and two years and a fine of between 20.000 and 200.000 Dirhams, or by one of these two penalties only.” Cf. Royaume du Maroc (2016)

⁵³ Interview, Cultural policies, 1; An earlier version of this paragraph was first published by Wüst and Nicolai (2022).

MENA region, the uprisings and instability have increased distrust and suspicion (Bohn et al. 2021). A Moroccan friend and doctoral researcher experienced this himself shortly before I undertook my own fieldwork. When conducting his linguistic field research in the north of Morocco, he was arrested by security forces and had to answer uneasy questions about his study. He was only released when he could credibly assert that his research had nothing political or even dissident.⁵⁴ A few years into her PhD, another Moroccan colleague working on North African Jewish literature within a German-Moroccan cotutelle programme was urged by her Moroccan supervisor to change her literature canon at short notice because one of her analysed authors was suspected to be overly sympathetic to the Israeli position in the Middle East conflict. Although the canon might eventually have turned out to be unproblematic after Morocco normalised its diplomatic relations with Israel in late 2020, her supervisors still deemed it politically more reasonable to change the authors.⁵⁵ Even though, as a Western foreigner, I was (probably) less exposed to direct surveillance and political pressure than my Moroccan colleague, acknowledging the autocratic context of research in Morocco still came with several methodological considerations. Many are of an ethical nature, which in turn entail practical problems (Glasius et al. 2018).

Should research of inherently political content be conducted under circumstances which may yield legal consequences for both the researcher and his encounters (facilitators or interviewees)? If the question is answered in the affirmative, the researcher still faces the dilemma of how he, his interview partners and other research-facilitating individuals can be protected from the state and its security apparatus. Answering these questions requires some honesty: When I had decided to conduct research in autocratic contexts, I needed to accept that no protective measure designed with whatsoever diligence warrants the absolute safety and security of my interlocutors. Ultimately, I faced an imbalance of power between the state and its subjects. Yet I was ready to do whatever was in my capacity to ward my interlocutors from potential threats linked to them supporting my research.

During fieldwork, this first entailed building a relationship of trust and understanding, which is primordial to engaging in conversation with government officials. They needed to be confident that their privacy and the anonymous use of their shared points would be respected. In the first encounters, I tried to avoid any reference to Morocco as an autocracy, following the recommendations of (Glasius et al. 2018, 41ff.) to depoliticise the actual topic of my study.

⁵⁴ Informal conversation, Language policies, 1.

⁵⁵ Informal conversations, Jewish literature in the Maghreb, 1.

This was not about hiding my intentions but can rather be justified in terms of two considerations, one of theoretical and one of psychological nature: From a theoretical point of view, revealing the full interest of my study would not have been helpful or even counterproductive. Alerting my interviewees about the actual research goal could have pre-empted their wording by pushing them, from the outset, to think and talk in a specific direction. From a psychological perspective, revealing every detail of my research interest could have made communication far more complicated. My interviewees might have been put in a situation where they would feel unsure about disclosing and sharing certain elements. Many officials feel more comfortable when they do not have the impression that they are being criticised or even run the risk of dissidence/unloyalty towards the monarchy. However, if, during an interview, I noticed a certain degree of openness to talk about the Moroccan regime more critically, I sometimes revealed more details about the topic. I then explained that it is about stability or legitimacy or cultural policies in the context of the 2011 uprisings in the region.

As long as my research focus was not yet totally shifted towards Morocco alone, I usually referred to my topic in terms of my former comparative research approach that had dealt with cultural policies in Tunisia, Morocco and Mali in the context of the 2011 uprisings. With the necessary adaptations to a single case study on Morocco, the dynamics in Morocco became the very centre of my research interest, leaving me with some unease about explaining the exact subject of my study to my interviewees. More than before, I had to be aware of the potentially subversive nature of my topic and reluctance on behalf of government officials to speak about the relationship between cultural policies and autocratic regime maintenance was to be expected. The necessary restructuring process made me leave explanations at a rather unpolitical level. I would use formulations such as „I am interested in the cultural policies of Morocco, the motives behind them, their principal actors, the trends and dynamics in the cultural policy field since 1999”.

This strategy became even more relevant against the backdrop of the rising tensions between Germany and Morocco following the USA's recognition of the Moroccan claims over Western Sahara in late 2020. In the aftermath, I was obliged to ask my mentor in the USA to provide me with a recommendation letter. This enabled me to continue my research after the Moroccans cut off all official relations with Germany. Still, I never lied when people asked me which university or country I came from. I instead avoided a direct answer by saying that I ALSO worked with a US-American university, showing the American recommendation letter to my interlocutors. Most of the interviewees left it at that and proceeded to the interview. Some, however, insisted on knowing my home country and university. In these cases, I told them and

left the decision to continue the exchange to them. Before the interviews, I always handed over my card provided by my German home university or used my official e-mail signature when contacting my interviewees in advance. This allowed my interlocutors to check my profile on the university website and make their decision before. Some of my interview requests might have been declined or ignored. Only a few openly refused an interview with a knowing/regretting smile or a kind excuse that they could not help the government's decision to break up ties with Germany. At this point in time, it became obvious that many officials became unsure whether they were allowed to speak with Germans at all, although the official order issued by Morocco's Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita to cut all ties with Germany only concerned institutional rather than private relations. This uncertainty articulated itself in various incidents of last-minute interview cancellations by some of the interviewees or complete contact break-ups. Even in my private environment, tensions were on the rise. Some Moroccan friends openly claimed their pride and support for Morocco's firm position, commending „how Morocco shows the world its force". They would make Donald Trump and the Moroccan King a hero for „bringing home" the (Western) Sahara. One friend who had even studied and made his PhD in Germany went as far as to tell me that he „would rather die than accept that the Western Sahara is not Moroccan". When Moroccan intellectuals and politicians threatened to push for the independence of the Algerian Kabylia people, another friend with a similar background told me, „This would give them (the Europeans and Algerians) a taste of the bitterness Morocco had to swallow for so long". This self-confidence remained unbroken ever since December 2020. It was even renewed after Joe Biden took over the White House and confirmed that the US position regarding the Western Sahara would remain unchanged under his mandate. This hostile atmosphere was even exacerbated by false information diffused by the media and political pretexts, which made an amalgam of the Western Sahara issue and other (constructed) problems between Morocco and Germany. Suddenly, Moroccans spoke about Germany's „neo-colonial behaviour": Moroccan officials claimed Germany would humiliate Morocco by not recognising Morocco's role as a moderator in the Libyan peace process and by not inviting the kingdom to Libyan peace talks held in Berlin. They furthermore accused Germany of not extraditing the alleged (former) radical Islamist Mohamed Hajib. The latter had been convicted in Morocco in 2010 and had left Morocco after his prison sentence for Germany, yet continuing critical activism against the regime via his YouTube channel.⁵⁶ Also, differences concerning the status of German political foundations were purported to have contributed to the

⁵⁶ Interview, International relations, 3; Cf. also Kozłowski (2022a) and Bouanani (2022).

crisis.⁵⁷ Out of nothing even economic allegations were created, claiming Germany would support the independence of Western Sahara (which in itself is a false accusation) to get access to huge deposits of rare raw materials that hid beneath the mysterious Tropic Seamount in front of the Moroccan coast and that Germany was purported to urgently need for its car production.⁵⁸ Even established German researchers like Isabelle Werenfels were accused of pushing German intelligence services and policy makers to act against Morocco's legitimate political interests. Without quoting it directly, Mohammed VI criticised her article "Maghrebi Rivalries Over Sub-Saharan Africa – Algeria and Tunisia Seeking to Keep Up with Morocco" (Mohammed VI 2021) where Werenfels had called upon the European Union to diversify its relations to Maghrebian countries in order to (among other things) "put Morocco's hegemonic ambitions in perspective" (Werenfels 2020). This amalgam of reasons and allegations served to justify the Moroccan cut-off in diplomatic and political ties with Germany and, indeed, heavily impacted my relations with Moroccans. For the first time in Morocco, as a German, I was sometimes treated like a *persona non grata*. I felt more comfortable speaking French, and I even started preferring to be mistaken for a French rather than to be identified as a German, who used to be much better regarded than Morocco's former colonisers.

The fear of consequences shown by potential new interlocutors and the generally hostile atmosphere towards Germans made me ask myself whether I could even publish names and dates of interviews with people whom I had spoken to long before the diplomatic crisis and who had initially agreed to be quoted openly.

I was even more worried since the escalation came at a point in time when the arbitrariness and repressiveness of the regime reached a new peak after two brief periods of liberal reforms in the early years of King Mohammed's rule in the 2000s and the wake of the constitutional reform in 2011. In recent years, however, a reversed tendency could be observed with a tightening of the regime's grip on society. This impression was even enhanced by breaking news in the summer of 2022 about the Moroccan state using the Israeli spying software Pegasus to check on the king and his entourage but also opposition groups and foreign leaders like French president Emanuel Macron.⁵⁹ People would become increasingly aware of the vulnerability of their privacy. To give an example, on a beach day with some Moroccan friends in Skhirat, at a point in time, one would ask half-joking, half-serious: „Are we actually still allowed to meet you [note: you, the German]? We might get spied upon by the intelligence services.", followed

⁵⁷ Cf. Filali (2021).

⁵⁸ Cf. for instance Fadwa Islah (2021a) and Kasraoui (2021).

⁵⁹ Fadwa Islah and Soudan (2021); Leloup (2021a, 2021b).

by the immediate reaction of another friend: „You are spied upon anyways”. In this tightening atmosphere, I became increasingly aware of the high risk, especially low and medium-level officials run, when they spoke to someone like me who, from the point of view of the Moroccan security apparatus (and even parts of the normal population), represented a potential dissident threat and spy from the kingdom’s new favourite enemy Germany.

These experiences made me resort to more extensive media analysis to reduce my dependency on personal conversations. Following Glasius et al. (2018, 102ff.), I decided to anonymise most of my remaining interview data (except for some media-experienced and PR-trained officials), irrespective of previous permissions, to publish the exact names and functions of the interlocutors. Even more than before, I also decided to keep a low profile when researching in Morocco. I entered the country with a tourist visa and stayed in private flats in calm, modern urban areas, which are used to European-looking foreigners. When I left my room, I closed the door with a key and always carried my laptop and notes with me or locked them into my suitcase. I furthermore began storing my data on an external cloud server provided by my home university and secured by an individual password. Furthermore, written notes were taken in a private shorthand and a mix of languages (French/English/German) that would be hard to decipher for others.

Furthermore, I hardly ever handed out written catalogues of questions. Yet when I did, I ensured that they would not be overly revealing about my research topic. Following Glasius et al. (2018, 41ff.), once again, depoliticising the subject of my study proved to be a valuable tool to avoid problems for both my interviewees and myself. Not being too precise about the topic would leave people with the option to always blame me for not having told the whole story. With this procedure, I could prevent my interlocutors from consciously running into trouble in case they would accept an interview for the sake of hospitality despite their full awareness of the issue. The priority here was that people felt safe answering my questions and that even in answering them, they would keep either an opt-out option or blame me for talking them into the interview. Even more than before, asking my interviewees about how they allowed me to use the interview material (direct quotes/paraphrases/pure background information) and assuring them about the anonymity of their data would become important elements in every beginning and end of a conversation.

In the Moroccan context, experts, activists and officials often function as echo halls of the regime, sharing only the (sometimes obvious) material I had already obtained from media analysis. I could not always rule out the risk that some interlocutors would only share self-

evidential material and would not be ready, allowed, or able to disclose information other than those provided by official statements to media outlets. Furthermore, it was not always possible to get access to relevant policymakers or those who knew about the underlying strategies and motives behind the state's cultural policies. Some interlocutors would also relativise their accounts of decision-making processes and underlying motives/reasonings with phrases like „c'était ça la raison, j'imagine/I think – this was the reason”, „je suppose/ I suppose” or they would explain things they knew little about by generally shared clichés about Moroccan politics like the dichotomy between modernists and conservatives, republicans and monarchists, Imazighen and „obscurantists”. Some would try to explain certain decisions in which they seemingly had not been involved because the real decisions had been taken at higher (minister/prime minister) or highest level (royal palace) by referring to generic truisms like „vous savez, Sa Majesté le roi est un grand amateur d'art / you know, His Majesty the King is a great art lover”. In fact, in some cases, my interlocutors told me they were not allowed to tell me more but would love to put me in contact with relevant people who could speak more freely. In one case, an official spokesperson of the institution intervened and insisted on the pertinence of the already communicated official version and aborted all further outreach to potentially dissident or subversive informants.

Except for conversations where I was sufficiently confident about the level of mutual trust built up during the interview process, I would stop digging much deeper. Instead, I took such statements as signs that my interlocutors did not know more or did not feel comfortable enough to advance on risky territory. Of course, such experiences made triangulation of data ever more important (Glasius et al. 2018, 67f.). Wherever possible, I therefore compared my data gained from media, interviews and (participant) observations with findings made by other researchers and discussed it with them. Nevertheless, given the closed character of decision-making circles in Morocco, the smoking gun test was not always available. I also decided to accept accounts which did nothing more than echo regime narratives as evidence within the fifth category of my study, where I analyse the regime's engagement with the international environment. I thereby reflect on my own positionality as a researcher from Europe of the Caucasian type who might have been perceived by his interlocutors as a projection screen for international regime propaganda, just like foreign journalists or international state leaders (Mosley 2013, p. 13). In some cases, the fact that a tape recorder was used might have changed the situation into one where the interview was changed into „a formal platform for political statements” (Clark 2006, p. 421). In this situation, professionalism was thus a prerequisite to building trust and confidence. Without my interlocutors' trust, continuing my research would have been

impossible. With this caveat being respected, it is necessary to acknowledge that despite Morocco's rising restrictions on the freedom of speech, the kingdom remains one of the more open countries for foreign researchers. This becomes visible when looking at the way many officials welcomed me. The first contact – if not made previously by e-mail – was often established in the respective ministry or administration office. It was helpful to show up on the spot, often even without prenotification, dressed in a suit and tie. I also always brought a card with my contact details and my recommendation letter from the US partner university. This professional appearance often facilitated my access to many administration buildings and the officials concerned. On other occasions, after a short reception, I would be given interview appointments at a later date. This experience replicates the findings of Morse (2019, p. 5) about interviewing elites in weak institutional environments. He argued that „when properly navigated institutional weakness can also reap significant rewards. The flexibility in an elite's schedule and greater amenability toward personal interactions means that with some preparation and tenacity young researchers can approach elite respondents much more directly than in other settings.” Sometimes, I had to deposit an official interview request at the „bureau d'ordre”, a response would then take a few days, sometimes also weeks before resulting in a confirmation or (less frequently) in a turn-down. In cases where a response would take longer than foreseen, occasional gentle reminders by phone calls or emails that pointed to the urgency of the request and to my limited time left during my field trip turned out to be useful. As also described by Morse (2019), this high level of insistence made some of my interlocutors agree to meet me or grant me an online interview after my return to Germany. During the interviews, a good preparation encompassing prior research on my interlocutor's CV and the written formulation of precise guideline questions proved essential. This helped me keep an overview of the interview topics during the conversation and to understand my interview partner's allusions that had to do with his/her personal career. Yet, even the most diligent preparation has not always been spared by surprise by certain elements and turns in my interviewee's narrative. In these cases, also my follow-up questions stayed within the regime's red lines and I tried to be prudent about my wording of Glasius et al. (2018, 44f.). For instance, I would always refer to Morocco's king not by his name, Mohammed VI, but rather in terms of his title as „His Majesty the king” or „*amir al mouminine* – leader of the faithful”. In some cases, my usage of official wording might have made the interview more formal than I would have liked it to be, putting my interlocutor in a quasi-official position where he/she would get the impression of needing to respect appropriate wording and stay within the official discourse instead of speaking from his heart. However, considering the risks laid out above, I preferred my findings

to be limited in this regard rather than unintentionally offend the official or make him/her feel uncomfortable. In most cases, though, this careful behaviour rather facilitated than complicated the establishment of a good relationship. The atmosphere and interview tone usually soon relaxed which would normally enable me to ask for personal recommendations and other contacts in specific fields where my data was not yet saturated. Following the advice of Morse (2019), this snowballing approach enabled me to make use of the personal networks and references of my interlocutors and helped me reach out even into the exclusive circle of the king's advisors. During a last field trip in May 2024, close to the end of my PhD writing process, these personal acquaintances allowed me to close some empirical gaps, personally check on some alleged policy performances and take photos of places I had not yet been to during my prior travels.

5. Regime and Statehood in Morocco

5.1. A Short History of Moroccan Statehood

5.1.1. From Medieval Sovereignty to a European Protectorate

Morocco is one of the oldest states on the African continent and in the MENA region. Before the arrival of Islam in North Africa, Berber kings controlled parts of modern Morocco, either as independent entities or as part of the Phoenician and Roman empires. In the 7th and 8th centuries, the Umayyad conquest subdued North Africa and crossed the Mediterranean to expand their Islamic empire from the Iberian Peninsula on the European continent. While the Islamic expansion was stopped by the Franks at Tours and Poitiers in 732, large parts of the Iberian Peninsula remained under Muslim control, a territory that became to be known as Andalusia and was governed by the emir (later caliph) of Cordoba (Buresi & Ghouirgate 2024b, pp. 254–255; Singer 2004, p. 267).

Only in 1492, during the final year of the *Reconquista*, the united armies of the royal couple Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon forced the last Muslim troops into capitulation. In the following decades, Muslims and Jews were almost completely expelled from Europe to North Africa (Singer 2004, 321f.), thereby creating a shared Andalusian trauma and dream that persists in Moroccan society until today. At the peak of its power, the Muslim empire reached from Spain in the North to the Senegal River in the South. This maximal extension of the Moroccan empire is still an important point of reference in Morocco's identity discourse. Obviously, the territory controlled by the Muslim rulers varied in time and space.

Until today, Moroccans venerate Moulay Idris as the founder of the Moroccan state. He founded the Idrisid dynasty and made Fès the capital of his (small) realm in 789, which lasted until 985 (Singer 2004, p. 269). In these times, the caliph of Cordoba in the north and the Fatimid caliph in the east competed for religious and political hegemony in the western Maghreb, i.e. northern Morocco and western Algeria, which ended in an alliance between the Idrisids and the caliphate of Cordoba (Singer 2004, 284f.).

Expanding from the Sahara since 1046, the Almoravids, a puritan Islamic movement, gained control over Morocco and Andalusia. They founded Marrakesh and made it the capital of their realm, which lasted until 1147. This year, Islamic reformers of Berber origin conquered Marrakesh and paved the way for the Almohad caliphs' rule over the western Maghreb and parts of the Iberian Peninsula. They restructured their state, introduced a new tax system,⁶⁰ reorganised the recruiting for their army and initiated a dynamic of enormous cultural, architectural and intellectual productivity (Singer 2004, pp. 301–304).

The degradation of their dominion eventually resulted in a fragmentation of their realm and a return to the Sunni-Maliki school of Islamic jurisprudence. Under the surface of Maghrebian societies, the marabutism, i.e. the idea of internal religious mission inspired by holy men of Sufi tradition, spread and gained ever more weight in the 13th century with the ascendance of the Marinid empire, which reached its apogee in 1347 stretching from the Atlantic Sea to Gabès in Tunisia. The Marinid sultans emphasised the role of the Sharifs, i.e. the (alleged) descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. After the grave of Idris II was discovered, the Marinids introduced a cult of the Idrisid dynasty (Buresi & Ghouirgate 2024a, 420f.). Until today, the Marinids are praised as visionary builders of splendid mosques and founders of so-called *madersas*, university-like training centres for loyal state cadres (Singer 2004, 308–310). After the conquest of Tunis, however, the decline of the Marinids started, and they were succeeded by the Wattasids in 1465.

Yet, the latter were increasingly pushed aside by the Saadians at the beginning of the 16th century until 1545. From this time, the Saadi sultans managed to secure control over Morocco and fought back against Ottoman invasions. Thereby they established Morocco's north-eastern border still valid today (Singer 2004, p. 312; Sivers 2004, p. 509). Since the final defeat of the Muslim forces in Andalusia, however, the Christian kingdoms of Spain and Portugal grew more powerful. With them, the European threat also rose in Morocco's north. Introducing new weaponry in warfare, Portuguese expeditions in North Africa established bases on Morocco's

⁶⁰ As we will see (chapter 5.2.1.), this system, called *makhzen*, affects Moroccan state thinking until today.

Atlantic coast, destabilising the Saadian sultans' power. Despite the permanent threat, under Sultan Ahmed al Mansur, Morocco undertook military campaigns that attacked Songhay and Gao and gained ephemeral control over salt mines in the Sahara (Sivers 2004, 516f.).

After al Mansur died in 1603, the Saadians' decline began, and Morocco's unity fragmented. Meanwhile, over the years, corsairs had established a decently powerful fleet and a relatively stable dominion around the Bouregreg valley and the city of Salé. In 1668, these corsairs came under the influence of a new sultan, Moulay ar-Rashid. He founded the Alawid dynasty, whose members, despite missing tribal support, consolidated their power over Morocco and rule the country until today (Sivers 2004, p. 524).

Ar-Rashid's brother and successor, Moulay Ismail, restructured the Moroccan army by relying mainly on loyal slaves from West Africa, whom he received through the corsairs from Salé. Moulay Ismail also allied with England to gain access to gunpowder and modern weaponry and expanded its diplomatic networks worldwide (Buresi & Ghouirgate 2024a, p. 429). Nevertheless, towards the end of the 17th century and in the 18th century, France and Spain gained the upper hand in the Mediterranean. The Alawids tried to withstand the pressure, but in 1860, Spain beat Morocco in the Tetouan and gained control over Ceuta and Melilla, which remain Spanish until today. The Congo Conference in Berlin of 1884, furthermore, established Spanish jurisdiction over the Western Sahara. In 1904, England ended its security guarantees for Morocco and left the field to France and Spain. When the German empire stopped its opposition against French expansion in 1911, the French established a protectorate over central Morocco while Spain gained control over the northern territories in the Rif and ensured its control over Western Sahara (Fuess 2024, 578f.; Sivers 2004, p. 541). The Treaty of Fès on 30 March 1912, installed "protectorates" and formally ended the Moroccan sultan's sovereignty. In the French-controlled territories, Resident-General Louis Hubert Gonzalve Lyautey forced the sultan to abdicate and installed the latter's more docile brother as sultan. While he claimed to act as the sultan's first servant, Lyautey actually exerted almost total authority, which he used to fundamentally reorganise the Moroccan state, modernising its administration and reforming the education system. He built entire cities from scratch and changed the appearance of others with regard to sanitary standards, decoration and structure. While reducing the sultan to a mere rubber-stamp institution, he ensured French control by military force and a system of tribal networks and loyal appointees, including French-trained quids and pashas (S. G. Miller 2013, pp. 88–119).

The French and Spanish powers, though, were never uncontested. Nationalist movements in the French-governed part of Morocco called for a reform of the protectorate (not independence) and grew rapidly in the 1930s (S. G. Miller 2013, pp. 130–136). Yet, it was only during and after World War II that Morocco’s nationalist movement radicalised under the leadership of the independence party Istiqlal. At first, their call for independence fell on deaf ears but rose to new force when the sultan joined the fray in 1947 and started to support the nationalist cause by resisting the protectorate’s request to sign dahirs that would curtail the Istiqlal’s work. The protectorate authorities panicked, given the new dynamic introduced to the independence struggle by the monarch’s popularity. They dismissed Sultan Mohammed V, sent him to exile with his family in 1953 and only allowed them to return in 1955. Received by a cheering crowd on 16 November 1955, the sultan, joined by the Istiqlal and the power of the streets, ultimately forced the French authorities to release Morocco into independence in March 1956 (S. G. Miller 2013, pp. 148–153).

5.1.2. Where is Morocco? Statehood and its Implications



Figure 3: Cover of the 1476th edition (2-8 March 2023) of the weekly Maroc Hebdo

The question asked in the title of this chapter may seem naïve. Obviously, the kingdom of Morocco is located in the very North-West of the African continent. Yet, in the official narratives employed by both the royal palace and the Moroccan government and supported by parts of the civil society and media, the kingdom’s borders often become fuzzy. For instance, the 1476th edition (2-8 March 2023) of the Moroccan weekly Maroc Hebdo headlined „The Eastern Sahara, the apple of discord between Morocco and Algeria – THE TRUE PROBLEM LIES THERE!” (Figure 3).⁶¹ The map on the weekly’s cover not only paints Morocco’s uncontested territory in Moroccan red and not only limits its territorial claims to Western Sahara; it also

claims the contested territory monitored by the United Nations peacekeeping mission MINURSO. It even colours the Eastern Sahara, i.e. the territories east of the Atlas Mountains, lying on the Algerian side of the border. Like other articles published in Moroccan media

⁶¹ Maroc Hebdo (2023).

around the same time,⁶² this cover refers to a presentation of Bahija Simou, director of the Royal Archives in Rabat. On 21 February 2023, she presented her institute at the national press agency MAP's convention, broadcasted on Moroccan media.⁶³ In her talk, the monarchy's principal historian claimed that „[t]here are not only historical documents attesting to Morocco's sovereignty over what is referred to in inverted commas as the 'Western Sahara', but also over the 'Eastern Sahara'". The monarchy's principal historian pointed out that official documents relating to the links between the monarchy and the Sheikhs throughout the Sahara (such as acts of allegiance, treaties, reports on the bay'a, correspondence, dahirs and the development of border maps)⁶⁴ „exist in large numbers in the Royal Archives. They are also available for researchers to examine and study”.⁶⁵ It is beyond the scope of this book to assess the scientific rigour of these claims. Certainly, though, the academic underpinning of geopolitical claims is yet another element in the kingdom's long-standing efforts to renegotiate its borders.⁶⁶ While claims on the Eastern Sahara are nowadays rather unconventional and rare even by Moroccan standards, the king's legitimacy has always been intertwined with his religious authority and the resolution of the Western Sahara issue (S. G. Miller 2013, p. 184).

The Western Sahara, controlled by Spain between 1884 and 1975, is a largely inhospitable, sparsely populated but resource-rich region with large fishing grounds and rich deposits of precious metals and phosphates, the latter being among the largest in the world and highly valuable for fertiliser production. When the French released Morocco's centre into independence in 1956, the borders in North Africa became a bone of contention between the young North African states Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania. After the reinstallation of the Moroccan monarchy with a king who reigns and rules and the introduction of a multiparty system supposed to create an image of pluralism and democracy, the regime soon showed its iron fist (S. G. Miller 2013, pp. 162–164). By military means, Morocco tried to enforce its ideas of restoring the pre-colonial Greater Morocco, which once reached as far as Mali. Yet soon after Mali's independence, Morocco had to drop its claims on Malian territory. A few months later, however, King Hassan II provoked a new conflict between Algeria and Morocco over their ill-defined borders. The so-called Sand War erupted in October 1963. The conflict ended after a few months in February 1964 without substantial border change, but political hostilities

⁶² A. (2023a); Gherrabi (2023); Jaabouk (2023).

⁶³ MAP (2023a)

⁶⁴ For a clarification of some of this specific terminology refer to chapter 5.2.2.

⁶⁵ Jaabouk (2023)

⁶⁶ For a good discussion of historical arguments about territorial disputes, see Castellino and Domínguez-Redondo (2014).

between Algeria and Morocco remained (S. G. Miller 2013, 165f.). In the 1960s, King Hassan II increasingly discarded parliament and the army from power. This resulted in two coup attempts against the despotical monarch in 1971 and 1972. Having hardly survived the failed putsches, the authoritarian king knew he needed the support of civil society, political parties and the army. Giving them a patriotic reason to fight for the nation by reactivating disputes with external enemies was, therefore, a useful strategy to keep the social and political elites on track and the military occupied at a safe distance from the king's centre of power (Zartman 2014, 60f.). After the withdrawal of the Spanish from Western Sahara in 1975, new border conflicts arose as both Mauritania and Morocco laid claim to the territory. In November 1975, 350.000 Moroccan civilians armed only with Moroccan flags and copies of the Holy Qur'an marched into Western Sahara to support the kingdom's territorial claims at the request of their king (S. G. Miller 2013, p. 181). This event, which came to be known as the Green March, is still annually commemorated and celebrated in Morocco. In the following months, the monarchy militarily took control of the land and annexed it in 1976. After the withdrawal of the Mauretanian troops and the settlement of its claims in 1979, a long war ensued between the Moroccan royal forces and the independence movement of the POLISARIO Front that had proclaimed the creation of the Sahraoui Arab Democratic Republic (SADR, eng./RASD, fren.), supported by Algeria (Zartman 2014, p. 61).

For decades, two nationalisms have been competing for hegemony in the Western Sahara. One is revolutionary founded by the POLISARIO Front to go beyond tribal affiliations and to build on the idea of an indigenous people that has fought for its independence from Spain and continues to struggle for liberation from Moroccan occupation (Castellino & Domínguez-Redondo 2014, p. 45). While the Sahraoui nationalism defined by POLISARIO used to bear no explicit reference to a particular language or culture, this increasingly changes (Mitatre 2015, 35 and 43). Yet, POLISARIO still refers to the Sahraoui people as a nation-state within the borders of the former Spanish colony (Mitatre 2018, 95f.).

The second nationalism is promoted by the Moroccan state. It is grounded in the idea of a cultural particularity continuously shared by one Sahraoui people under the Moroccan king's authority across the artificial borders drawn by the colonial powers. Until today, international maps, including those of the United Nations, draw a line along the parallel of 27°40' to underline the unclear status of Western Sahara (Figure 4). Conversely, according to Morocco's ethnonationalist definition, Sahraoui culture transcends this line. Morocco's conception of the Sahraoui people reaches deep into Morocco's uncontested territory north of the United Nations'

line (Mitatre 2015, 35f. and 44).⁶⁷ The reasoning behind Morocco's claims is based on the historically controversial argument that, before the installation of the Spanish protectorate in 1884, the Western Sahara belonged to the *bled al-siba*. According to the Moroccan line of interpretation, this would imply that the territories were part of the Sherifian empire and pledged their allegiance to the sultan as *amir al mouminine*, although they were only under reduced control of the *makhzen* (Castellino & Domínguez-Redondo 2014, p. 40). These definitions gained particular significance in the 1990s.

In 1991, after over 16 years of fighting, POLISARIO and Morocco signed a cease-fire treaty. They agreed that the future of the Western Sahara would be determined by a referendum as



Figure 4: United Nations' map of Western Sahara showing the border with Morocco in the north and the berm separating the territory controlled by Moroccan forces in the west from the territory controlled by POLISARIO in the east.

proposed by the United Nations. In the wake of this agreement, the United Nations Mission for the Organisation of a Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was created to monitor the cease-fire and prepare the conduct of the plebiscite. This mission is extended annually by the Security Council of the United Nations, making it one of the longest-persisting UN missions. While large parts of the indigenous Sahraoui population still live in refugee camps in Algeria, Morocco exerts de facto control over the bulk of the Western Sahara and continues to

⁶⁷ On Moroccan maps this line is therefore always missing.

lay international claim to the entire territory (Figure 4).⁶⁸ Until today, the problem of any potential referendum has consisted of an unclear definition of the electorate. The United Nations and the two conflicting stakeholders agreed that all 74.000 Sahraouis who had been part of the census conducted by the Spanish in 1974 before their departure in 1975 should be included. Morocco, however, also argues that the Sahraoui people should include individuals who had fled to and today live on the uncontested Moroccan soil and shall be part of the electorate. Furthermore, Morocco holds that several Moroccan tribes maintained cross-border contacts and familial ties that would entitle them to participate in the referendum (Mitatre 2015, p. 37). Hence, the Moroccan authorities managed to convince the UN to accept that members of the Tekna, a social confederation from the Moroccan Oued Noun region, were admitted to apply for registration on the voters' lists.⁶⁹ Although Moroccan officials claimed voluntary participation in this procedure, Mitatre (2015, pp. 39–41, 2021, pp. 114–120) showed how the Ministry of the Interior recruited tens of thousands of people (both Hassani-Arabic speaking individuals of mainly nomad tradition and Tashelhit-speaking Imazighen of agropastoral tradition) from Oued Noun by force, provided them with false genealogies and sent them to the Western Saharan city of Laayoune to make them register with the United Nation. This is how the war of electoral lists began. Thanks to their close knowledge of the Sahraoui population, the sheikhs of the POLISARIO Front identified 42% of the applications to be fake Sahraoui profiles. Yet, Morocco nevertheless managed to more than double the number of Sahraouis on the electoral lists and increase (or inflate) it by over 86.000 people (Mitatre 2015, p. 41, 2021, p. 118). Hence, the referendum has constantly been adjourned so far and will most likely never occur.

Yet, by offering economic and social benefits, the Moroccan state incentivised the (re-) settlement of thousands of Moroccans from other Moroccan regions to the kingdom's so-called „Southern Provinces”, i.e. the Western Sahara, thereby creating facts on the ground and rendering Hassani-speaking populations a minority in towns like Dakhla or Tarfaya (Mitatre 2015, 38 and 42).⁷⁰ The benefits include tax exonerations, free electricity, free food rations every 10 days, access to the pipe water system, tax reductions on fuels, free cigarettes and first-need-products, free transportation, preferred employment in civil service, provision of nearby schooling and medical infrastructure (Mitatre 2021, 128f.). To determine who is entitled to

⁶⁸ The United Nations and Decolonization (2012).

⁶⁹ For a detailed description and socio-cultural analysis of the Tekna, see Mitatre (2021).

⁷⁰ Barreñada (2016, p. 291) quoted official Moroccan data claiming that only 18% or 92.176 persons of the official 510.713 inhabitants living in the “Southern Provinces” spoke Hassani Arabic. For an overview, referring to the 2004 census, also considering the number of Hassani speakers outside Western Sahara, see Bonte (2017, p. 411).

participate in the referendum, the MINURSO handed out cards, testifying about the cultural and political belonging to the Sahraoui people (Mitatre 2021, p. 120). Curiously, the benefits to which „official” Sahraouis are entitled have become a reward for participating in Morocco’s efforts to regain sovereignty over Western Sahara. Yet, granting social and economic benefits to (alleged) Sahraoui populations has also entailed a competition for the Sahraoui status, with families desperately striving to have their cultural belonging to the Sahraoui people approved. Being a potential voter in a future referendum deciding over the Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara has become a currency that some Tekna who initially moved to Western Sahara and may since have resettled to the Oued Noun region exploit to obtain the same benefits as those Sahraouis who have stayed in Western Sahara. Threatening the Moroccan state to join the POLISARIO Front has become a way to blackmail the Moroccan authorities and obtain the same privileges as the officially recognised Sahraoui people (Mitatre 2021, pp. 127–132). Hence, Morocco’s spoil and rent distribution system benefitted notables, tribal leaders and influential Sahraoui refugees, nurturing corruption, clientelism and mutual dependency. Those who do not benefit from patronage suffer poverty, unemployment and lack of perspective. Clashes between Moroccan forces and supporters of the POLISARIO Front, indigenous people and ethnic Moroccans who had moved from the uncontested territories have become common (Boukhars 2014; Naïmi 2016). Conversely, even people who had been displaced to Western Sahara by the Moroccan authorities use the UN’s Sahraoui identity card to rebel against Morocco’s hegemony and defy the king’s authority by acculturating and identifying with Hassani language, clothing, music, food customs and traditions despite their Amazigh descent, leaving behind their Moroccan identity (Mitatre 2015, pp. 46–48, 2021, pp. 123–125). Sahraouis resisting Moroccan dominance call the repeated deadly confrontations *intifada* – sedition/rebellion, that result in a permanent feeling of uncertainty and insecurity (Barona & Dickens-Gavito 2016).

At the same time, as we will see later in more detail (chapter 6.5.2.3), the kingdom of Morocco invests in the promotion of Sahraoui culture through the construction of museums, installation of cultural centres, publication of photo books and organisation of festivals under the high tutelage of the Moroccan king. This folklorised institutionalisation of Sahraoui cultural heritage aims at (re-)appropriating the identity discourse and locating Saharaoui culture within a broader Moroccan discourse of national unity that is not limited to colonial borders. The legitimacy of a politically defined Sahraoui Nation State is thereby undermined (Bonte 2017, p. 23; Mitatre 2015, p. 49). POLISARIO officials criticise the Moroccan approach and deplore a „cultural

genocide” (Mitatre 2018, p. 78).⁷¹ Some researchers, therefore, call for revitalising the Hassani language and protecting it against the influence of the northern migrants’ Arabic variants. At the same time, they claim that today, Sahraoui consciousness emerges in parallel and not opposed to a Moroccan national identity (Naïmi 2016, p. 343). The majority of people who identify as more Sahraoui than Moroccan belong to the middle class and the lower middle class, while those who identify as more Moroccan tend to belong to either the lower or higher social classes (Naïmi 2016, p. 344). This information is important to understand the social dynamics within the ongoing opposition against Moroccan dominance in Western Sahara.

Towards the end of the 1990s, UN brokers undertook new efforts to end the deadlock in which negotiations regarding the referendum were stuck. While both conflict parties seemed rather comfortable with the impasse, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed former US Secretary of State James Addison Baker III as his Personal Envoy in 1997 to solve the complicated Western Sahara issue. In the following years, Baker proposed two plans. The first suggested integrating the Western Sahara within Morocco with a degree of autonomy but was rejected by POLISARIO. The second plan, in turn, proposed a three-year delay towards a referendum but was rejected by Morocco in 2004 (Zartman 2014, 65f.). After the failure of both plans, Baker resigned. Then, upon international pressure, Morocco presented its „Initiative for Negotiating an Autonomy Status for the Western Sahara” in 2007, formulating a middle ground of granting the Sahara provinces relative autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty (Zartman 2014, p. 67).

This plan increasingly helped Morocco to escape its long-time international isolation, which it had long suffered because of its unilateral actions. In 1984, the country had left the African Union after the political representatives of the POLISARIO had been admitted as new members. It was not until 2017 that Morocco rejoined the body, and it has since been seeking to take an active role in intra-African political discourse. Still today, only a minority of the international community supports Morocco’s claims and the autonomy plan for Western Sahara under Moroccan rule, which the kingdom presented in 2007. The majority continues to call for the referendum once envisaged for the self-determination of the region’s population. However, the number of states supporting the Moroccan position has been growing for several years.⁷² This

⁷¹ The situation parallels with the case of Tibet where China proceeds in a similar manner to obtain not only political but cultural hegemony, cf. Saxer (2012).

⁷² The years 2019 to 2022 have been marked by a series of 28 consulate inaugurations in the Western Sahara by Arab, African and Latin American states. Some of these countries, for a long time, had refused to recognise Morocco’s claims on the Western Sahara. In December 2020, in the context of the Abraham Accords, also Israel and the USA announced that they would henceforth support Morocco’s claims on the Western Sahara in exchange for the normalisation of Morocco’s relations with the Jewish state. Cf. el Bouzdaini (2023); Jaabouk (2022b).

circumstance can probably be attributed not least to a fundamental change in strategy on the part of the kingdom. In 2013, King Mohammed VI called upon his ambassadors and civil society to think of themselves as fighters defending the kingdom's interests, including territorial integrity. To reach the international recognition of Morocco's claim on Western Sahara, Moroccan diplomats and all other state and non-state actors are supposed to contribute to the creation and propagation of a nation brand. This nation brand should have a strong cultural underpinning centred around the values of tolerance and moderation so brilliantly embodied by the Moroccan civilisation. Within a „framework of a proactive policy”, they should furthermore aim „at diversifying and enlarging the scope of our international cooperation” (Mohammed VI 2013b). In 2022, in his speech on the 69th anniversary of the King and People's Revolution, King Mohammed VI stressed the importance of the issue once again, declaring that the „Sahara issue is the lens through which Morocco looks at the world. It is the clear, simple benchmark whereby my country measures the sincerity of friendships and the efficiency of partnerships” (Mohammed VI 2022a). In other words, Morocco's main and overriding national priority consists in the complete control of this territory and the international community's recognition of its claims. By placing this message within one of the rare public occasions where the King speaks to his people, the monarchy underlined that it views the resolution of the Western Sahara issue and the re-establishment of „national integrity” as an important political promise towards its people. Every activity contributing to holding this promise must thus be considered a performance act to enhance the monarchy's legitimacy. The following chapters will show that Moroccan cultural policies are crucial in this endeavour.

5.2. Some Keys to Understanding Monarchic Power in Morocco

5.2.1. Defining the Makhzen

The Moroccan state system is often referred to as *al makhzen* (treasury). The term originally described the state's fiscal power, i.e. its capacity to levy taxes, which is closely associated with pre-colonial state building. The territories directly subject to the sultan's fiscal control hence used to be called *bilad al makhzen*, while *bilad as-siba* referred to regions where the sultan's authority was more diffuse and dissidence was not uncommon (Daadaoui 2011, p. 45).⁷³ Nowadays, the term *makhzen* is associated with „an apparatus of state violence and domination, and at the same time a system of representation of traditional royal power. Makhzen is also a conflict resolution system controlled by the king, who dominates all fields of the social

⁷³ A good overview on the historic development of the terminology and the governance modes of makhzen is provided by Daadaoui (2011, 41–70).

universe. It evokes fear, awe, and respect in the Moroccan political culture and refers to a patrimonial institution that has managed to adapt to the realities of modern Moroccan politics” (Daadaoui 2011, p. 41). Furthermore, the word is used by the Moroccan public to denounce the Moroccan deep state, which consists of an intransparent network of influential people from the centre to the local level distributing the wealth of the country (Hoffmann 2013, pp. 167–169). These actors associated with the palace take all relevant political decisions, which the country's elected institutions then have to carry out. While a system of patronage and co-optation holds the network together, it also builds upon the historically, traditionally and religiously justified public legitimacy of the sultan (now king). The sultan/king rules by decrees (*dahirs*), which „have the force and appearance of laws, always begin with a religious greeting and are signed under the title of amir al-mum’minin” (Daadaoui 2011, p. 65). Hence, dahirs are sacred acts „of sovereignty, immune to all judicial processes and inviolable” (Daadaoui 2011, p. 66). This character of legal immunity prevails until today (Tozy 1999, 94f.) since important laws are still promulgated by dahir before being published in the Official Gazette. Furthermore, high-ranking state officials like the king’s (and government’s) representatives on the sub-national level are appointed by dahir on the proposition of the Ministry of the Interior, including the walis on regional and governors on the level of provinces/prefectures, and the pashas and caids on the municipal level (Royaume du Maroc 2008, p. 1507). Historically, the sultan ensured participation through consultation (*shura*). In modern days, shura has partly been replaced by constitutionally enshrined institutions that organise interaction and responsiveness between rulers and the ruled (Daadaoui 2011, p. 65; Tozy 1999, p. 75). These institutions include the Moroccan parliaments, both national and sub-national. Also the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture, the Court of Audit, the National Council for Human Rights, the Economic, Social and Environmental Council, the Higher Council for Education and the Council of Moroccan Communities Living Abroad fall into this category. They are composed of academic and technocratic specialists who provide advice on matters of their expertise. Yet, the king also creates ad-hoc commissions that provide counsel on specific issues, such as the Constitution Writing Commission of 2011 or the Special Commission for the New Development Model. At the same time, the state system heavily relies upon a ritualisation of the political discourse centred around the sultan’s political and spiritual authority. They consist of five heavily loaded symbols, namely Sharaf, baraka, *amir al mouminine*, bay’a and the royal pardon, which have been institutionalised through various rituals and ceremonies exercised in the royal protocol, political practice, and daily life of the citizens (Daadaoui 2011; El Maarouf & Belghazi 2021).

They „set the monarchy above the political fray and neutralised challenges by oppositional forces, especially the Islamist groups” (Daadaoui 2013, p. 25).

5.2.2. The Symbols and Rituals of Power

5.2.2.1. Sherifian Descent – The Prophetic Lineage

Sherifian lineage means the descendance from the Prophet Mohammed, i.e. the capacity to trace the roots of someone’s family tree down to the prophet’s tribe. Since, in Islam, Mohammed is considered the last of the prophets, Muslims attach huge importance to him as a person and his acts. While some Qur’anic verses depict him as a simple man and servant of God, others assign his family with exceptional purity (*tahara*). Therefore, Muslim believers hold him in great esteem and consider him sinless and infallible. The descendants of the Prophet who came to North Africa either during Islamisation or in later times are also known as „honoured ones” (*shorfa*) (Munson 1993, 10f.). In Morocco, on the occasion of every Throne Anniversary, pro-regime newspapers traditionally publish the king’s genealogy tracing his descendance back until the Prophet himself (Tozy 1999, 82f.).⁷⁴ King Mohammed VI is considered the 34th direct descendant of the Prophet (Daadaoui 2011, p. 84).

5.2.2.2. Baraka – the Divine Blessing

The term „baraka” means one of the key elements of Islam. According to Munson (1993, 6f.), the Qur’an and everyone who observes the five pillars of Islam conducts a prayer or delivers proof of another great virtue in the name of God is imbued with it. In Moroccan folk Islam, however, baraka is also narrowly intertwined with the Sherifian lineage since the descendants of the Prophet Mohammed bear and yield a special kind of this divine blessing. According to Daadaoui (2011, 82f.), baraka is „transempirical, having an independent and divine force that exists outside the realm of human tangible or material perception. It is a ‘supranatural influence of blessedness, holiness, and spiritual force.’ Despite its transcendental religious attributes, baraka is also immanent and can be experienced in the secular realm. This allows people to access and view its use in different social, economic, and political contexts. The political context is where the monarchy in Morocco primarily uses it as a tool to sanctify the monarchy. As commander of the faithful and descendant of the Prophet, the king in Morocco automatically acquires this blessedness or ‘God’s grace on earth.’ Baraka produces power and is the product of power.” In fact, by surrounding itself with an aura of holiness, the monarchy has managed to render „its legitimacy as axiomatic for both society and political elites”, which ensures the continuity of the regime (Daadaoui 2013, p. 30). This effect trickles down to even the lowest

⁷⁴ For the genealogy see Tozy (1999, p. 83)

political level. For example, Daadaoui (2013, p. 30) reported that a high-ranking PJD representative of the city council of Marrakesh acknowledged his party's dependency on the king's legitimacy for its actions. By referring to the king's blessing, he underlined that „royal ceremonies give royal authority a sacred dimension, as everything we do in the political system is bestowed upon us through the baraka of Sidna”.⁷⁵

5.2.2.3. Amirat al Mouminine – The Commandery of the Faithful

In 1987, the late Hassan II once summarised the significance of his royal titles in the following words: „As you know, I am the Commander of the Faithful ... I received this title at birth, without asking for it, without wanting it. That means that I am one of the descendants of the Prophet, which is not exactly common, and which means that as deeply rooted as I am in Morocco for generations, my original tribe is that of Mecca. This title, ‘Commander of the Faithful’, for some, including the Iranians who have accorded such an importance to the question of the descent of the Prophet, does not meet with indifference. It is a title that imposes a great deal of humility and, all the same at certain times, [large] responsibilities.”⁷⁶

To understand this royal explanation, it is essential to look at the origin of the terminology. The title commander of the faithful (*amir al mouminine*) goes back to the immediate successors of the prophet Mohammed, i.e. Omar, Othman and Ali, as well as the caliphs of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties (Rausch 2012, p. 67). They claimed religious authority over the community of believers derived from a divine blessing that placed them above all political factions and debates. Today, it casts upon the king a religious legitimacy, which makes him Commander of the Faithful. This constitutionally sanctioned title renders the king the symbol of national unity and makes him the warder of the community of believers with special authority over his Muslim subjects. However, his powers are not considered unlimited but are supposed to be executed in conformity with the Qur'an and the Sunna. In turn, the king's margins of interpretation of these sources (*ijtihad*) are traditionally wide (Tozy 1999, p. 92). As Bouasria (2013, p. 40) describes, the „institution of the Commander of the Faithful serves a double purpose: that of defining the strategic field of action exclusively owned by the king, and that of controlling interstices of politics and religion”. This means that in the king's person – and his person alone – the religious and the political authority in Morocco converge. Technically, the title *amir al mouminine* declares the monarchy's claim to leadership for all book religions, and in the Moroccan context, especially the Muslim and Jewish communities (Kenbib 2016). As the Sultan's *dhimmis* – non-

⁷⁵ „Sidna“ is a title of reverence meaning „Our lord“ and referring to the monarch.

⁷⁶ Cited in Daadaoui (2013, p. 28).

Muslim subjects that were obliged to pay the *jizya*, a special tax/tribute for their safety in the empire – they benefitted from his protection against the attacks by Muslim subjects and the harassment of other *dhimmis* (e.g. there are reports about Christian-Jewish conflicts in the 16th and 17th century). At the same time, the physical closeness to the palace assured the Sultan control over those Jews who had come to wealth and influence through flourishing commerce and trade, some of whom also served as the Sultan's advisors and legates/ambassadors (Amiar 2022). Furthermore, the creation of Mellahs (like the one in Marrakesh in the times of the Saadian sultans in the 16th century) gave the Sultan political legitimacy (Gottreich 2007a, p. 27). Today, after the creation of the state of Israel and the wars in the Middle East, there are only a few Jewish citizens (up to 3000 souls) left in Morocco. Although Jews are not part of the *umma*, i.e. the community of Muslim believers concerned by the spiritual authority of *amir al mouminine*, they recognise the political dimension of the king's leading position that guarantees their protection under the very laws the Commander of the Faithful defends (Schroeter 2018, p. 222).

5.2.2.4. Bay'a – the Oath of Allegiance

As described by Aslan (2014, 104f.) and Hammoudi (1997), the monarchy's active revival and re-invention of certain old practices and traditional symbols are essential to strengthen the monarchy's legitimacy. The mandatory dressing in traditional garments like the jellaba for official purposes (e.g. for parliamentarians during the opening ceremony for the political year) or the use of antiquated family titles such as Moulay are cases in point. However, the most prominent re-invention of Moroccan tradition concerns the so-called bay'a. As an annual ceremony, where notables, government representatives and civil servants annually assemble at one of the royal palaces to swear an oath of allegiance to the king, the bay'a has been a matter of debate in society and academia. According to Hegasy (2017a), what is presented today as an authentic socio-political institution in Morocco actually constitutes a rather recent symbolism established in its current form by Hassan II in the 1960s. Historically, the bay'a was an oath of allegiance binding the early Muslims to the prophet Mohammed and later to the caliphs. Later, it became a contract of mutual rights and duties between the ruler and his people in an Islamic society. In Morocco, upon the sultan's death, it was used as a rather formal act that marked the new ruler's succession per acclamation. It was accompanied by expectations and political demands issued by the new sultan's subjects upon the signing of the bay'a. In colonial times, from 1933, the bay'a became an element of the coronation day, an invented tradition inspired by European rituals. After independence, these rituals, which used to be organised only on the occasion of the passing of power upon the enthronisation, became an

annual ceremony pompously celebrated under Hassan II during the new Day of Loyalty. The bay'a is now annually performed as a highly mediatised event. It unites thousands of notables from all over the country (including annexed Western Sahara), members of the government and high-ranking civil servants from all ministries and governorates, dressed in white jellabas to renew their oath of allegiance to the king. According to Hegasy (2017a, 110ff.), the significance of the bay'a in contemporary Morocco transcends a mere restorative measure to reinstate discipline among relevant socio-political actors. Rather, it has become a ritualised and reciprocal reaffirmation of authenticity. In a modern state claiming historicity, the king asserted the notables' and civil servants' status as his subjects while promoting them within the authenticity debate. The subjects, in turn, recognise and approve his claim to modernity. For a Moroccan newcomer, the ceremony is a liminal moment that marks his adoption and integration into the country's leading elite, opening new opportunities and enabling vertical social mobility. By pulling all registers of important orientalist stereotypes, the style of the ritual with its traditional dress code, Andalusian music, couscous and mint tea makes this fake tradition appear more authentic than a real one.

5.2.2.5. The Royal Pardon

Sometimes, the societal bond between the king and one of his subjects can be breached. This can be done by simple crime or, worse, by overstepping the regime's red lines and challenging the royal authority. This situation, however, is not irreversible. Building upon Weber and Pitcher et al. (2009), El Maarouf and Belghazi (2021, p. 3) argued that the „royal pardon, as a mode of gifting, encapsulates the authoritative position of the monarch operating within, and enabled by the neopatrimonial political arrangement. Royal amnesties are hence part of ‘the contrasting ways rulers may establish legitimate authority by securing consent (compliance) from their subjects’”. According to El Maarouf and Belghazi (2021), this royal gesture is more than a gift; it is part of the reservoir of almost mythical visual metaphors symbolising the relation of mutual allegiance between the king and his subjects, which builds upon a patrimonial concept of exchange and reciprocity. Royal pardon is used as a preferred power instrument, especially at moments of turmoil, when repressive options to end social unrest threatening the stability of the regime would be on the table as well. The royal pardon represents the total power of the king, who decides „what to give, how to give, and when to give” (El Maarouf & Belghazi 2021, p. 21). It is an honour granted to the receiver by the king's benevolence as an offer to reconciliation. Detainees can welcome the decision to issue a royal pardon. At the same time, the gesture can be perceived as provocative by the victims (and their families). Yet also, the receiver might not behave the expected way after accepting the gift of freedom. Either way,

however, the pardon itself still represents an expression of royal sovereignty. It is the screen on which hopes and aspirations for freedom are projected. Hence, the royal pardon, like other royal gifts, has the power to continue or repair injustice, grant or deny a favour, and enforce or delay reform. Conversely, the gift receiver has the power to confirm the injustice by accepting the gift. He can conform to the gift logic by showing gratitude or refusing to accept the gift in an act of renewed dissidence (El Maarouf & Belghazi 2021, p. 22). A royal pardon is usually granted during national or religious feasts. The gesture draws upon the spiritual authority of the king as *amir al mouminine* and shares the prophetic baraka yielded by the sovereign thanks to his Sherifian lineage. His pardon, therefore, „amounts almost to divine forgiveness” (El Maarouf & Belghazi 2021, p. 13). The sacred character of his pardon is backed up by a biblical reference to the Prophet Joseph’s famous release of his culpable brothers deployed by the Prophet Mohammed when pardoning his enemies with the words „Go, you are free”. Echoing such ancient narratives „legitimizes current ruling by connecting the gift to a highly honouring pattern. This pattern has at least four distinctive prerogatives: First, it establishes similarity in the remarkable nature of giving and forgiving by pardoning at times that, which is unpardonable. Second, it establishes an ‘as holy as thou’ point of reference by pointing out to other past gifts of pardon (especially during situations of war, treason, revolt, and unrest). In these, the actions of the giving person (Prophet/Commander of the Faithful) are sanctified because they are believed to be motivated more by divine wisdom/Baraka/connection to a holy lineage, and less by pragmatic rationality. Third, coming from a divinity-guided person, the gift becomes what it is: a sacrosanct event. Fourth, a déjà vu of the grand gifting in the present can easily be connected to its similar past manifestations” (El Maarouf & Belghazi 2021, 26f.).

6. Cultural Policies and Power Maintenance in Morocco – the Case Study

Building upon theoretical considerations outlined above (chapter 3), the following section provides a detailed analysis of the empirical data to show how the Moroccan state crafts and deploys cultural policies to secure the monarchy's power. It concentrates on those cultural elements that are particularly useful in forging, communicating and reproducing the people's feeling of belonging within the king's national identity project. It shows how the Moroccan monarchy harnesses, manipulates and engineers the society's relationship with its religion, languages and history by legal, political and symbolic modes to ensure the persistence of its rule (Figure 5). Chapter 6 will be strongly guided by the questions suggested by these three modes of power maintenance (cf. chapter 3.3.6.).

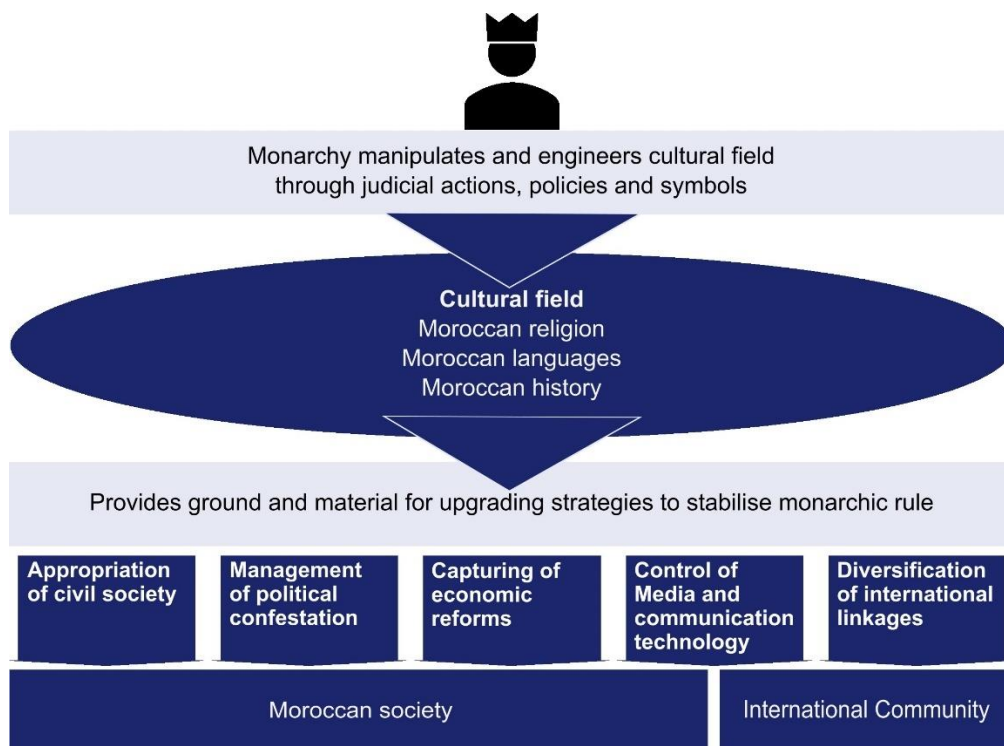


Figure 5: Cultural policies and the stabilisation of monarchic power in Morocco

While chapter 6.1. sets out with an overview of the monarchy's policies in the religious field, the main argument of chapters 6.1.-6.6. holds that this traditional component of the monarchy's legitimacy claim has strategically been stretched over the last 25 years to accommodate other identity strands of Moroccan society (such as the Amazigh, Hassanian, Jewish or cosmopolitan-modernist populace) and unite them behind the king's banner. Chapter 7.1. will then provide a synthesis which brings the so-analysed material together with the five upgrading strategies introduced in chapters 3.3.1.-3.3.5.

6.1. Religious Diffusion or the Vaccination Against Extremism

In 1962, the Moroccan constitution legally enshrined the king's religious authority as *amir al mouminine*. Along with this step, the king was also declared sacred. Although this step had not been uncontested at the time, the rule was soon internalised by the political sphere (Bouasria 2013, 37 and 40). Nevertheless, the criticism against the king's religious authority never fully stopped (Munson 1993, pp. 149–179). It even received new attention and dynamic with the emergence of the Justice and Spirituality movement (Al Adl wal Ihssane) under the leadership of Abdesslam Yassine. In 1974, Yassine sent a 114-page-long open letter to King Hassan II entitled „Islam or the Deluge: an open epistle to the king of Morocco” (Munson 1993, 163ff.). In this letter, Yassine accused the king of deviation from Islamic principles of rule and the domination of Morocco's economy by Western liberalism, socialism as well as „Zionist” wealth. He decried the king's debauchery and luxury as well as the king's use of Islam to camouflage his Western attitudes. He also urged the king to see the failed coup attempts of 1971 and 1972 as a last warning by God to repent and return to the path of rightfulness and Islam to end social injustice and poverty of the people. He called upon the king to dismiss his Western-type advisors and hand over part of his power to a council elected in an Islamic manner. In the regime's narratives, Hassan II was the commander of the faithful and Allah's shadow on earth. Hence daring to call the king his Sherifian „brother” (*akhi*) and his beloved one (*habibi*), lecturing him and even questioning whether the king was a true believer or a believer at all was a flagrant transgression of the regime's red lines. While Yassine's letter and later writings grew very influential in Moroccan society, the monarchy's reaction was relatively lenient, arresting Yassine and putting him in an insane asylum so as not to turn him into a martyr (Munson 1993, p. 171). After his release from the clinic three and a half years later, Yassine resumed his Islamic activism. He was soon forbidden to preach in mosques, and his publications were banned before being once again arrested and jailed for two years, until 1986. After his release, Yassine was put under house arrest, with his home becoming the base of his growing fundamentalist movement. Letting this happen was part of a strategy of carrots and sticks applied by the regime to silence the fundamentalists while using harsh repression to keep the Islamists at bay in the following years (Munson 1993, 176f.). At the same time, the king successfully boosted his religious authority as *amir al mouminine* and „God's shadow on Earth” (Daadaoui 2011, p. 120), which helped him to counter attacks against the king's legitimacy. Charismatic as Hassan II was, he skilfully crafted an image as a religious expert, profoundly educated in Qur'anic studies and capable of discussing with the most prominent imams (Bouasria 2013, p. 48). Furthermore, Sheline (2018, 194–196) argued that already since the 1960s, Hassan II

had actively undermined the religious authority of the famous al Qaraouiyine University in Fès by cutting its funds, hollowing it out and erecting competing institutions of higher Islamic education like the Dar al Hadith al Hassania in Rabat that would produce „clerics loyal to him and his preferred interpretation of Islam, which highlighted his status as the ‘commander of the faithful’”.⁷⁷ Although this measure took time to show effect, the regime also benefitted from the fact that the Moroccan people’s generally unpolitical interpretation of religion heavily diverged from the fundamentalists’ ideal of a politicised Islam (Munson 1993, pp. 176–178). Especially Sufism has been presented as a bulwark against a faster and broader rise of Islamist thinking. Hence, Hassan II publicly cultivated his supportive attitude towards the Sufi brotherhoods, visiting the Marabouts and praying at the holy men’s graves (Bouasria 2013, p. 47). In fact, Hammoudi (1997) goes as far as to argue that the Sufis’ mystical initiation rites full of ambivalence and temporary role inversions explain the persistence of social and political power relations in Morocco. The sanctity of the hierarchical relationship between Sufi masters/saints and their disciples help the subordinate to accept and even sublimate the scheme of obedience or even obsequiousness which binds them to the sultan/king. For example, since Hassan II, Moroccan kings have repeatedly managed to rally Sufi orders like the Tariqa Tijaniya behind the throne to defend the “*marocanité*” of the Western Sahara and gain the support of Sahraoui tribes (Werenfels 2014). Beyond this spiritual component, it has been argued that the existence of a multi-party system and socio-political pluralism in Morocco representing, from the onset of independence, a wide range of ideological streams, prevented the fundamentalist movements from joining forces and channelling their demands into one influential Islamist party like in Algeria or Tunisia (Willis 2007, p. 152). Yet, unlike in the 1970s and the 1980s, the latter factors do not explain the rise of fundamentalist movements in the 1990s and early 2000s. As Willis (2007, 154f.) argued, the political liberalisation of the 1990s, with the decrease in repression, provided the movements with enough space to place their narratives strategically and grow more influential. Facing the Islamist movements’ worrying capacity to mobilise masses in contexts like the 1990 May demonstrations or the anti-Gulf War protests in February 1991, the regime tried to co-opt these groups. The government offered them subsidies in return for red-line-abiding behaviour and encouraged them to establish legally registered parties and integrate into the official political game (Munson 1993, p. 176; Willis 2007, 157f.). While Yassine’s Al Adl wal Ihssane refused to be co-opted, other movements accepted, yielding, for instance, the formation of the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) (Willis 2007, 157f.).

⁷⁷ For the decline of Islamic education in traditional medersas like Qaraouiyine also see Eickelman (2007) and Wainscott (2014).

Hence, despite the high ideological competition within Morocco's diverse landscape of religious fundamentalism, the movements experienced considerable growth in the following years. Although staying outside the official political game, Yassine's Al Adl wal Ihssane broadened its support base. Furthermore, in 1997 and 2002, respectively, the PJD celebrated good results in the national legislative elections, benefitting from both its grassroots activism and the sentiments of pro-Islamic solidarity in the society following the invasion of Afghanistan, the Second Intifada and the pending start of the Iraq war (Howe 2005, p. 347; Willis 2007, p. 160). This situation constitutes part of the political context around Mohammed VI's rise to power.

6.1.1. Rescuing *Amir al Mouminine*: The King's Role in the War on Terror

When Mohammed VI succeeded his late father, Hassan II, in 1999, his reign started under the auspices of liberalisation and clear demarcation from his father's authoritarian rule. Upon his ascendance to the throne, King Mohammed VI released Yassine as a gesture of reconciliation and forgiveness and withstood the temptation to yield to Yassine's provocations by another round of coercion as his father had done in 1995 (Bouasria 2013, p. 45; Willis 2007, 158f.).⁷⁸ Instead, Mohammed VI simply ignored Yassine's reiterated exhortation to repent and return the wealth accumulated on the people's expenses ever since Hassan II's rule (Daadaoui 2013, p. 32). Furthermore, although Yassine's movement has always refused to take part in the game of official (party) politics and to end its outright criticism against the regime, the monarchy refrained from completely banning its activities and tolerated its preachings and social activities. The readiness to openly oppose the regime and call the king's legitimacy into question earned Yassine respect even beyond the circles of his imminent supporters (Willis 2007, 164f.). Although Yassine's references to Sufism are sometimes considered superficial, the Al Adl wal Ihssane's flirt with Sufism has been put forward to explain the movement's appeal. Furthermore, the movement rejects Wahabism and criticises the PJD's legalist approach to Islamic politics as well as its rigid worldviews. The PJD's political visions widely remain within the boundaries officially sanctioned by and around the monarchy. In turn, Al Adl wal Ihssane, in the long run, calls for the installation of some sort of a Caliphate that is adapted to the requirements of the modern world and borrows some aspects of Western liberal democracy while rejecting its secularist elements (Willis 2007, p. 168).⁷⁹

⁷⁸ For a lucid, in-depth analysis of the development of PJD and Al Adl wal Ihssane under the reigns of Hassan II and Mohammed VI, see Spiegel (2015) and Wegner (2011).

⁷⁹ For instance, building upon the Sufi-master tradition of communicating dreams to their disciples, a dream circulated within Yassine's movement that predicted the fall of the regime and the installation of a just caliphate for the year 2006. By making this dream public, the monarchy tried to discredit Yassine as a false dreamer and

The liberalisation trend enabling the PJD and Al Adl wal Ihssane to place their narratives was accompanied by the announcement to re-organise the religious field which had been administered since 1984 by the then-Minister of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs, Abdelkbir M'Daghri Alaoui who is often reported to be close to the Salafists (Wainscott 2017, p. 129; Zeghal 2008, p. 249).⁸⁰ The unofficial alliance with the Wahabi current had been useful for many years in order to counter both the socialist opposition (Bensadoun 2007, 22f.) and the opposition rising from the non-violent mainstream fundamentalists like the legal opposition of the PJD or those movements that call for regime change, e.g. Yassine's Al Adl wal Ihssane (Howe 2005, p. 344; Tozy 2009).⁸¹ At the same time, it came with the downside of promoting radical and extremist religious views in the kingdom. For the first time in the young reign of Mohammed VI, the religious fundamentalists' mobilisation capacity became manifest in March 2000. Islamists of all strands, including members of the PJD and Al Adl wal-Ihssane, organised a massive demonstration of men and women against the monarchy's reform plans for the personal status code (Moudawana) initiated and personally patronaged by Hassan II in favour of women's rights. Many Moroccan oulema participated in the movement. Even state institutions, including the Minister of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs, Abdelkbir M'Daghri Alaoui, joined the fray by distributing communiqués against the reform, demonstrating the alienation between the monarchy and his minister in religious matters (Zeghal 2008, 244f.).⁸²

In the following weeks, the signs of alienation multiplied even further. Upon his first bay'a, on 31 July 2000, King Mohammed VI changed the ceremony. While his father, Hassan II, had not put much weight on how the text of the bay'a was drafted and delivered, Mohammed VI had the Minister of Religious Affairs, Abdelkbir M'Daghri Alaoui, formulate and enact the ritual to boost the religious weight of the moment. At the same time, however, another breach of tradition relativised this new emphasis on the religious nature of the ceremony. According to Bouasria (2013, p. 39), the „new king limited the number of signatories to the allegiance act to his brother Moulay Rachid and his cousins Moulay Hicham and Moulay Ismail. The first person outside of the family circle to sign this document was not a religious scholar or a close

ridicule Al Adl wal Ihssane. At the same time, the monarchy realised the power of the paranormal in the political sphere and began to use dreams, claiming a monopoly of authentic dreams, cf. Bouasria (2013, p. 46).

⁸⁰ Aït Akdim (2013b).

⁸¹ Another interlocutor quoted former Moroccan Prime Minister el Othmani and claimed that, contrary to the official statements publicly available to Westerners, the alliance was forged to oppose the influence of some Sufi brotherhoods which had become too independent from the monarchy (cf. Interview, International relations, 2).

⁸² According to Wainscott (2017, p. 140), estimations for Rabat ranged between 40.000-100.000, while those for Casablanca were reported between 100.000-200.000 demonstrators.

courtesan, but the highly respected Prime Minister Abderrahmane Youssoufi, an old opponent of the monarchy and one of the leaders of the socialist Moroccan party (UFSP)". This change aligned with a growing secularisation trend in the first years of Mohammed VI's rule. In fact, from the outset of his rule, King Mohammed VI presented himself as a bridgebuilder between modern Western-style reformists and traditional elites representing religious intellectuals and tribal notables (Hegasy 2017a, p. 100).

At the same time, however, changing the hierarchy of signatories in the bay'a ceremony is also a sign of the progressing alienation between the monarchy and the religious elites of the country. Unsurprisingly, the demonstrations against the royal reform projects continued until 2001. In April 2001, in a manner typical of the monarchy, King Mohammed VI appointed a royal commission composed predominantly of religious scholars and three women to formulate suggestions about how to reform the personal status law. Fearing to lose its weight in the debate, feminist activists now directly turned to the king to ensure their concerns were heard by employing the monarchy's discourse about the threat of Islamist extremism (Wainscott 2017, p. 141). Conversely, some weeks after a new phase of huge protests against the reform, King Mohammed VI, on 4 September 2001, granted an interview to the French daily *le Figaro*. Asked about the protests in Casablanca and whether they represent a growing risk of Islamist radicalisation in Morocco, the king answered the following: „I don't think so, because Morocco is a country firmly rooted in its traditions. In Iran and Algeria, there was a whole period when religion was no longer part of daily life. Here, religion is part of everyday life. Moreover, the King has religious legitimacy because he is Amir Al-Mouminine, the Commander of the Faithful. I must guarantee freedom of worship, and not just for Muslims. The three religions, Muslim, Jewish and Christian, can express themselves in complete freedom, security and serenity.”⁸³ This interview shows the monarchy's confidence that Islamist terrorism was not and would not become an issue in Morocco. The king seemed to preserve this attitude even despite the terror attacks of 9/11, which happened a few days after the interview. On 16 September 2001, as a symbol of solidarity, King Mohammed VI organised a ceremony in the Cathedral of Rabat where Mohammed VI painted Morocco as a harbour of time-honoured peaceful coexistence between the religions and where representatives of the Moroccan government and the different confessions expressed their feelings concerning the catastrophe in the USA. This moment of interfaith dialogue and the fact that it took place in a catholic church was widely applauded but also strongly criticised by 16 Moroccan oulema who issued

⁸³ *Le Figaro* (2001).

a fatwa against it condemning the Habous Ministry's role in trying to mainstream public opinion about 9/11 (Zeghal 2008, pp. 215–221).

Unlike his father, King Mohammed VI rarely expresses himself outside his official speeches prepared for special occasions. He even more rarely grants interviews to the press. However, already a few weeks later, on 23 October 2001, the king received the French weekly *Paris Match* for an interview in his residence in Ouarzazate.⁸⁴ The fact that the interview was granted to a French rather than Moroccan newspaper shows that the monarchy was keen on reassuring its international partners about its reliability. At the same time, however, the regime made sure that the domestic audience also heard the king's messages conveyed in the interview. Even before *Paris Match*, the national press agency MAP published the interview and made it available to everyone, e.g. via the monarchy's mouthpiece, *le Matin*.⁸⁵ In this interview, the king was asked how he felt about the fatwa that had condemned the ecumenical ceremony in Rabat. The king impulsively interrupted the interviewer by saying:

There is no fatwa in this case any more than there is an ulema. The individuals you refer to have no authority whatsoever, and they certainly do not have the legitimacy to issue a fatwa, which is the sole responsibility of the Supreme Council of the Oulema, of which I am President. But, you see, even if it means lapsing into a certain chauvinism, I would like to share with you what I have been feeling deeply since 11 September. This tragedy has shown once again the Moroccan difference. The way in which we are Muslims in our own right, faithful to all their forms of solidarity, proud of their spirituality and their convictions, and yet totally committed to the universal values of humanism and modernity that are most widely shared throughout the world.

Without explicitly referring to his status as Commander of the Faithful, in this statement, the king put great emphasis on his religious authority, which cannot be overridden by any presumptuous self-acclaimed religious authority. Furthermore, he reiterated his conviction that his nation's values make Morocco a civilisational exception in the world. When he was asked whether he was worried about Islamist fundamentalism in Morocco and whether it should be fought against, he resolutely replied that Morocco was not threatened by extremist thoughts and that the whole issue of the Islamist danger was exaggerated by Western observers:

„No, you don't have to fight them, you have to convince them. During the final years of the reign of my father, the late King Hassan II, certain high-ranking figures deliberately pumped up the Islamist bubble, while our Islamists took advantage of the suspicious complacency of certain Western media who were only too happy to outbid them. For example, the Spanish daily *El Pais* recently ran the headline 'Mohammed VI faces the Islamist danger'... This article really made me smile and made everyone here smile. I really don't see where the Islamist threat lies. I walk around my country, I go where I want, when I want, without any problem. I haven't increased my security staff... Here, men who want to be bearded have the right to wear beards, women who want to veil their faces have the right to do so... It's not necessarily because they do so that they are Islamists or dangerous.

⁸⁴ Sinclair (2001).

⁸⁵ MAP (2001).

By associating the question of risk with danger for his own life and by assuring that he felt completely safe in his own country, he implicitly declared that no one else in Morocco or beyond should be afraid of the Islamist threat. Then, asked whether he considered Islamic fundamentalism a rogue form of Islam, he replied:

I would rather say that I have no lessons to learn from anyone about Islam. Muslims have nothing to learn from anyone. Muslims have the Qur'an and God. There is no intermediary. The only judge is God. I will not allow anyone to set themselves up as a conscience. That would be an insult to Muslims.

This answer is noteworthy. It stressed the individual responsibility inherent to Islam to read and interpret the Holy Script. Thereby, he seems to contradict and undermine his previous assertion about his own religious authority as president of the Supreme Council of Oulema (Zeghal 2008, 215f.). But it may also be read as a self-confident assertion of his religious capacity against Abdessalam Yassine's presumptuous offer, made in 2000, to provide religious advice to the king. At the same time, despite the horrors of 9/11, the interview demonstrates the monarchy's cautious approach to expressing its solidarity with the USA. With this approach, the monarchy tried to avoid repeating errors from the first Gulf War when the kingdom had actively supported the US and suffered heavy protests in 1991. Aware of the extremely negative perception of US foreign policy in Morocco's population, the regime did not want to show overt support for US interventions. At the same time, it had to avoid upsetting its Western partners (Zeghal 2008, p. 214). In the interview, Mohammed VI denied all associations between Morocco and rising Islamist radicalisation. He presented himself as optimistic that Morocco would not be affected by Islamist terror but a safe harbour of peaceful coexistence.

Behind the scenes, however, things started to change. In the legislative elections of 7 September 2002, the PJD secured 12,92% of the votes or 42 of 325 seats in the Moroccan parliament, i.e. only a few seats behind the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (50 seats) and the Independence Party Istiqlal (48 seats) and ahead of the National Assembly of Independents/RNI (41 seats). Their success was even more impressive among young and educated, particularly in the country's economic powerhouse, Casablanca and some districts of Rabat. Unofficial sources even leaked word about negotiations between the PJD and the royal palace, which urged the PJD to accept the 42 seats, i.e. 15 seats less than their actual wins, which would have made them the strongest party in parliament (Zeghal 2008, p. 183). Despite the peaceful and mutually accepted negotiation procedure, this more than respectable election result of a conservative Islamic – yet partly dissident and fundamentalist – party can be considered another weak-up call for the traditional monarchist forces. Mohammed VI eventually chose to ignore the election results and selected the technocrat Driss Jettou as the new Prime Minister of a government without any participation of the PJD (Zeghal 2008, p. 185). A few weeks later, in November

2002, Abdelkbir M'Daghri Alaoui, the long-time minister of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs, was replaced by the history professor and Sufi disciple Ahmed Toufiq. His appointment as Minister of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs marks a fundamental turning point in Morocco's religious policies. Ahmed Toufiq represents the intellectual counter-concept to the conservative profile of his predecessor. He had specialised in Morocco's historical connection with the African continent and the Jewish community. He also had been director of the Institute for African Studies at the humanities faculty of Rabat (1989-1995) and worked as director of the General Library before he was appointed the head of the Habous ministry.⁸⁶ Upon his nomination, Toufiq allegedly consulted his spiritual guide, Sidi Hamza Boutshish, the head of the Sufi Boutshishiya, whether he should accept the post. As argued by Bouasria (2013, p. 47), a negative answer would have been hard to envision since this would have effectively equalled the illegal subjugation of the king's supreme religious authority under a Sufi master, a simple Moroccan citizen. Toufiq's appointment, in turn, constitutes the *de facto* co-option of the Sufi order and represents an implicit reiteration of the latter's support for the monarchy.⁸⁷ Since 2002, Toufiq must be considered a lynchpin and royal instrument in Morocco's identity politics, given his continuous membership in all subsequent governments.

The reorganisation of the religious field experienced a massive push after the Islamist terror attacks of Casablanca on 16 May 2003, targeting (western) tourist places like hotels, cafés, Belgium's consulate, as well as a Jewish-owned pizzeria and a Jewish cemetery. The state's reaction to these atrocities – which cost 33 lives and left about 100 people injured – was firm and swift. A harsh crackdown followed. Despite critique from civil society and human rights activists who feared a return of the *Leaden Years*, by August 2003, over 1000 suspects were arrested. By the end of October, Moroccan courts had already issued 16 death and dozens of long prison sentences. Hardly a year after the Casablanca bombings and upon the 2004 terror attacks in Madrid, which, once more, were mainly blamed on Moroccans, already 5000 suspects of terrorism and alleged sympathisers had been put under arrest, and over 1.500 had been tried and jailed (Howe 2005, pp. 334–336). Repression and coercion were often enacted without making a difference. Sometimes, the sole fact of belonging to an illegal association like *al Adl wal Ihsane* seemed to suffice to bring someone into great trouble (Howe 2005, p. 344).

⁸⁶ Cf. Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques (2002) and MAP (2002).

⁸⁷ Bouasria (2013, p. 47) also interpreted the royal patronage for other Sufi orders like the Tijania brotherhood as a transnational tactic to symbolically weaken the Algerian claim over the saint Ahmed Tijani (1735-1815). Werenfels (2014, p.282) even argues that “Mohammed VI in the late 2000s twice appointed a sheikh by decree, for the Kettaniya and the Tidjaniya, apparently not only with the goal of settling succession squabbles within the orders, but also towards enhancing state control over them by installing sheikhs loyal to the palace”.

At the same time, the king struggled to surf the wave of public rage and frustration against religious extremism. In a public speech issued on 29 May 2003, two weeks after the Casablanca terror attacks, the king tried to regain the sovereignty of interpretation of the events and restate his religious authority, which he perceived as at stake. The speech mainly presented the king as an active manager of the terrible situation despite him having remained silent for two weeks after the terror attacks. Whereas his explanations rather seemed like an excuse, King Mohammed VI painted himself as the vanguard of Moroccan democracy by declaring an end to „the era of laxity in the face of those who exploit democracy to undermine the authority of the State, and of those whose ideas they spread represent a breeding ground for the thorns of ostracism, fanaticism and discord.”⁸⁸ He, therefore, focussed his speech on the popular demonstrations of solidarity with the victims. The king also recalled the national epos of the Green March under his father in 1975 when civilians supported the royal army by peacefully marching to recuperate the Western Sahara, only armed with a Qur’an and a Moroccan flag in their hand. According to the king, this had shown the unbreakable link between the throne and the people. Mohammed VI interpreted the people’s solidarity demonstrations in 2003 as evidence of the same popular support for his political endeavours to promote and defend moderation and democracy. With this almost mythical sublimation of his own political agenda, he tried to reestablish an aura of legitimacy around the proposal that followed: He called for a „comprehensive, integrated and multidimensional strategy” to reform the country politically, economically and with regards to culture, education, media and religion as „to educate and train citizens by imbuing them with the virtues of openness, modernity, rationality, seriousness in what they do, uprightness, moderation and tolerance.”⁸⁹ Two months later, in his yearly Throne speech, the king explained in more detail what he perceived the terror attacks to be implying for his nation. For him they were “incompatible with the specific Moroccan identity”, obliging the whole nation to “fight against all evil temptations in human beings and against aberrations and chaos”. In this struggle, he sought to re-emphasise and reinvigorate the king’s special special spiritual position ensuring religious moderation and political stability:

This **religious and historical commitment, perpetuated by the strength of the Baïâ (allegiance)**, has been updated by a **modern political and constitutional pact**, through which the Ummah has been unanimous in considering **Islam as the religion of the State, and the King *Amir al mouminine* (Commander of the Faithful)**.

[...] We affirm, just as firmly, that **the question of the relationship between the State and religion in our country has been settled since the Constitution stipulates that the Kingdom of Morocco is a Muslim State and that the King, Commander of the Faithful (*Amir al mouminine*), is responsible**

⁸⁸ Mohammed VI (2003b).

⁸⁹ Mohammed VI (2003b).

for protecting the faith and guaranteeing respect for freedoms, including freedom of worship for followers of other celestial religions.

As the **Commander of the Faithful is the sole religious reference for the Moroccan nation, no party or group can set itself up as the spokesperson or guardian of Islam.** The religious function, in fact, falls under the **supreme Imamate of *Amir al mouminine***, who is entrusted to Us, assisted by the Supreme Council and the Regional Councils of Ulemas, whose upgrading and renewal We intend to proceed with soon, as well as the revitalisation of their mode of operation.

From this enlightened vision of our religious frame of reference, Islam and modernity complement each other to form one of the fundamental tributaries that irrigate the universal frame of reference in perfect harmony with the most important of its supports, namely **democracy, which We have made the keystone of the Moroccan constitutional Monarchy, and an irreversible choice.**

Since **democratic transition is a long and arduous process that requires a climate of stability**, commitment and vigilance, the first prerequisite is, therefore, a State, strengthened by the supremacy of the Moroccan Constitution (Mohammed VI 2003a).

The king's warning words revealed the regime's anxiety that its authority might have dwindled. King Mohammed VI's liberalisation policies had seemingly encouraged a so far repressed and intimidated opposition to speak up and – even worse – violently challenge the monarchy. This is also implied by Moroccan officials who openly contested critical media for a lack of morals. Only a few days before the terror attacks, Ali Lamrabet, a former Moroccan diplomat and outspokenly critical journalist, had started a hunger strike when he was convicted of *lèse-majesté* and sentenced to four years in prison for satirical cartoons and paintings allegedly questioning the monarchy and Morocco's territorial integrity. While national and international activists and politicians strongly criticised this judgement and the monarchy's treatment of freedom of the press, the Moroccan ambassador to France explained that journalists like Ali Lamrabet were the reason why young people committed terror attacks like the ones in Casablanca only a few days before.⁹⁰ However, as argued by Howe (2005, p. 325), for „the first time, the Moroccan public realized that Islamic extremism was a serious threat to the kingdom. Morocco could no longer claim to be an island of moderation, whose people are united around an enlightened monarch leading them to equity and well-being. The coordinated offensive by Islamic extremists revealed that a sector of the population is fiercely opposed to the regime's project for gradual progress toward a modern, Western type democracy". The regime was now confronted with questions of why the regime had not been able to detect the ongoing radicalisation and prevent the attacks (Howe 2005, p. 326).

The regime tried to fend off (potential) critique by blaming Islamist intellectuals and attributing to them – with some success – the moral responsibility for the catastrophe (Howe 2005, p. 328). Especially the political left and women's associations advocated banning even the moderates of the PJD camp from the political game, making them responsible for the proliferation of Jihadi

⁹⁰ Cf. Tual (2003).

ideology (Howe 2005, 334f.). Although the PJD and Al Adl wal Ihssane unequivocally condemned the bombings and although the state's security measures taken in the slipstream of the terror attacks did not explicitly target either of them, both movements had to keep a lower profile in the following years (Willis 2007, 162f.). Given their potential to win even more seats in the subsequent municipal elections of September 2003, the PJD was compelled to renounce from presenting candidates in many cities to prevent them from gaining ever more political influence. Furthermore, the Ministry of the Interior insisted that Mustapha Ramid, a member of the more radical wing of PJD-faction in the Moroccan parliament, would not become elected head of the parliamentary group (Willis 2007, p. 163). Despite these limited self-sacrifices, the movements survived the imbroglio without taking major damage. They diverted attention to the desperate situation in the country's poor neighbourhoods, pinpointing the state's failure to tackle social inequality and poverty. Al Adl wal Ihssane even went as far as to explicitly accuse the regime of having promoted Wahabism in an attempt to curtail the societal influence of Yassine's movement (Howe 2005, p. 344; Willis 2007, 166f.). Also, Ahmed Raissouni, then president of the PJD's ideological branch MUR, put the king's religious authority into doubt by questioning the legal provisions that constitutionalised the king's infallibility as *amir al mouminine* and the king's qualification to issue religious rulings (fatwas). When calling for creating an expert council with the necessary theological training, Raissouni was criticised by high-ranking cadres of his party and had to step down (Bouasria 2013, p. 41). A year later, however, Mustapha Ramid, a member of the more radical wing of PJD-faction in the Moroccan parliament, called to revise the Moroccan constitution and abolish the sacred character of the monarchy. Although attempts to have Ramid's proposal be debated in the party's fifth congress in April 2004 were turned down (Willis 2007, p. 163), the idea found its supporters in Morocco's political landscape. Hence, the critique against the monarchy never really ceased. Daadaoui (2013, p. 33) reports accusations of both the PJD and Al Adl wal Ihssane against the regime's employment of power rituals like the bay'a, which they call a „false appropriation of religious symbols” that essentially serve to „sanctify the ruling family” and affirm the people's position servitude towards the king. At the same time, however, both movements seem to be aware that these „un-Islamic” power symbols enjoy wide acceptance in a widely illiterate society like Morocco (Daadaoui 2013, p. 33).

So, by asserting, in his speeches, his commitment to democratic transition while calling to remain truthful to an authentic Moroccan culture, King Mohammed VI obviously tried to re-affirm his supreme legitimacy as a religious and political leader. To do this, he underlined that Morocco's genuine faith was traditionally based on the moderate and tolerant Malikite rite of

which, being *amir al mouminine*, he was the sole depositary. He stressed the importance of the interpretative power of the *ijtihad* as opposed to the practices of the califate in the Mashrek. He declared that all violent forms of Islam were alien to Moroccan identity and civilisation. According to the king, for generations and through the bay'a, Moroccans have committed themselves to recognise and acknowledge Islam as a state religion and, hence, the king as their supreme religious leader. By reiterating this link, he affirmed that without the Moroccan people acknowledging his supreme religious and political authority, chaos would be the alternative, and the monarchy would not be able to ensure the democratic transition it had embarked the nation on. Although the political elites in the country challenged the obscure and often obstructive policies of the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs under its previous minister and demanded a more substantial implication in the reform process in the name of the country's securitisation,⁹¹ it was to the very same ministry under the management of Ahmed Toufiq that the king entrusted the change management:

By February 2004, the king had already managed to push his reform of the personal status code through parliamentary adoption, benefiting from the temporary weakness of the Islamist movements and the global context of the War on Terror. This success earned him the international reputation of a fervent defender of women's rights and democratic values while, in reality, it asserted his autocratic grip on power (Wainscott 2017, pp. 142–144). In a similar vein, a few months later, on 30 April 2004, Mohammed VI spelt out in more detail what his reform plans for more „spiritual security” involved:

- Reform the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs.
- Create subdivisions for Islamic education and mosques
- Reorganise the Higher Council of Oulema and its local subdivisions to
 - o make the Council the only institution entitled to issue fatwas.
 - o advance the policy of proximity for the interaction with Muslim believers.
- Reactivate the *League of Moroccan Oulema* and baptise it *Rabita Mohammedia of Moroccan Oulema*, christened with his own Sherifian name.
- Strengthen the mosques as spaces of worship
- Update Morocco's religious education by stressing the principles of rationalisation, modernisation, and mainstreaming („unification”) of Islamic sciences, as well as protecting the values of Islam, including openness, tolerance, and moderation.

⁹¹ Aujourd'hui le Maroc (2003).

For the king, these reforms are essential to counter the perversion of Islam promoted by extremists and terrorists. To promote universal values of tolerance, solidarity and non-aggression, the „spiritual security”-strategy aims at upgrading the image of authentic Islam which Moroccans have made „their own, because it is in keeping with common sense and their natural inclinations, as well as with their identity unified by obedience to God, the Prophet and the Commander of the Faithful, *Amir al mouminine*, to whom they have entrusted, by their allegiance, the task of taking charge of their affairs. He also protected them from all heresies and evils caused by sectarians and tribalists who placed themselves outside the Sunnah and the community’s consensus.” The king asserted to his subjects that in this fight for spiritual security is on their side: „You will find the First Servant of the Kingdom at the forefront of the fight to counter the destructive currents that have burst into our society, which remains firmly attached to Islam, in all its purity and moderation, an attachment that embraces all Moroccans, including Our loyal subjects living abroad” (Mohammed VI 2004a). By addressing the national and foreign public alike, the king seemed to acknowledge that the terror attacks in Casablanca had undermined his authority at various levels. Firstly, the attacks themselves rendered visible that parts of the Moroccan society did not recognise his religious authority and contested it by violent means. Secondly, the attacks revealed to everyone that the monarchy’s recent liberalisation approach had opened space for radicals to operate and reduced the state’s capacity to ensure people’s safety. Thirdly, the attacks risked proving wrong the international community’s trust in Morocco as a reliable partner against global terrorism and a safe travel destination where religious tolerance is the rule rather than the exception.

This setback seemed to have reduced the monarchy’s confidence – almost amounting to an inferiority complex. Still four years later, the king deemed it necessary to emphasise his religious authority. On 27 September 2008, at the occasion of the ordinary session of the Higher Council of Oulema in Tetouan, the king reiterated the pillars of his religious reform. Beyond the elements announced in 2004, he also announced the creation of a Council of European Oulema for Moroccans living abroad. He once more announced the strengthening of the mosques as spaces of worship, learning and protection of the values of Islam, including openness, tolerance and moderation. Furthermore, he wanted to implement the charter of religious scholars (Mithaq al-Oulema) to raise awareness and sensitise imams and spiritual guides to the struggle against extremism.⁹² Lastly, the king wanted to enhance the social welfare offers of the Mohammed VI Foundation for social services for religious personnel. These

⁹² According to Bouasria (2013, p. 44), in the following years this re-education of Morocco’s 45.000 religious staffers cost the country 200 million dirhams (~25 million USD).

reforms clearly show how much the monarchy is concerned with security issues and preserving its religious legitimacy domestically and abroad. The king even stated this quite explicitly by explaining that his „ultimate aim is to ensure that our honourable Oulema make a more effective contribution to the process of reform and modernisation that We are leading in all fields. In particular, We want them to help strengthen the spiritual security of the nation by ensuring the preservation of its religious doctrine, which is based on tolerant Sunni Islam.” More specifically, according to the king, the idea to monopolise the right to issue fatwas has to be interpreted against the necessity to „protect this interpretative prerogative from intruders and other impostors who place themselves on the fringes of the institutional religious framework, embodied by the Commandery of the Faithful, of which We are the custodian” (Mohammed VI 2008).

As we will see in the next chapters, in obedience to the royal orders, Ahmed Toufiq’s Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs took control of all Moroccan mosques. It put imams and preachers under examination, surveillance and massive pressure. By alliance with the Ministry of the Interior, security forces arrested thousands of actual and presumed terrorists and leaders of the Salafi community. Many were sued in untransparent fast-track tribunals and received a death penalty or a long-time prison sentence. Theologically, the new concept relies upon Mohammed VI’s constitutionally anchored role and his strong religious authority as Commander of the Faithful (*amir al mouminine*). It allows the regime to propagate a Moroccan brand of Islam that is both reform-oriented and tolerant (Boussouf 2018; Del Sordi & Dalmasso 2018). It builds on Sunni-Maliki jurisprudence,⁹³ Ashaari doctrine⁹⁴ and Sufi mysticism⁹⁵.

⁹³ The Sunni Maliki school of jurisprudence represents one of four Sunni schools of religious law. It goes back to imam Malik ibn Anas (711-795). All schools of jurisprudence acknowledge the Qur’an and the Sunna (sayings of the prophet), the *ijma’a* and *al Qiyas* as sources of legal interpretation (*fiqh*). To this, Malikism adds the confirmed acts of the first Muslim inhabitants of Medina, i.e. the descendants of the prophet’s first companions. Furthermore, it seeks to find the best and most adequate solution for a problem taking the general interest into consideration if Qur’an and Sunna are silent on a matter, cf. Boussouf (2018, p. 193). Morocco’s time-honoured concentration on public interest has sometimes provoked accusations against the state of being utilitarian, cf. Wainscott (2017, p. 75).

⁹⁴ The Ashaari school of thought goes back to Abou al Hassan al Ashaari (873-935). He rejected the idea of human free will and believed in destiny. He also rejected the anthropomorphist concept of God and defended his ubiquitous nature. Yet although God decides over everything, good or bad, humans have a certain space to act guided by their faith. They will therefore be held accountable for their doings in their afterlives as they are to their lifetimes vis-à-vis mundane law, cf. Boussouf (2018, pp. 196–198). According to Wainscott (2017, p. 77) therefore poses “a middle path between a legalistic, strict interpretation of scripture and the use of human reason”.

⁹⁵ Sunni mysticism is an esoteric way of practicing Islam that is guided by feelings and intuition rather than reason and aims at becoming an intimate and direct union with God, cf. Boussouf (2018, p. 199). A disciple seeking to reach this union passes by the initiation and education (*tariqa*) of a sheikh (master) disposing of supranatural blessing (*baraka*). Those sheikhs descending from the prophet Mohammed are considered holy men (*marabouts*). Moroccan society has been marked by several orders (also called *tariqa*) present in the country for centuries, namely the Qadiriya-Boutshishiya, the Tijaniya, the Hamadsha, and the ‘Aisawa, cf. Wainscott (2017, 78f.). Sufi masters Masters and disciples form a community, called *zawiya*, which is organised strictly hierarchically and

As opposed to the borderline-Salafi era before Toufiq, the leading principle of dealing with the holy book and the *sunna* has become the *ijtihad*, an exegetical interpretation of the writings and prophetic traditions, allowing the state to find a flexible and moderate response to contemporary societal needs such as a reform of women's role in society (Boussouf 2018, 247ff.; Dennaoui 2024; Zeghal 2008, 244f.). This concept was conceived to form the bulwark against extremist ideology, which presents a common threat to Morocco and many states of northern and sub-Saharan Africa (Wainscott 2017).⁹⁶ As we will see in more detail below, domestically, the Moroccan „spiritual security”-model penetrates all societal levels. The state resorts to multipliers – imams, teachers or male and female spiritual guides (*murshidin* and *murshidat*) – to ensure the prevalence of the official religious narrative. This commitment is also mirrored by the growing investments in the religious field (Figure 6), which has translated into tremendous growth in the budget of Toufiq's Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs ever since Mohammed VI came to power. From less than 118 million Dirhams in 1999/2000, the global budget has gone up to over 6,6 billion Dirhams in 2023, i.e. a multiplication by a factor of over 56. The trend started after 2003 when the reform of the religious sector began. The budget growth became even steeper after 2011 in reaction to the grievances of the uprisings in the region when even the monarchy had to bolster its legitimacy and therefore relied once more on its religious credibility, which has always served to underpin his political power in times of crisis.

builds upon a relationship of obedience between disciples and their master. Upon a master's death, his mausoleum becomes a sanctuary of a holy man also called *marabout*, attracting pilgrims and veneration from new generations of disciples. For the importance of Sufi tradition in Morocco's state system also see Hammoudi (1997) and Eickelman (1976).

⁹⁶ Cf. also interview, Religious policies, 9.

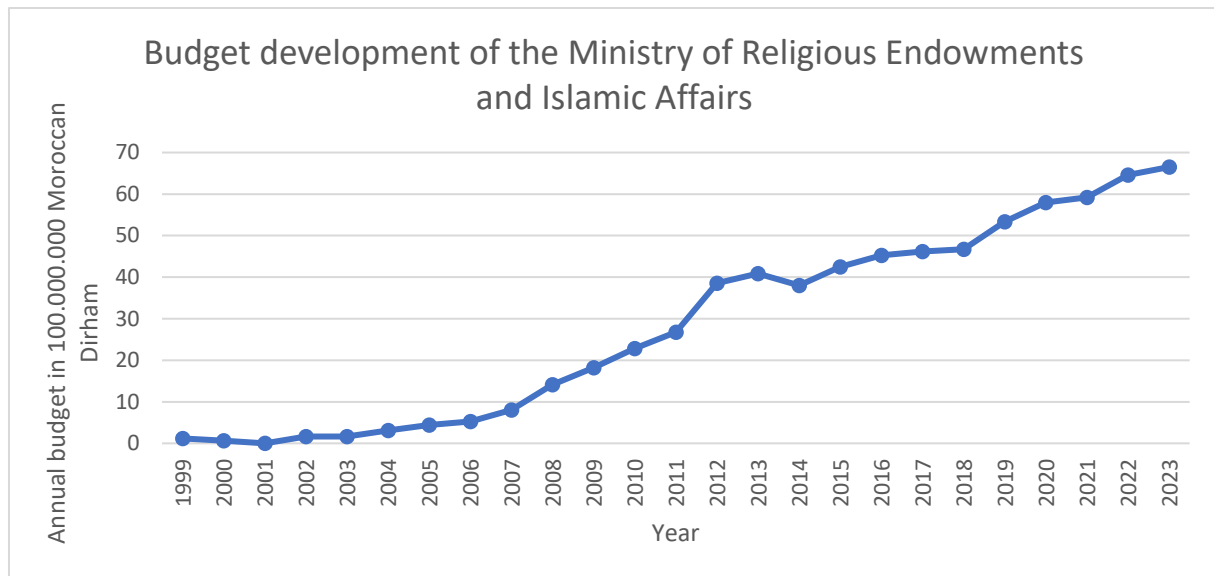


Figure 6: Budget development of the Habous Ministry⁹⁷

While some of the political parties on both the national and subnational level might have been frustrated by the omnipresent dominance of the royal palace in the country's politics, national, regional and municipal governments continued to refer to actual or alleged royal will to make difficult budget choices pass or have them blocked in otherwise democratic decision-making processes. Hence, hiding behind the monarchical authority continued to be an effective strategy to govern by dissuading, discouraging or silencing opposing views. To avoid troubles with the monarchically controlled authorities of the central state, even the locally elected officials of the municipal councils – opposition or not - would consider themselves obliged to pronounce, after every council session, the oath of allegiance to the king and praise the monarchy to assert their loyalty with the institutional constants of the nation, i.e. the monarchy (Chahir 2010, 354f. and 566f.).

In 2011, though, the wave of protests spilt over from Tunisia, which had just chased its long-time dictator Zine el Abidine ben Ali. The so-called Arab Spring – a term often refused by Moroccans given its exclusivist ethnic character – took a different form in the kingdom. Organised under the umbrella of the so-called 20 February Movement, most protesters refrained from calling for regime toppling like it was in other countries. It rather demanded an end to corruption and tyranny. The movement was composed of a heterogeneous coalition of people from the frustrated urban strata, unions, leftist activists, Amazigh activists, Al Adl wal Ihssane and a few members of political parties (Willis 2014, p. 439). While the PJD decided to stay out of the protests as a party, some high-ranking members also decided to integrate the movement.

⁹⁷ The author's compilation on the basis of data from the respective Finance Laws between 1999 and 2023.

To calm the protests, Mohammed VI decided to avoid the mistake of outright repression committed by other leaders in the region. Instead, he portrayed himself as the spearhead of a democratic reform process. On 9 March 2011, he announced new legislative elections and a revision of the constitution that would cede more powers to the parliament and the prime minister (Willis 2014, p. 440). He, therefore, mandated a Consultative Commission for the Revision of the Constitution presided over by hand-picked Abdelatif Menouni to elaborate the new draft constitution by June 2011 that would then be posed to a public referendum. He also installed a Political Mechanism Accompanying the Constitutional Reform and entrusted one of his advisers, Mohammed Moatassim, with coordinating the public debate. This approach can be called a „consensus game” in which relevant societal actors were to be involved and heard „while maintaining the royal pre-eminence” (Dalmaso 2021, p. 372).

One of the most heated debates pertained to the question of freedom of conscience and the monarchy’s political and religious status. While many liberal forces in the country pushed for a change that would guarantee free confessional choice and cultic exercise, the PJD and most Islamic conservative parties lobbied to abandon this idea. With their support, royal adviser Mohammed Moatassim eventually chose to leave it out (Dalmaso 2021, p. 374) despite public protests from the liberal camp. A similar debate revolved around whether the king should continue to reign and rule or whether a constitutional monarchy could be envisioned. Despite some tergiversations, the PJD and other Islamist forces eventually decided to support the preservation of the Commandery of the Faithful. In contrast, other currents like Al Adl wal Ihssane denied the king’s religious legitimacy and advocated for more meaningful democratic change by considerably reducing the king’s executive powers (Dalmaso 2021, p. 376). The new constitution of 2011, then indeed, officially yielded a change in the king’s status. He remains „Commander of the Faithful”, „Supreme Representative and the Symbol of the unity of the Nation”, „guarantor of the perpetuation and the continuity of the State”, and „guarantor of the independence of the nation and the territorial integrity of the Kingdom” (cf. Figure 7).⁹⁸ The descriptions of the religious and secular powers of the king, though, were split into two separate articles. This is a highly symbolic legal revolution since both spheres are no longer merged for the first time in Moroccan post-independence history (Biagi 2016, p. 500).

⁹⁸ Kingdom of Morocco (2011).

Text of the old constitution of 1996 ⁹⁹	Text of the new constitution of 2011 ¹⁰⁰
Article 19 The King, „Amir Al-Muminin“(Commander of the Faithful), shall be the Supreme Representative of the Nation and the Symbol of the unity thereof. He shall be the guarantor of the perpetuation and the continuity of the State. As Defender of the Faith, He shall ensure the respect for the Constitution. He shall be the Protector of the rights and liberties of the citizens, social groups and organisations. The King shall be the guarantor of the independence of the Nation and the territorial integrity of the Kingdom within all its rightful boundaries.	Article 41 The King, Commander of the Faithful [<i>Amir al mouminine</i>], sees to the respect for Islam. He is the Guarantor of the free exercise of beliefs [cultes]. He presides over the Superior Council of the Ulema [Conseil superieur des Oulema], charged with the study of questions that He submits to it. The Council is the sole instance enabled [habiletee] to comment [prononcer] on the religious consultations (Fatwas) before being officially agreed to, on the questions to which it has been referred [saisi] and this, on the basis of the tolerant principles, precepts and designs of Islam. The attributions, the composition and the modalities of functioning of the Council are established by Dahir [Royal Decree]. The King exercises by Dahirs the religious prerogatives inherent in the institution of the Emirate of the Faithful [Imarat Al Mouminine] which are conferred on Him in exclusive manner by this Article.
	Article 42 The King Head of State, His Supreme Representative, Symbol of the unity of the Nation, Guarantor of the permanence and of the continuity of the State and Supreme Arbiter between the institutions, sees to respect for the Constitution, to the good functioning of the constitutional institutions, to the protection of democratic choice and of the rights and freedoms of the citizens [feminine] and citizens [masculine], of the collectivities, and to respect for the international commitments of the Kingdom. He is the Guarantor of the Independence of the country and of the territorial integrity of the Kingdom within its authentic frontiers. The King exercises these missions by Dahirs by virtue of the powers that are expressly devolved to him by this Constitution. The Dahirs, with the exception of those provided for in Articles 41, 44 (2nd paragraph), 47 (1st and 6th paragraphs), 51, 57, 59, 130 (1st and 4th paragraphs) and 174, are countersigned by the Head of Government.
Article 23 The person of the King shall be sacred and inviolable.	Article 46 The person of the King is inviolable, and respect is due Him.

Figure 7: Text comparison of Morocco's 1996 and 2011 constitutions with regard to the king's religious authority

Furthermore, at first glance, the king is no longer „sacred and inviolable” but „inviolable and respect is due him”. In an interview with the author, a high-ranking state official heading one of the major institutions of Islamic education in Morocco shared his conviction that it was precisely the sacred principle of the Commandery of the Faithful that saved Morocco from the

⁹⁹ Kingdom of Morocco (2007).

¹⁰⁰ Kingdom of Morocco (2011).

chaotic fate of other countries in the region during the 2011 uprisings since it guarantees the bond between the king and his people. It represents a consensus that the king deserves respect despite all socio-political difficulties and divisions due to his sacred position.¹⁰¹ This is a hint that there is more to the new formulation. As convincingly explained by Biagi (2016, 500f.), the French and English translations deceive the international observer since they veil the significance of the Arabic original. The new two-fold terminology referring to „respect” (ihtiram wa tawqir) is an ancient formulation used by (alleged) descendants of the prophet. Beyond meaning „respect”, this wording dramatically underlines their claim to veneration and obeisance.

Yet, even if we accept that, with the constitutional referendum, the king legally lost his claim to sanctity, the regime ensured that the monarchy continues to enjoy the same degree of legal and political protection. In fact, Werenfels (2014) has shown that the monarchy even managed to convince the Sufi order of the Boutshishiya to mobilise hundreds of thousands of people to demonstrate in favour of the king’s constitutional referendum. These demonstrations legitimised the king’s religiously sanctioned political power and delegitimised the Salafi groups which had been part of the anti-regime demonstrations across the region. Furthermore, only a few weeks after the constitutional referendum, the king, as every year, held the bay’a ceremony, assuring himself of the allegiance of civil servants, local chiefs and oulema by employing the same sacred symbols of obeisance and servitude as if nothing had happened (Biagi 2016, p. 501). This can be seen in an interview with Ahmed Toufiq, published in *Jeune Afrique* in 2017. The minister explained the regime’s perspective on Morocco’s political landscape. In this interview, he asserted that besides the Ashaarite dogma, the Malekite rite and the spiritual way [i.e. the Sufi traditions], the *Commandery of the Faithful* must, above all, be regarded as the basis of Moroccan Islam. According to Toufiq, it is based on the bay’a, which represents a social contract that is entirely in the spirit of a modern constitutional state and guarantees people the free practice of their religion, security, dignified quality of life and also counters terrorism/extremism, as it prevents aberrations.¹⁰²

This shows that, in Morocco, the claim to performance legitimacy still goes hand in hand with the religious element of the Commander of the Faithful. Only the religious yet constitutional bond between the king and his people should be considered conducive to prosperity, development, and law and order. This is also why the Moroccan regime perceives secularism

¹⁰¹ Interview, Religious policies, 10.

¹⁰² F. Iraqi (2017).

as a misguided opinion of state leaders. According to the same interview with the minister, the reform of the religious sector could be more advanced if all political actors were aware that *amir al mouminine* alone sets the guidelines and guarantees the preservation of the nation's foundations. At the same time, he called upon the parties to concern themselves solely with what is negotiable and what underlies change. Conversely, they should refrain from manipulating religion or interfering in religious matters and remind themselves of the king's religious authority. In the interview, Toufiq also explained why a technocrat like himself could become a minister of religion. Since an imam speaks to a mixed audience, he must be able to deliver a sermon that appeals to listeners from all political strands. It would, therefore, be fatal if politicians/political parties were given control over the Habous Ministry so that they could instruct the imams accordingly. Standing outside the partisan competition, the minister thus clearly emphasised the regime's conception of the state's hierarchy.¹⁰³ Here, the government and the political parties it is composed of are relegated to a second rank where political contingencies are dealt with as opposed to the sphere of religious constants that defines the basis and the glue of the Moroccan society under the exclusive leadership of *amir al mouminine*, King Mohammed VI. In one of my interviews, a high-ranking official of the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs also explained that, while the ministry is usually consulted and intensively involved in elaborating new regulations and reforms of the religious sphere, the texts themselves are prepared by the king in collaboration with external experts/religious scholars, his royal advisors and members of his cabinet such as Mohammed Kettani, a prominent academic and chargé de mission in the royal cabinet since 1997.¹⁰⁴

6.1.2. A House for Allah or a House for the King: Morocco's Mosque Strategy

Throughout the history of the successive Moroccan dynasties, the monarchy has been eager to leave an architectural footprint in their realm.¹⁰⁵ The most recent signs of the monarchy's eagerness are visible all over the country nowadays, most prominently in the new theatre and museum infrastructure built under Mohammed VI in Rabat and Casablanca. However, the spiritual sector has also "benefitted" from the monarchy's permanent care. New mosques have been built all over the Moroccan territory. They were often endowed with a name associated with the Alaouite dynasty, enhancing the current monarchy's prestige and vesting it with an aura of modernity anchored in tradition and piety. The idea to use the construction of new mosques to boost the monarchy's legitimacy is not new. Against the backdrop of the ideological

¹⁰³ F. Iraqi (2017).

¹⁰⁴ Interview, Religious Policies, 5. Cf. also Académie du Royaume du Maroc .

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Cultural heritage, 13.

threats posed by the 1979 revolution in Iran and the massive bread riots in Casablanca in 1981, the current king's father, Hassan II, ordered the construction of a giant mosque in Casablanca, „second in size only to the Great Mosque of Mecca”, built upon the seaside on a vast esplanade and featuring the tallest minaret in the world at the time (Sheline 2019, p. 112). Inaugurated in 1993, the sum of approximately 600 million USD necessary to construct this megalomaniac building was financed only by Moroccans. Authentic Moroccan materials were used on the mosque „to reflect traditional Moroccan heritage as well as replicate the great mosques of Islamic civilization” (Sheline 2019, p. 112). Although the construction of the mosque in Casablanca was not uncontroversial, mostly due to its high construction and maintenance costs, and although it has not necessarily contributed to a boost of the monarchy's popularity, it has still become „a visual representation of the regime's symbolic and religious authority in a central and strategic location” (Sheline 2019, 113). Hence, like his father, Mohammed VI continued the construction of mosques¹⁰⁶ in major cities in Morocco and abroad, which he “kindly christened with His August name”.¹⁰⁷

Already in 2004, a few months after the terror attacks, the king had announced the creation of a mosque division within the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs. He also wanted to revise Moroccan „legislation governing places of worship, with a view to adapting them to architectural requirements, so that worship can take place in an atmosphere of serenity, that the sources of funding are controlled and that their transparency, legality and durability are ensured” (Mohammed VI 2004a). A few years later, in January 2007, the parliament passed a new law which restricted the construction of new mosques by conditioning it to the prior approval „by the local governors as well as by the chairmen of municipal and rural councils. In order to have the right to build a mosque, the law requires concerned individuals to organise themselves into an association to follow strictly the rules and laws that are put in place by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior. The association would then be responsible for the upkeep and activities of the mosque. For stricter control of the financial basis of the mosques, the new law would follow more closely the sources of the money and how it would be used by establishing special bank accounts under the name of the associations. Here again, the new law is guided by concerns about terrorism and security. The new law

¹⁰⁶ Already upon his ascendance to the throne, Mohammed VI explicitly referred to his father's architectural activities by commending the renovation of the royal palace in Fès, the construction of the Mohammed V Mausoleum in Rabat and Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca. Cf. Mohammed VI (1999).

¹⁰⁷ Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques (2016c). Cf. also for instance Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques (2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d).

stipulates that any violation would be punishable by large fines as well as prison sentences of up to five years for repeated offenders” (Maghraoui 2009, p. 203).

In 2008, during a speech given at the ordinary session of the Superior Council of Oulema, the king personally gave more details about the ongoing reform of the religious sector. For him, this institutional reform could „only be complete if we work to revitalise the role of mosques, since they are the vibrant heart of the spiritual sphere. We have therefore adopted a series of measures reflecting Our constant and benevolent concern for the houses of God, especially as they are one of the major pillars on which our plan to initiate and raise awareness of the principles of enlightened religious thought is based. Our wish is to strengthen the role of mosques as places of worship, invocation of God, guidance, spiritual orientation and literacy” (Mohammed VI 2008). This speech shows that gaining control over the Moroccan mosques is crucial to the monarchy’s spiritual security approach. More specifically, according to the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs, the state’s eagerness to build new mosques all across the kingdom „reflects the special interest shown by the Sovereign in religious matters, in order to guarantee the conditions for the ideal practice of the precepts of Islam, the dissemination of spiritual peace and the safeguarding of the religious identity of Moroccans based on the Malekite rite.” It is part of the integrated, global and multidimensional strategy to reorganise and manage the kingdom’s religious affairs which, since 2004, is supposed to be „tailored to the needs of the faithful” and which allows defending the values of understanding, harmony, cordiality and peaceful coexistence between peoples and communities while rejecting obscurantism and religious extremism. The idea is that mosques „make it possible to implement the principle of participatory action and bring the citizen closer to the Alem, as well as helping to protect religious discourse from possible misuse and strengthening the foundations of the faith” (Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques 2014a). Building mosques thus equals the creation of spaces where citizens can meet religious guides and imams who are theologically trained according to the principles approved by the ministry and, hence, by the king in his function as *amir al mouminine*. To underline the importance of mosques for the kingdom, the king even introduced the Journée nationale des mosquées (National Mosque Day) in 2007, which has to take place every year on the 7th day after the Aid Al Mawlid Annabaoui Acharif (birthday of the prophet Mohammed).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques (2012).

With Mohammed VI's new strategy to create a state monopoly in Morocco's mosques came a need for stock-taking. By 2016, the ministry had taken control of over 52.500 mosques in the kingdom for a total population of over 34 million (Figure 8).

Category of mosque (as of 2016)	Rural	Urban	Total
Friday mosque	16.089	7.191	23.306
Mosque for the five daily prayers	22.353	7.214	29.577
Total number of mosques	38.442	14.405	52.883

Figure 8: Mosque categories in rural and urban areas

Yet, the stock-taking also yielded a huge discrepancy between the regions and among provinces/prefectures (Figure 9). Especially the densely populated areas in and around the big cities like Casablanca, Rabat, Salé, Marrakesh and Agadir have fewer than ten mosques per 10.000 people (in Casablanca and Rabat, there are even only two per 10.000). More rural areas, in turn, including regions like the Rif or the coastal south, dispose of more than 20 or 30 mosques for 10.000 people (Figure 10).

Number of mosques per prefectures and provinces

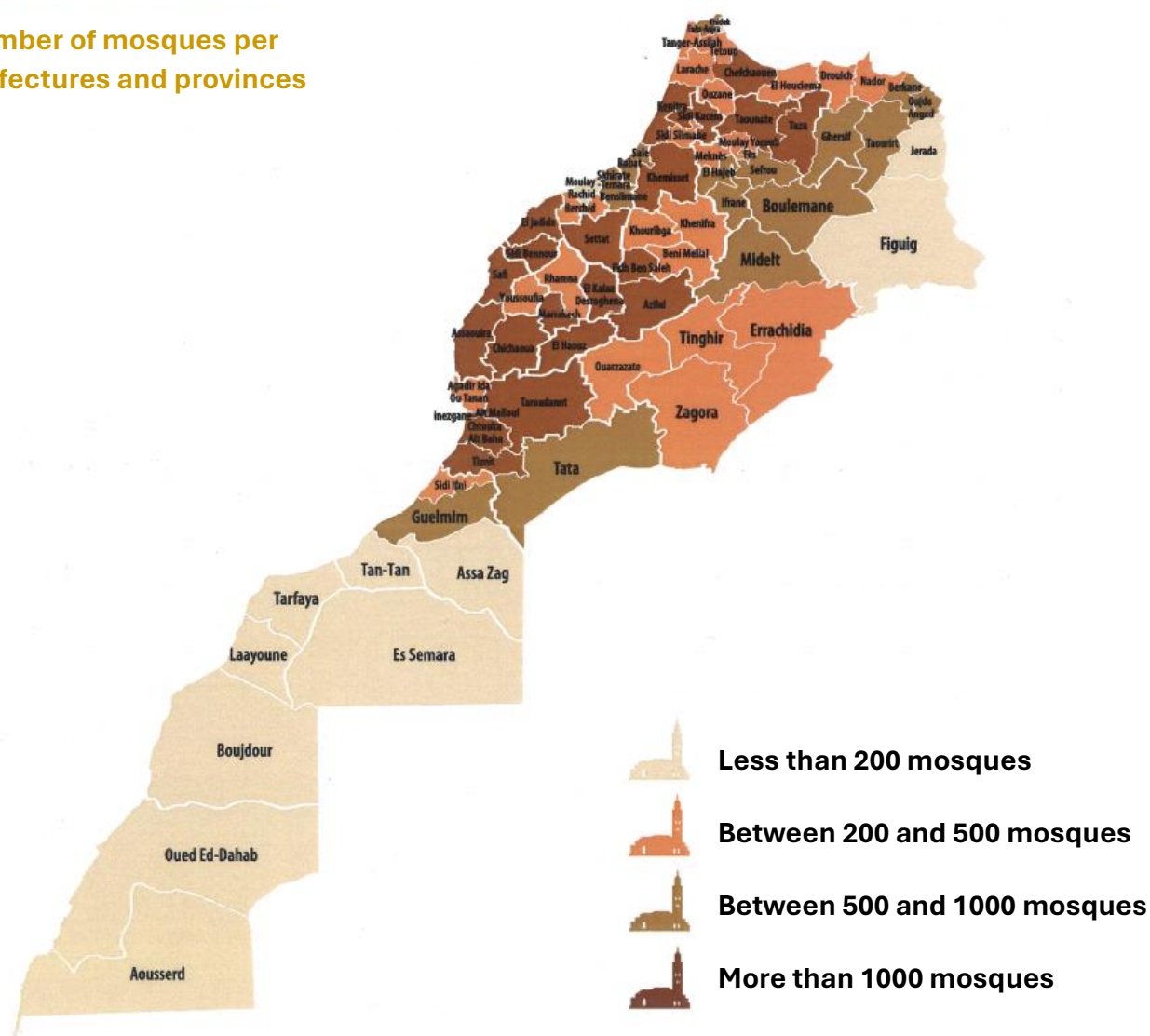


Figure 9: Number of mosques per prefecture and province¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Adapted from Royaume du Maroc - Ministère des Habous et des Affaires Islamiques (2016?, p. 12)

Number of mosques per 10.000 inhabitants of prefectures and provinces

Legend:

- Less than 6
- Between 6 and 10
- Between 11 and 20
- Between 21 and 30
- Between 31 and 57

Figure 10: Number of mosques in prefectures and provinces per 10.000 inhabitants ¹¹⁰

Given the rising trend of urbanisation and the expected growth in population, the ministry started to invest strongly in constructing new mosques and prayer halls. The ministry calculates an additional annual need for 170 new mosques to meet these demographic trends. Between 1999 and 2019, 1642 mosques were built. 267 of them were realised by the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs, and the rest by donors.¹¹¹ According to a high-ranking ministry official,

¹¹⁰ Adapted from Royaume du Maroc - Ministère des Habous et des Affaires Islamiques (2016?, p. 11). There is an apparent flaw in the numbers for Friday mosques that could not be corrected by the author. The official numbers claim a total number of 23,306 Friday mosques while the sum of Friday mosques in rural and urban areas should yield not more than 23,280 by the time of the publication of the ministry's 2017-2021 vision.

¹¹¹ J.K. (2020). This data concurs with other numbers. According to Spiegel (2015, p. 137) “Mohammed VI’s reign has also witnessed the most dramatic increase in the construction and oversight of state-run mosques in the country’s history. By way of comparison, in 1991 there were approximately 21,000 registered mosques in

thanks to the personal support of Mohammed VI, the ministry has no difficulty in convincing the Finance Ministry to allocate new funds for the renovation and construction of mosques.¹¹² Conversely, to encourage private investments in mosque construction, the king also decided to cede public real estate to donors and grant a 50% exoneration from value-added taxes for those who build a mosque.¹¹³ In this policy, the state refers to a hadith attributed to the prophet Mohammed, according to which those who build a house for Allah on earth will receive the equivalent from Allah in paradise. While this development allows the state to save money, it also presents wealthy Moroccans with opportunities for public boons, earning them state-sanctioned prestige of piety and an aura of closeness with the monarchy. For some people with obscure sources of income, like drug dealers, it even presents an opportunity for money laundering.¹¹⁴ Some parties and civil society organisations also criticise the trend, commenting that similar attention is not paid to other public infrastructure like schools, hospitals or homes for socially underprivileged people. They also argue that this policy equals an invitation to investors from the Gulf region who promote the Wahhabi ideology. For others who support this state approach, like Mustapha Benhamza, the well-known president of the local Council of Oulema in Oujda, it would equal „pure dictatorship” to prevent donors from seizing their legally enshrined right to invest in the construction of a mosque. From his perspective, having spiritual infrastructure nearby contributes to physical safety and health because it helps avoid dangerous journeys in the countryside. It also contributes to human development by providing reading courses to fight illiteracy.¹¹⁵

6.1.2.1. When mosques crumble...

The safety argument is not without a tragic background. Ever since the new mosque strategy started, a focus has been placed on the construction of new mosques, while the maintenance of historical mosque infrastructure has been neglected. On 19 February 2010, this resulted in one of the most tragic accidents in Moroccan history when the minaret of the 18th-century Bab Berdieyinne Mosque in Meknès crumbled during the prayers, causing 41 human casualties and

Morocco. That number rose to at least 35,000 by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first-century. And today, that number stands of around 50,000.” From my point of view, this dramatic divergence can best be explained by considering the details of Spiegel’s analysis. His data not only involves the construction of new mosques but also the fact of gaining control over mosques that had formerly not been registered by the state and not been under the tutelage of the Habous Ministry.

¹¹² Interview, Religious Policies, 5.

¹¹³ Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques (2008); Mohammed VI (2008) and Royaume du Maroc - Ministère de l’Economie et des Finances - Direction Générale des Impôts (2011, 80f.).

¹¹⁴ Interview, Religious Policies, 6.

¹¹⁵ Cf. for instance Bladi.net (2019); Boudarham (2017c).

leaving 76 injured.¹¹⁶ In the wake of the accident, the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs denied any responsibility. It claimed that it had been permanently renovating old religious infrastructure and closing 83 mosques all over the kingdom. The ministry instead attributed the accident to the heavy rainfalls in the days before the crash of the minaret, but had a hard time countering the civil society's accusations of corruption and mismanagement. People's critique was soon extended to the generally bad situation of Moroccan infrastructure. In fact, the minaret had already shown a dangerous inclination of about 10% before the accident. Hence, the reasons for omitting the urgent renovation or even a precautionary shutdown of the building are opaque.¹¹⁷ While corruption within the responsible local authorities may have played a role, it is very likely that, at a higher political level, authorities turned their eyes elsewhere since renovations were just not on the top of the priority and budget list. Furthermore, the centralisation coming with the transfer of responsibility for local mosques from the local communities to the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs in 2003/2004 probably entailed a loss of knowledge about the preservation details, including the static situation of some of the oldest structures. In addition to this, responsibilities are not always obvious since a lot of the old mosques are located in the old medinas where other non-religious buildings, whose stability falls into the responsibilities of e.g. the Ministry of Culture or the Ministry of Housing, might endanger the statics of the mosques standing in their neighbourhood. The scarcity of skilled workers familiar with the old construction techniques has been an additional problem nationwide. It became even more urgent with the monarchy's decision to make the preservation of the ancient urban tissue in the kingdom's medinas a priority, complying with the UNESCO World Heritage Convention (see chapter 6.2.3.2.1).

At any rate, the national and international attention to the accident risked jeopardising the religious credibility of the regime, which had always claimed to defend the peaceful and safe cultic practice for all Moroccan believers. The accident made the monarchy realise that the state could not continue as before if it wanted to continue relying on its religious legitimacy claim. In the wake of the catastrophe, the monarchy tried to gain control over the situation. Rumours were spread that deflected the responsibility from the monarchy, explaining that the king had personally donated money two years before to finance the renovation works, which had

¹¹⁶ This was the first accident of that kind, however. Already in 2006, some building adjoining the unique Ain al Kheil (also known as al Azhar) mosque in Fès collapsed, destroying parts of the mosque during prayer and causing the death of ten people. The king expressed his condolences to the victims' families, but beyond that nothing happened. Cf. MAP (2004b); World Monuments Fund (2008).

¹¹⁷ Cf. for instance Filali Ansary (2010); Jihad (2010); Koné (2010); La Presse (2010); MAP andould Khadija (2012).

eventually not been carried out by the authorities.¹¹⁸ More importantly, however, the king declared that the king would personally pay for the funerals of the dead. Furthermore, the sovereign commanded a timely reconstruction of the Bab Berdieyinne Mosque to „preserve its original architecture”.¹¹⁹ Finally, he ordered „urgent safety checks” to be carried out on all historic mosques in all the kingdom’s provinces and prefectures.¹²⁰ The Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs also commended the king for his efforts and tried to position him at the forefront of the new safety initiative. The minister Ahmed Toufiq declared, for instance, that „HM the King’s high directives in this area and the Sovereign’s great concern for places of worship, both in terms of the state of their buildings and the quality of their supervision, so that they can continue to fulfil their mission of preserving the constants and sacred values of the Ummah, have heightened awareness of the need for constant monitoring and upgrading of mosques”.¹²¹ This shows that the monarchy struggled to maintain its credibility and religious legitimacy. Only a few weeks later, in May 2010, the ministry announced a rehabilitation programme in the king’s name. This programme to secure mosques in danger of collapse was worth 2,7 billion Dirhams (200 million for technical studies and 2,5 billion for renovations).¹²²

Although the safety checks yielded an intensification of preventive closures and renovation works, it was not until another major accident that a fundamental strategy change was adopted. In May 2013, the Grand Mosque of Taroudant, which the king had visited some years before for prayer, caught fire after a short circuit inflamed the carpets in the praying hall. The fire soon spread to the whole building, destroying the historic mosque that dates back to the Saadian era in the 16th century and could welcome up to 4000 people.¹²³ While the accident did not cause

¹¹⁸ RFI (2010).

¹¹⁹ The implementation of this royal order, as carried out by the authorities, brought the kingdom into conflict with the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, which protects the world heritage of the medina in Meknès. Despite UNESCO’s recommendation to proceed with an identical reconstruction of the mosque, respecting the original building techniques, the Moroccan authorities ignored the international organisation’s recommendations. They preferred the (according to UNESCO) unjustified use of contemporary techniques to ensure the future stability of the building. Cf. UNESCO (2010) and UNESCO (2011).

¹²⁰ AFP (2010b, 2010c, 2010d); La Croix (2010); The Associated Press (2010). The policy change in the wake of the Meknès accident was also confirmed in an interview with a high-ranking official of the Habous Ministry, cf. Interview, Religious Policies, 7.

¹²¹ Aswab (2010a).

¹²² According to the minister Ahmed Toufiq, the on-site safety checks of 19.205 buildings, including 15.770 mosques and 3.435 prayer halls, revealed several shortcomings in 54% of the buildings inspected, i.e. 10.437. Based on these findings, the local committees recommended restoring, refurbishing or reinforcing the structures of 6,674 mosques (64%), carrying out detailed technical assessments of 3.374 mosques (32%) and demolishing and (partially) rebuilding 389 mosques (4%). Local inspection committees also recommended partial closure for 2% of mosques and complete closure for 6%. Cf. Aswab (2010a) and Royaume du Maroc - Ministère des Habous et des Affaires Islamiques (2016?, 42f.).

¹²³ MAP (2013d); Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques (2013e).

human casualties, the symbolic loss was considered tremendous. Once again, the regime's capacity to ensure a safe environment for Morocco's believers was called into question. In its Vision 2017-2021, the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs, therefore, decided to adapt its strategy to prevent similar events from happening in the future by revising and upgrading the kingdom's mosque infrastructure also with regard to necessary safety equipment (Royaume du Maroc - Ministère des Habous et des Affaires Islamiques 2016?, 62f.). For the new mosque strategy, the ministry allocated a budget of almost 5.3 billion Dirhams usable between 2017 and 2021 (Figure 11). Although the public funds to finance the programme were not always ensured,¹²⁴ the rehabilitation and construction of mosques were still going on, partly thanks to private investments. In the last year of the programme, in 2021, for instance, the state and sponsors completed 172 new mosques, of which only 15 were built by the government. The amount used to manage, maintain and construct mosques totalled 853 million Dirhams.¹²⁵

While a major part of the budget allocated for implementing the programme was supposed to be used for common services, a clear regional focus can be identified within the budget. While the three scarcely populated (yet underequipped) southern provinces, including Western Sahara, were not planned to receive more than 3,9% of the money for their mosque infrastructure, the urban areas around Marrakesh (10,4%) and Fes-Meknès (10,1%) received a medium amount. Surprisingly, also the provinces of Casablanca-Settat and Rabat-Salé-Kénitra received only 7,7% and 6,8%, respectively, although the ministry had also identified the greatest need in these regions. By contrast, the northern provinces, including the Rif region, were attributed 10,4% of the budget, although they were already well-equipped with mosques and praying halls.¹²⁶ This shows that, contrary to its claims, the ministry does not necessarily allocate its money according to demographic growth and urbanisation needs. Rather, political considerations might play a strong role since the Rif region, with its movements contesting and challenging the central power of the makhzen, is not yet entirely dominated by the pro-regime discourse usually spread through mosques and their spiritual personnel.¹²⁷ To support this argument, it is useful to have a look at the so-called *hirak* protests in the northern Rif region.

¹²⁴ Bladi.net (2019).

¹²⁵ Cf. P.A. (2021). Even after the end of the funding period, the programme continued. In 2022, the minister announced that another 200 new mosques were needed per year (i.e. 1000 in five years) to "respond to the demographic and urban growth of the country". Considering that by 2022, 2.216 mosques were closed, of which only 723 could be opened after renovations, he called upon donors to help the state accomplish this task since the ministry could only construct 80 new mosques. Cf. A.T. (2022).

¹²⁶ Royaume du Maroc - Ministère des Habous et des Affaires Islamiques (2016?, p. 95).

¹²⁷ As will be shown later in this book (chapter 6.5.2.1.), this trend is also mirrored in other cultural policy domains.

Planned budget allocations by region as of 2016			
0	Common services	1.638.000.000,00	30,9%
1	Tangier-Tetouan-AlHoceima	548.300.000,00	10,4%
2	Oriental	284.700.000,00	5,4%
3	Fes-Meknes	537.000.000,00	10,1%
4	Rabat-Salé-Kénitra	360.000.000,00	6,8%
5	Beni Mellal Khenifra	222.500.000,00	4,2%
6	Casablanca-Settat	409.900.000,00	7,7%
7	Marrakesh-Safi	553.000.000,00	10,4%
8	Drâa-Tafilalet	226.954.000,00	4,3%
9	Souss-Massa	311.554.000,00	5,9%
10	Guelmim-Oued Noun	80.118.000,00	1,5%
11	Laâyoune-Sakia al Hamra	77.104.000,00	1,5%
12	Dakhla-Ouad ed-Dahab	45.431.950,00	0,9%
Total		5.294.561.950,00	100%

Figure 11: Planned budget allocations by region

6.1.2.2. The mosque in centre-periphery discourse

As we will see in more detail in chapter 6.5.2.1., in November 2016 – i.e. the time of the elaboration of the new mosque strategy –, a series of massive protests started to shake the Rif heavily. Mohsen Fikri, a young fishmonger, had died after police confiscated his illegally caught fish and threw it away into a garbage press. When he tried to save his catch by climbing into the press, the machine was launched, and Mohsen Fikri was killed. Already in the evening, crowds gathered in al Hoceima to demonstrate against state arbitrariness and discrimination, followed by months of riots against the authorities, also known as Moroccan *hirak* (= movement in Arabic) (Wolf 2019). That the decision-makers in the Habous Ministry bore these riots or at least vague security aspects in mind when they developed the strategy becomes even more likely and understandable if we consider how the regime reacted to the evolution of the riots, which only reached a peak in 2017/2018 with the arrest of the popular riot-leader and Amazigh activist Nasser Zefzafi (Wolf 2019). Zefzafi was arrested after he had created the scandal during the Friday prayers of 26 May 2017 in the Mohamed V Mosque in al Hoceima. When the imam preached about the believers' obligation to avoid *fitna* (discord) associated with troublemaking, disobedience and destruction of goods, Zefzafi was convinced that the imam attacked the legitimate socio-economic demands of the *hirak*. Hearing about the sermon's content, Zefzafi rushed to the mosque and tried to attract the attention of the people about to leave the mosque after the service.¹²⁸ He openly accused the religious official of being on the payroll of the makhzen. He accused the authorities, including the Habous Ministry, of staging a special case against the *hirak* while, in all the other mosques in the region, topics relating to Ramadan were

¹²⁸ Here the official version as established by the Moroccan court diverge from Zefzafi's account of the events. The judges were convinced that Zefzafi willingly disturbed and interrupted the sermon although neither the *hirak* nor Zefzafi himself were directly mentioned by the imam: Kabbadj (2018).

on the agenda.¹²⁹ Videos of Zefzafi's angry speech were diffused via internet platforms like YouTube¹³⁰ and received wide attention. Shortly after this incident, on 29 May 2017, police forces broke into Zefzafi's home to arrest him and other leaders of the *hirak*. A few weeks later, Zefzafi was tried for assault on the free cultic exercise, for assault on state security and for inciting public disorder. In the last instance, in April 2019, Zefzafi was sentenced to 20 years in prison.¹³¹ During his first months in detention, videos and radio tapes were leaked with him testifying to have suffered torture and with his body showing clear signs of mistreatment. Later in 2019, Zefzafi symbolically broke his allegiance with the king and announced that he would abandon his Moroccan nationality. Along with Zefzafi, more than 40 other members of the *hirak* and a journalist reporting on the protests were condemned in a mass trial for similar reasons.¹³²

However, this act of repression and the judicial response were not the only reactions of the regime. On 25 January 2018, the authorities of al Hoceima province proceeded to demolish the very mosque in al Hoceima where Nasser Zefzafi had provoked a scandal by interrupting the local imam half a year before (Figure 12). As was to be expected, this demolition raised eyebrows and yielded critique from the public. Following this critique, the prefecture issued the following statement published by the MAP on 26 January 2018: „Reacting to reports in certain media about the start of demolition, reconstruction and extension work on the Mohammed V mosque in the city of Al Hoceima, and in order to clarify the matter for public opinion, the prefecture of the province of Al Hoceima, which oversees the implementation of the Al Hoceima-Manarat Al Moutawasit, and in coordination with the provincial delegation for Islamic Affairs, stresses that the demolition, reconstruction and extension of this mosque is one of the projects included in the religious section of the Al Hoceima-Manarat Al Moutawasit agreement signed on 17 October 2015”. Furthermore, the statement explained that the decision to demolish the religious building was taken „in the light of the technical expertise carried out by several approved laboratories, which concluded that the building was fragile and constituted a danger to the safety of the faithful who pray there”.¹³³

¹²⁹ Kabbadj (2018).

¹³⁰ Cf. for instance L'Économiste (2017).

¹³¹ Jeune Afrique with AFP (2019a).

¹³² Human Rights Watch (2019).

¹³³ MAP (2018a).



Figure 12: Demolition of the Mohammed V mosque in al Hoceima¹³⁴

In this widely reproduced explanation,¹³⁵ the authorities thus denied all links to the events around the *hirak* leader Zefzafi. They declared that the demolition was rather carried out for safety reasons within the framework of Hoceima's urban development programme, which had already been decided in the autumn of 2015, hence pre-dating the *hirak* events. Due to a lack of retrievable information, it was impossible to verify this explanation and to rule out that the regime intended to remove the mosque from public focus to prevent it from becoming a testimonial of the *hirak*. However, there is a MAP article from 2015 which announced that on „the religious front, the spatial development programme for the province of Al-Hoceima involves the construction of an administrative and cultural complex for the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs, of a mosque, of a traditional school as well as the reconstruction of three mosques”.¹³⁶ The article does not provide details on the name or location of the three mosques to be reconstructed. Yet, it may be possible that the Mohammed V Mosque was among them, especially if the mosque was as dilapidated as declared in the official statement. However, the

¹³⁴ LeSite info (2018).

¹³⁵ Bladi.net (2018); H24Info (2018b); LeSite info (2018); Morocco World News (2018); Rédaction H (2018).

¹³⁶ MAP (2015g).

timing of the demolition still raises question-marks: Between October 2015 and January 2018, no measures were undertaken, although the bad condition of the building had already been known and had constituted a risk to the safety of the population in al Hoceima ever since. It may thus be possible that the regime's performance claims camouflage a repressive cultural policy act committed to guiding public opinion in more desirable directions.

Through the demolition of the Mohammed V Mosque, other mosques of al Hoceima would receive more public attention from local believers. Among other religious facilities, this would also affect mosques particularly linked to the monarchy, including the al-Qods Mosque where King Mohammed VI had attended a Friday prayer in 2011,¹³⁷ or the Ghinya mosque in the Sabadia quarter, where King Mohammed VI had completed a Friday prayer in 2013 and commanded its renovation which lasted until May 2017.¹³⁸ The latter used to count among the most important mosques in al Hoceima until the construction of the new Grand Mosque called *Mosquée Mohammed VI*, which was financed on the personal expenses of King Mohammed VI for a total amount of 26 million Dirhams and which had been erected on 6.760 square meters to welcome 5.200 worshipers since its inauguration in 2008.¹³⁹ The inauguration ceremony of this mosque was a telling example of regime propaganda that legitimated the king's position as leader of the faithful. With historical, legal and spiritual arguments, the preaching imam justified the king's authority, transcending the religious realm and reaching into the political sphere. He explained the king's prerogatives, which range from formal and symbolic roles to the declaration of war, the conclusion of treaties and peace agreements, the commandment of punishments and the installation of imams, judges or muftis. He concluded that this institution was key to the Islamic state system and represented the warder of the country and warrantor of the nation's stability and unity.¹⁴⁰ While beyond the explanations given in the official statement of the prefecture, other motives behind the demolition of the Mohammed V Mosque in January 2018 remain opaque, similar patterns of cultural repression can be observed around the same time.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ MAP (2011d).

¹³⁸ MAP (2013b) and Moumeni (2021).

¹³⁹ Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques (2013a) and Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques. The construction works had begun in 2006 and originally only 14 million Dirhams had been allocated for the completion. Cf. MAP (2006).

¹⁴⁰ MAP (2008a, 2008b).

¹⁴¹ The verdicts against Zefzafi and his compagnons as well as the regime's treatment of their contestation legacy mirror a trend within Morocco's justice system where similar charges of moral and religious character are used to silence critical voices of moral and religious character are used to silence critical voices such as the prohibition of Nabil Ayyouch's movie "Much loved" or the dissolution of the civil-society association Racines (see also chapter 6.1.4.2.).

6.1.2.3. Mosques or the loudspeakers of the monarchy

The examples mentioned above clearly show that, despite the ministry's order that mosques' have to be politically neutral, the monarchy's mosque policy is far from being unpolitical. While it tries to ban critical and non-aligning views, it has no problem promoting the king's spiritual and political authority by streamlining the Friday sermons of the kingdom's imams on special occasions (Royaume du Maroc - Ministère des Habous et des Affaires Islamiques 2019a, p. 25). Allegedly, „the ministry initially connected 2.000 of the country's largest mosques under a program (reaching 80 % of the population), colloquially called 'Mosque TV,' which disseminated sermons and religious guidance produced by the ministry of Islamic affairs. Religious guidance and sermon-making were now being nationalized. The palace was watching. The goal according to the minister of Islamic affairs was 'to spread noble discourse' and 'to protect mosques from weak and deviant speeches' – and by 'deviant', he meant straying from official royal positions" (Spiegel 2015, p. 137).

By contrast, a high-ranking official at the Habous Ministry interviewed for this study claimed that a maximum of 10% of sermons were annually produced on the ministry's demand about such topics as road safety, the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccinations. Other than that, he claimed that, against the public conviction, imams were free in their Friday speech because the ministry had better things to do than prescribing the sermons every week. What mattered more for the ministry was whether the imams respected certain rules and the constants of Moroccan Islam, namely Malekite jurisprudence, Ashaarite school of thought and Sufi tradition. Content-wise, speaking about corruption in general is acceptable, but without falling into defamations. The same is true for topics such as the events in Chechenia, the relations between Morocco and Israel, and local problems. In all these matters, the imam must stay unpolitical and impartial; otherwise, he is fired or asked to step down. Furthermore, each session in a mosque must end with a prayer for the king. From the outset, imams are told that agents of the Ministry of the Interior might be present during their sermons and will duly report any infringement against the rules mentioned above. Hence, any refusal to observe the state's rules can result in firing the imam.¹⁴² One of the most prominent examples of the palace's interventions in the national imam's sermons concerns the weekly prayer of 24 Friday June 2011. In the wake of the countrywide uprisings, the Habous Ministry prepared a speech draft to be read out in all mosques exhorting the Moroccan believers to vote yes in the king's constitutional referendum taking place a few days later on 1 July 2011 (Bouasria 2013, p. 49).

¹⁴² Interview, Religious Policies, 6. This is confirmed by Boussouf (2018, p. 221).

Similarly, Katharina Nicolai (2023 (to be published), 227f.) showed that the regime also uses mosques to back up the monarchy's prestige projects, such as the green transition. According to her, Morocco's Green Mosques strategy, implemented from 2015-2021, was used as a multiplier „for generating environmental awareness among the Moroccan population”. It also served as an „insightful public diplomacy strategy” to support the monarchy's approach to the Western Sahara issue by boosting the kingdom's image as a green country and reliable partner for the West in the green transition. .

6.1.3. Producing and Controlling Religious Expertise: the Bureaucratisation of Islam

As seen in chapter 5.2.2.4., the bay'a represents a ceremonial ritual in which an oath of allegiance is reproduced to bind the ruler to his subjects. This bond is concluded to mandate the ruler with the mission to ensure law and order. From a historical perspective, this contractual agreement between the ruler and his people could be renounced by the religious experts (oulama) (Daadaoui 2011, p. 85). It is, therefore, unsurprising that the modern Moroccan state invests a lot to gain control over this specific group's potentially dissident interpretative power. Hence, oulema and spiritual guides (imams, murshidin and murshidat) play an essential role in the king's multidimensional strategy announced in 2003 and 2004. According to a high-ranking official of the Habous Ministry, it was on the personal initiative of the king that the ministry started to reform the training of imams and spiritual guides, which, before Mohammed VI, was rather informal and limited to a person's capacity to memorise and recite the entirety of the Holy Qur'an.¹⁴³ According to the king's vision, the new generation of religious staff shall implement the policy of „proximity” in the religious sector. Before the reform, the staffers did not receive any salary from the ministry. Yet, nowadays, they receive a „prime”, a bonus which is still not very high but allows them to concentrate on their spiritual mission. Religious staff, hence, no longer have to look for other sources of income, which used to make them easy prey to detrimental propaganda of radical and foreign donors, e.g. from the Middle East who wish to impose their Shiite or Wahabi doctrines. Even staffers financed by donors nowadays are chosen and controlled by the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs.¹⁴⁴ By deploying them all over the country, the regime tries to make sure that the religious discourse in the country is dominated and controlled by oulema „known and recognised for their loyalty to the constants and sacred institutions of the nation and for their ability to combine religious

¹⁴³ Interview, Religious Policies, 5.

¹⁴⁴ Interview, Religious Policies, 5.

erudition with an openness to modernity” (Royaume du Maroc - Ministère des Habous et des Affaires Islamiques 2016?, p. 23). By loyalty to constants and sacred institutions of the nation, the ministry means, first and foremost, the spiritual staffers’ allegiance to the religious authority of Mohammed VI as *amir al mouminine*. The term also comprises values and principles sanctioned by the monarchy, including the king’s discourse of the eternal bond between the monarchy and the people, which, if broken, would result in chaos and misery instead of democracy and prosperity.¹⁴⁵ This is why it was crucial that in parallel to the creation of the Mosques Directorate in the Ministry of Habous also, three other Directorates were founded that structurally underpin the strategy, namely the Directorate for Traditional Education and the combat against illiteracy in mosques, the Directorate for the Management of matters regarding religious staffers and the Directorate of legal affairs.¹⁴⁶

In 2015, the reform was supplemented by a reorganisation of the famous Qaraouiyyine University, which used to be marginalised during Hassan II’s reign and had played a minor role in Morocco’s strategy to train religious scholars under Mohammed VI. Nevertheless, the name Qaraouiyyine continues to resonate in the Islamic world as a sign of quality in religious expertise. To harness this intellectual radiance, in 2015, the regime – by way of its Habous Ministry – formally reorganised major institutions, including Dar al-Hadith al Hassaniya, the Mohammed VI Institute for Qur’anic Readings and Studies, the Mohammed VI Institute for the Formation of Imams, Murshidin, and Murshidat, the Royal Institute for Research on the History of Morocco and the Institute of Muslim Thought and Civilization of Casablanca under the tutelage of the Qaraouiyyine University. Whereas institutes like Dar al Hadith al Hassaniya had once been created as a counterweight to the potentially dissident intellectual power of Qaraouiyyine’s religious authority, „the name of one of the oldest and most prestigious institutions of higher Islamic learning” was now used „to describe new institutions” and to „legitimate counterterror efforts and reforms to the religious sphere” (Wainscott 2017, p. 205). As Wainscott (2017, 205f.) shows, this reorganisation also boosted the monarchy’s grip on the university since significant parts of its administration are either directly appointed by the king or are highly dependent on its closest ally, i.e. the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs and its super-minister Ahmed Toufiq.

¹⁴⁵ The other principles are the Malikite rite, the Ashaarite dogma, the Soufi traditions and the territorial integrity. Cf. Aourid (2021, p. 123).

¹⁴⁶ For details on the ministry’s structure, see appendix 9.7. of this book. For a succinct description of the ministry’s structure refer to Wainscott (2017, pp. 101–105).

6.1.3.1. Harnessing Religious Science Innovation and Tradition

While the ministry is the most powerful bureaucratic manifestation of the king's strategy to reform the religious sector (Wainscott 2017), the monarchy's religious think-tank *Rabita Mohammadia des Ouléma* is its intellectual motor and complements the Higher Council of Oulema (CSO) with its dynamic working modes.¹⁴⁷ It is an alliance of religious sages placed under the tutelage of the king which, although founded under Hassan II in 1960 under the name of *Ligue of Morocco's Oulama*, had been dormant after the death of its former Secretary General, the celebrated *alem* Abdellah Guennoun, in 1989 (Aourid 2021, p. 119). In 2006, with the appointment of Ahmed Abbadi as the new Secretary General, the league regained much of its influence and invests heavily in national and international outreach activities. Wainscott (2017, p. 119) even called the Rabita Mohammedia the „centerpiece of the monarchy's reforms to the religious field” and an „engine of innovation”. While the institution is listed as part of the Habous ministry,¹⁴⁸ it enjoys far-reaching autonomy and flexibility regarding its work since its Secretary General and members are directly appointed by the king (Royaume du Maroc 2006). Furthermore, the Rabita Mohammedia reports directly to the king and provides him and the ministry with new theological concepts and ideas (Wainscott 2017, pp. 120–121). Abbadi is convinced that government clerics and religious trainers have so far not been sufficiently equipped and educated to effectively counter radical discourse and prepare their students to detect and withstand the threat of extremism (Sheline 2018, p. 145). Hence, while the organisation does research in various fields, its focus is the publication of argumentation guidelines that help deconstruct radical narratives as Daech and others spread them. Some of its most influential papers published and presented on an international scale are about the appeal of extremist streams, the dreams they sell¹⁴⁹ and the ten most common grievances of Muslims that are instrumentalised as pretexts to attract new followers.¹⁵⁰ They „blame IS for failing to

¹⁴⁷ Interview, Religious Policies, 5.

¹⁴⁸ Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques (2015).

¹⁴⁹ The dreams involve the “dream of Muslim unity” under the leadership of the caliph, the “dream of dignity” that sells decency in life, the “dream of purity” in faith against the alleged false concepts about Islam, and finally the “dream of salvation” promising eternal compensation in the afterlife for conformity with Islamist ideologies and immediate damnation for others. Cf. Abbadi (2017).

¹⁵⁰ These grievances include 1) conspiracy theories about the USA and the West preventing the Muslim's dream of unity from becoming real with the complicity of Arab leaders; 2) the colonial legacy of social inequality with no reconciliation whatsoever; 3) the issue of Israel; 4) the double standards Muslims face in international affairs; 5) humiliation of Muslims in international media and the entertainment industry; 6) the continuing conflicts in Muslim countries like Palestine, Irak and Afghanistan; 7) the expansion of Iran's influence at the expense of the Sunni world; 8) the domination of ethnocentric Western values to the detriment of Islamic values; 9) the Eurocentric falsification of history and geography that ignores Muslim contributions; 10) the ongoing defamation of the Prophet and Qur'an. Cf. Abbadi (2017). While Pektas (2019, p. 194, 2021, p. 202) quoted Abbadi the same way, Aourid (2021, 130f.) cited another publication of Abbadi's where the first grievance is about conspiracy theories about the West preventing the Umma from uniting under the leadership of the caliphate. The second

consider the ‘higher objectives of Islamic legislation’ (*maqasid al-shari’a*) and accordingly end up with ‘misguided paths and evil deviations’” (Pektas 2019, p. 190). They shape Moroccan exceptionalism by showing how Islamists have deviated from the founding jurisprudential principles of *maqasid al shari’a*, namely „*istislah* (seeking the good) or *maslaha* (seeking public good), which were initially introduced by the Maliki school of jurisprudence”, i.e. the school of thought officially adopted by Morocco and promoted by the king (Pektas 2019, p. 195). Ahmed Abbadi (2017) explained that his institution tries to reinstate state authority in religious affairs by countering the dreams Islamists sell to generate bigger followership: „We have been working in the realm of dreams, competing with Morpheus, and trying to produce greater, genuine dreams.” These counter-dreams concentrate on theological issues like the question of faith, unbelief and religion but aim at redressing misused Islamic political concepts such as „sovereignty, governance, state, community, taxation, war and killing” (Pektas 2019, 194f.).

Apart from publications, Rabita Mohammedia diffuses these concepts through a vast information offer that seizes the opportunities of modern telecommunication technologies, including the internet and broadcasting. Knowing that the internet is Moroccans’ primary information tool for religious questions, Abbadi initiated a webpage that achieved relatively high traffic of around 7500 daily hits from both inside Morocco and abroad by 2009. Next to the publication of an electronic journal written by the country’s most prominent religious experts, Abbadi also offers a live dialogue programme and daily provides short lectures on the interpretation of the Qur’an on Morocco’s main TV channel and weekly holds a two-hour Q&A format on Moroccan radio where he „frankly and openly promote[s] Sufi version of Islam”, a mission which he called „Islamic beauty” (El-Said 2013, p. 184). By countering Islamist thinking through reaffirming state-sanctioned theological concepts, the Rabita Mohammedia also tries to bolster the king’s religious authority and the regime’s overall legitimacy in reforming the country in compliance with Islamic and international values.

As this work already implies, Abbadi’s institution, too, always has to strike a complicated balance between religious modernism, as pushed primarily by the monarchy and leftist/Amazigh intellectuals and orthodox traditionalism, which has its support base in state institutions and civil conservatism. One example is the case of female intellectual and women’s

grievance is explained in much more detail, talking about the alleged unnatural implantation of Israel into the region. Furthermore, the seventh grievance about Iran is replaced by anger about the sacking of resources in Muslim countries. This shows that Abbadi adapts his list according to the public he addressed, knowing that in the West, accounts that could be read as critiques against Israel would be unwelcome. In contrast, criticism against Iran would most likely be shared and bolster the partnership with countries like the USA.

rights activist Asma Lamrabet.¹⁵¹ In March 2018, Lamrabet had to resign as director of the *Centre for Research on Women in Islam* at the Rabita Mohammedia because her views did not correspond to most conservative opinions in the institution. In a collective book she had expressed her strictly personal view on the equal right to inheritance for both men and women. After Moroccan media had reported this view, her opinion caused a huge polemic discussion at the 20th session of Rabita's academic council. Hence, after 10 years in office, Lamrabet felt pressured to step down and leave the Rabita Mohammedia. However, from her perspective, she had had „no other ambition than to serve [her] country and promote this third way, that of an Islam that is appeased, contextualised and in phase with universal humanist values compatible with our cultural values.” In this struggle, she had „always advocated for a progressive, reformist and depoliticised approach to the question of women in Islam. This is what I have always done by deconstructing rigorist and patriarchal interpretations, particularly through my various books and within the Centre for Women's Studies, which has become a reference point for the reform of the religious field initiated by the country's highest political authority”. Hence from her point of view, she had always been defending the „royal approach” to the question of modernising the Moroccan state.¹⁵² By mentioning the royal approach, Lamrabet referred to the reform of Morocco's new personal status and family code, the Moudawana, which had been initiated by the king in 2003 and passed the parliament in 2004 to strengthen the position of women in Moroccan society. She regrets that the „theological power” of some influential theologians is so strong that it frightens people to challenge and debate it because it represents the country's „power. Not the political power, but the power of the sacred”, which in Morocco is „masculine and patriarchal”.¹⁵³ For Lamrabet, restructuring Morocco's religious field has been useful in countering radical thinking in general. Still, it does not go far enough in terms of meaningful societal reform. She criticises that the regime's concept of „moderate Islam” remains very fuzzy and that the king only intervenes when there is real social division. Lamrabet deplores that reforms in Morocco have recently only happened „as a matter of political urgency,” which is the reason why many responsibilities stay unclear in the political system and why many things, like the equality between men and women, „remain ambiguous” in Moroccan legislation because they were only addressed to „respond to social and political

¹⁵¹ For a more detailed profile of Asma Lamrabet and her work see Gray (2013).

¹⁵² Lamlili (2018).

¹⁵³ Interview, Religious policies, 1.

contestation and please everyone.”¹⁵⁴ Lamrabet’s case underlines that, despite legal changes initiated and carried by the king, implementation can be hindered by influential political and religious actors who, with the king’s silent approval, actively sabotage profound reforms to promote their ideology or to preserve opportunities to coopt and maintain the political balance. This dovetails with Maghraoui (2009, p. 202), who holds that reforms „in the religious field in Morocco can better be viewed as part of a process of restructuring rather than as part of a significant theological breakthrough that has the potential for the secularization of state institutions. These reforms are instead new statements and symbols of the principle that has historically turned the monarch into *amir al-mouminin* and hence the guardian of an official Islam.” It remains to be seen whether, with other social movements and debates emerging, the religious elites of the country will ultimately support new political reforms and whether the „royal approach” will this time diffuse into Moroccan society more than it has been the case so far.¹⁵⁵

6.1.3.2. Gendering the Training of Oulema

Against this backdrop, it is even more interesting that, at first glance, in other religious institutions, the role of women is discussed much more positively. For the country’s 52.000 mosques, an equivalent number of imams is required. Additionally, muezzins and other religious personnel are on the ministry’s payroll. To train its staff, in 2004, the Local Council of Oulema of Rabat started a training programme for imams (leaders of prayers) and religious guides. While the imam curriculum is reserved for men following a fatwa by the Higher Council of Oulema (Rausch 2012, p. 69), the courses for religious guides (murshidin and murshidat) are also open to women. Candidates, men and women alike, are required to have a bachelor’s degree with distinction. Male candidates also need to memorise the entire Qur’an, whereas women must only know half of the text by heart (Rausch 2012, p. 68). During their education, the trainees attend courses including religious sciences on the Qur’an, Sunna, Fikh, hagiography of the prophet, courses on Sufism and the origins of the Malikite rite, psalmody,

¹⁵⁴ Interview, Religious policies, 1. This also concerns issues such as the introduction of freedom of conviction, which is still not enshrined in the Moroccan constitution, although it speaks of other religions or a revision of the legal provisions regarding sexual liberties, such as extramarital relations or abortion in the penal code.

¹⁵⁵ In 2023/2024, a new reform of the Moudawana was launched that, once more, caused a controversial debate in Moroccan society about, among other things, the gender-specific modes of marriage between Muslims and non-Muslims, divorce and inheritance. In March 2024, a royal committee elaborated confidential recommendations to Prime Minister Aziz Akhannouch to bring them in accordance with Morocco’s international commitments and the de facto change of the kingdom’s society. In large part, the committee’s leaked recommendations followed proposals made by the CNDH in December 2023, which would further strengthen women’s rights along the lines Asma Lamrabet had already suggested years before. While conservative groups and parties denounced a violation of sharia law and voiced concerns about Morocco’s religious and cultural identity being watered down by “Western” values, women’s rights activists praised and welcomed the reforms as overdue. Cf. Fouzi (2024)

and preaching workshops. They furthermore attend courses on Islamic history, introductions into Christianity and Judaism, economy, philosophy, psychology, geography, human rights, sexual education, IT, Arabic and foreign languages (Royaume du Maroc - Ministère des Habous et des Affaires Islamiques 2019a, p. 58). After their 12-month training, the men and women are assigned to mosques all over the country (usually close to their hometowns and families), where they are often responsible for several neighbourhoods and mosques at a time (El Haitami 2012, p. 229). The women receive a monthly salary of up to 5.000 Dirham (Wainscott 2017, p. 151). As of 2018, the institute had trained a total of 3.077 persons, of whom 2.161 were male and 916 were female (Figure 13).

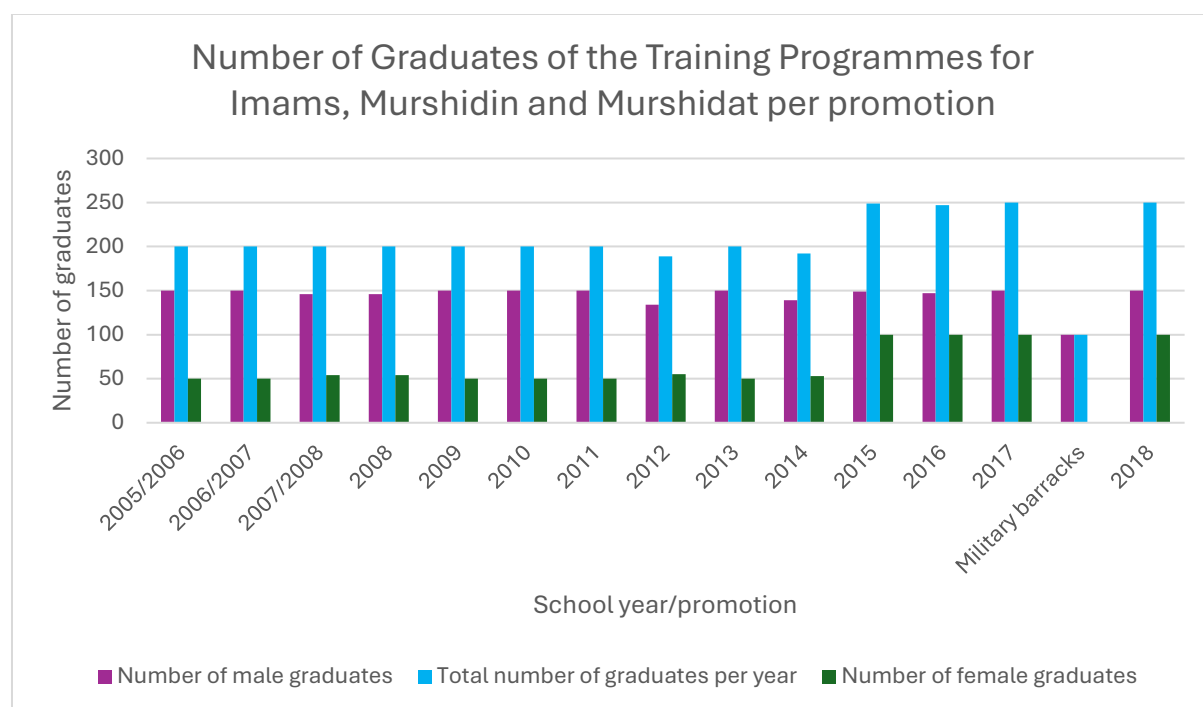


Figure 13: Number of Graduates of the Training Programme for Imams, Murshidin and Murshidat per promotion¹⁵⁶

Under King Mohammed VI, Morocco takes special pride in its religious training for women.¹⁵⁷ As pointed out by Rausch (2012, pp. 60–64), in Morocco, there are plenty of historical examples of influential Muslim women with religious authority and a high level of training in the sunna, Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Sufi practice teaching in *madersas* and owning *zaouias* from the 9th century when the famous al Qaraouiyyine University in Fès was founded by a woman named Fatima al Fihri up until today. In 2003, at the peak of the societal debate about the personal status law *Moudawana* and prompted by the Casablanca terror attacks,

¹⁵⁶ Adapted by the author from Royaume du Maroc - Ministère des Habous et des Affaires Islamiques (2019a, p. 34) The numbers used here correct a calculation mistake committed by the source in the total sums.

¹⁵⁷ For a detailed analysis of women's role in Moroccan society since independence, see Sandberg and Aqertit (2014). For a special focus on Amazigh women and their religious views, see Sadiqi (2014b) and Sadiqi (2016).

Mohammed VI invited the law professor and expert on family at Mohammed V University in Rabat, Dr Rajaa Naji el Mekkaoui, to deliver one of the Ramadan lectures at the royal palace before himself and several high-ranking military and government officials as well as foreign ambassadors.¹⁵⁸ This highly mediatised event was one of the first contemporary occasions when the state publicly promoted female religious expertise. Since that time, Ramadan lectures have regularly included female experts. In 2005, the king appointed 104 female experts to oulema councils at all levels, local (68), regional (35) and national (1) level (El Haitami 2012, 230f.; Rausch 2012, 60–64).

Dr Mekkaoui was also engaged in helping set up the *murshidat* programme. Hence, in alliance with the monarchy, women have managed to carve out yet more space in Moroccan society. Conversely, realising the detrimental impact fundamentalist and radicalised women (for instance of *Al Adl wal Ihssane*) have on Moroccan society, especially during electoral campaigns given their multiplier capacities, the king decided to have this new gendered perspective on the training of religious experts.¹⁵⁹ Hence, the state has intensively promoted the *Murshidat* training programme through wide media coverage, raising awareness for the regime's recognition and promotion of women's rights and female expertise in religious matters while ensuring their loyalty (Rausch 2012, 65f.). From the state's perspective, according to the training centre's director, Mohammed Lazaâr, „the risk of terrorism can start within family. [...] The *Murshida* is, above all, a woman, a mother, a sister. Her role within the family is very sacred. She has influence in her environment. For her influence to work in the right way, she needs to be fully equipped and well-positioned. That is why she learns the social sciences and also good skills of communicating with men and women.”¹⁶⁰ This shows that within the programme, women are perceived as natural partners of anti-radicalisation initiatives due to their role as caregivers, as mothers who are, for most Moroccans, the primary educators, and wives who often exert considerable influence upon their husbands (El Haitami 2019, p. 32; Rausch 2012, p. 69). In this strategy, women's stereotypical role is essential to give them access to spaces where imams and fathers cannot go to spread the monarchy's discourse about tolerance and moderation (Anceau 2019, 24f.). It is, hence, crucial to ensure the reverberance and acceptance of its legitimacy claims in Moroccan society. According to Habous minister

¹⁵⁸ Wainscott (2017, 157f.) argued that the king's choice of Rajaa Naji el Mekkaoui was a deliberate one since she represents a strand of Moroccan intelligentsia entirely trained by the public religious education system loyal to the monarchy (unlike many of her colleagues who have at least partly been trained by institutions such as Qaraouiyyine University). Treating the advantages of the king's reform project of the personal status code, her speech also publicly supported and bolstered the monarchy's position and provided it with intellectual legitimization.

¹⁵⁹ Interview, Religious Policies, 5.

¹⁶⁰ PBS NewsHour (2015).

Ahmed Toufiq, the murshidat must „be committed to the faith and politics of the state which the people have chosen. This choice includes the policies of the Amīr al-Mu'minīn (Commander of the Faithful), who runs deep in our veins". Furthermore, it is their „duty" to „prevent intrusion by foreign agents trying to violate" Moroccan „values and traditions" (Spiegel 2015, p. 138). Like their male counterparts, upon the completion of their training, the murshidat are bound by oath to observe the provisions of the handbook, which commits them to the foundational pillars of Moroccan Islam, i.e. the Ashaari school of thought, Maliki school of law, Sufi traditions and the Commander of the Faithful embodied by the king as a „source of spiritual tranquillity for Moroccan citizens" (Rausch 2012, p. 67). In analogy with imams and their male counterparts, murshidat are supposed to work as congenial role models within their communities and provide (mostly to other women, kids and teenagers) literacy classes and religious training, e.g. on Qur'an recitation and exegesis (El Haitami 2012, p. 229) as well as religiously informed advice on every-day-issues such as ethics, worship, relationships, sexuality, education, parental love, domestic violence etc. (Rausch 2012, 77–79). Although the women's religious formation is not as rigorous and broad as the one their male counterparts receive (Anceau 2019), the murshidat programme can be described as a fascinating blend of tradition and modernity, conservatism and feminist innovation that has the potential to speak to diverse strands of the Moroccan population. By training female spiritual guides, the state tries to make its religious discourse and securitisation approach penetrate the private sphere, which it would normally have only limited access to. Their social activities, for instance, also include visits to hospitals, orphanages, nursing homes and prisons (El Haitami 2012, p. 231), i.e. spaces where desperation and alienation with the regime's values are potentially high. According to Gray (2013, p. 145), the monarchy perceives the murshidat „as the king's eyes and ears in those parts of the country where the makhzen has no hold, areas where unemployment, poverty, crime and lawlessness are rampant, and illiteracy is high." However, some murshidat feel sceptic, frustrated and exhausted given their assignment to sometimes underprivileged neighbourhoods and areas with high crime rates. Although this feeling decreases with time, some continue to view their double mission to offer religious guidance while also reporting suspicious behaviour as potentially dangerous spy work (Anceau 2019, p. 23; Rausch 2012, 72). While the effectiveness of the training programme is hard to measure in numbers, El Haitami (2019, p. 32) is convinced that it has „significantly contributed to disseminating the state's vision of moderate mainstream Islam as a counterweight to extremist ideology."

Besides this rather recent element of Moroccan religious education, there are various other ways the Habous Ministry employs to bring the monarchy's religious messages to the people. The

first is through direct teaching, ensured by the Directorate for Traditional Education. The second is through national broadcasters, jointly managed by the government's Department for Communication and the Habous Ministry. The third one is the law enforcement and judicial sector, which works as a teacher through intimidation.

6.1.3.3 The Traditional Education System

The Moroccan state defines traditional education as follows: „Traditional educational establishments help to the immunisation of Moroccan society and the preservation of its religious constants and its historical and civilisational identity, through the implementation of a teaching system characterised by moderation, tolerance and respect for others”.¹⁶¹ The use of terms like „immunisation/immunise”, „vaccination/vaccinate” is very common in Moroccan deradicalisation discourse because unlike other terms like „prevention” they encompass the internalisation of concepts and the acquisition of resilience against a much broader and more diffuse set of potential threats (Hmimnat 2019a, p. 41). The administrative body responsible for implementing the government programmes evolving from this idea is the Directorate for Traditional Education and Literacy in Mosques within the Habous ministry. It is responsible for structuring, planning and organising the pedagogical programmes that educate religious officials and experts (*préposés religieux* and *oulema*), produce laureates memorising the Holy Qur'an and train teachers and educators in the various fields of the Sharia sciences and the arts of the Arabic language. Finally, the directorate is also entrusted with providing literacy courses in mosques, especially in underprivileged areas, a programme that has existed since 2000.¹⁶² It responded to the rise of radical thoughts since the 1980s. Under the tutelage of the Ministry of Education, a programme was launched with the new education charter launched by King Hassan II shortly before his death and published under his son. Under Art. 88, the charter contains the first provisions regarding a reform of the „Original Education” (Royaume du Maroc 1999, p. 88).

Mohammed VI continued the path of his father. He had the legal framework regulating the religious education field be further refined. On 29 January 2002, the king issued *dahir* n°1.02.09, which paved the ground for a fast reform of the sector, starting in 2006 with the elaboration of application laws. Most interestingly, with the appointment of Ahmed Toufiq as the head of the Habous Ministry, he was not the only non-religious science scholar and technocrat to take responsibility in the field. In 2004, upon creating the Directorate of

¹⁶¹ Quoted from Royaume du Maroc - Cour des comptes (2022, p. 75)

¹⁶² Interview, Religious Policies, 3.

Traditional Education, the minister asked his friend and former colleague at Rabat University, Abdelwahed Bendaoud, to join him at the ministry, knowing about his reliability and administrative capacities to head the new department. The dean of the literature faculty and professor for French language and literature eventually accepted. He became the second high cadre in the ministry not to be trained in religious sciences in the first place.

As Wainscott (2017) describes, this bureaucratisation of the Habous ministry is one of the monarchy's key instruments to gain control over the religious sector. This idea is even mirrored in internal ministry documents retrieved during my research at the ministry. For the Moroccan monarchy, „the Moroccan political system is based on the protection of religion, including the teaching of religion in its constants. The fulfilment of this mandate by the State is one of the conditions of its legitimacy, especially as any gap in this section can be filled by parties known in the history of Muslims as capricious” (Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques - Direction de l'Enseignement Traditionnel 2019, p. 2). This means that for the monarchy, inculcating the Moroccan population with the values of Islam is a matter of preserving the stability of the state system with the king at its head. One of my interlocutors at the Habous Ministry hence directly linked the king's function as *amir al mouminine* with the duty of ensuring that all oulema and imams respect the constants of Moroccan Islam, namely the Maliki school of jurisprudence, the Ashaarite school of thought and the Sufi tradition.¹⁶³ Hence, traditional education occupies an essential role in the reform project for the religious sector. Beyond enhancing the traditional school infrastructure and its equipment, the Habous Ministry was supposed to update its pedagogical tool kit, improve the academic knowledge of its teaching personnel and introduce a constant evaluation system for the schools to leave behind „indoctrination and dumping” that used to dominate the widely privatised traditional education in Morocco before the ongoing reform of the traditional education system since 2006 (Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques - Direction de l'Enseignement Traditionnel 2019, p. 3).

In general, the traditional education system relies on three sources of funding: the Ministry's general budget, the special account for literacy in mosques and the rehabilitation of traditional education, and the operating budget of the Ministry. The average operating budget from 2014 to 2021 amounted to approximately 253 million Dirhams annually. 90% of this amount was allocated to remunerate employees in traditional education and to grant scholarships to students. During the same period, investment credits were allocated, averaging 70 million Dirhams per year (Royaume du Maroc - Cour des comptes 2022, 75ff.). Essentially, two types of schools

¹⁶³ Interview, Religious Policies, 3.

ensure traditional education: On the one hand, there are Qur'anic schools (katatibs) and other centres for learning to read and recite the Holy Qur'an supervised by local councils and normally (92% of all cases) structurally attached to mosques. On the other hand, there are dedicated traditional education schools. The number of schools has reached 294, according to the statistics for 2021, while the number of katatibs totalled 12.943. The number of pupils enrolled in traditional schools reached 36.661 during the same year, and the number of pupils in katatibs reached 419.855 (Figure 14).

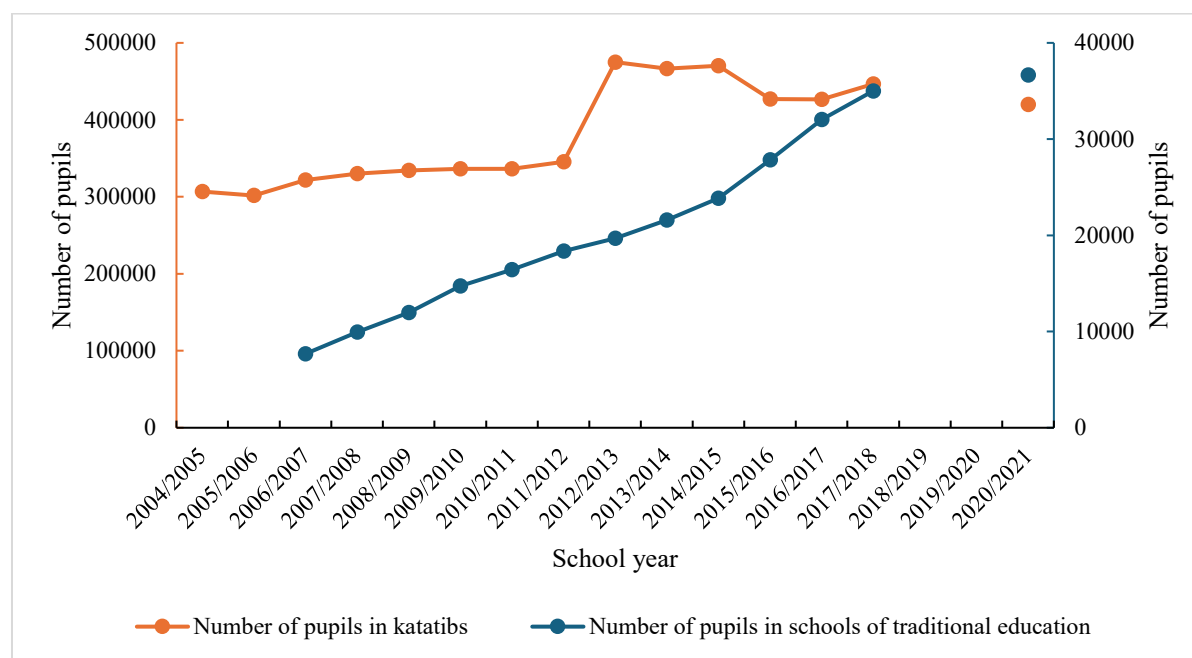


Figure 14: Pupils enrolled in Qur'anic schools (katatibs) and schools of traditional education between 2004 and 2021¹⁶⁴

Between 2006/2007 and 2017/2018, this equals a progression of 355,60%. At the same time, the number of traditional education schools rose from 114 in 2016/2007 to 286 in 2017/2018, and the number of teaching staff rose from 1.858 to 4.022. The development rate in this sector of Morocco's education system has continued to progress in the last few years, although at a somewhat slower pace. In 2018, for instance, the Ministry had built 24 new traditional schools in various regions of the kingdom, for an investment budget of around 5,512 million Dirhams (Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques - Direction de l'Enseignement Traditionnel 2019, p. 21). These schools were supposed to offer a total capacity of 5.239 teaching places and 5.050 boarding beds. The development in this sector was attributed to the importance of school support and the promising perspectives and future opportunities for graduates of the traditional education sector (Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques - Direction de

¹⁶⁴ Adapted by the author and Laura Wegner from Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques - Direction de l'Enseignement Traditionnel (2019); Royaume du Maroc - Cour des comptes (2022).

l'Enseignement Traditionnel 2019, pp. 1–2). Over the years, some traditional education schools were closed or downgraded to Qur'anic schools by the Habous Ministry because their teachers could not provide more than simple Qur'anic reading and recitation courses. In a similar vein, some khatatibs were closed because they were nothing more but kindergardens (Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques - Direction de l'Enseignement Traditionnel 2019, p. 9). An official at the Habous Ministry claimed that the quality of religious education was more important to them than its quantity. Hence, in 2006, the ministry introduced exams that entitle the graduate to pursue Islamic studies at a national institute of higher Islamic education before being assigned to a mosque. This procedure enabled the state to control the quality of traditional teaching.¹⁶⁵

One high-ranking state official heading a national institution of higher Islamic education also reported that some years ago, in over 40.000 Moroccan mosques, the Habous Ministry used to streamline lessons on Islamic thought by broadcasting them two or three times per week on a dedicated television channel „to unify the religious discourse”.¹⁶⁶ In the wake of the 2003 Casablanca bombings, upon open outcry from Moroccan parents and a joint study by an American human rights association and Moroccan citizens and experts who criticised the unequal depiction of boys and girls and violent discourses in Moroccan Islamic education curricula (Wainscott 2014, 47f.), the Moroccan government also changed the Islamic education programme contentwise to inculcate the Moroccans from an early age on with the values of moderation and tolerance. This includes the integration of lessons on human rights and other religions, as well as the deletion of lessons on Jihad.¹⁶⁷ In a second round of schoolbook revisions in 2007/2008, „sayings from the Quran and the Hadith were almost completely removed. Discussions of Islamic practices, such as prayers, were replaced by new topics, such as communication or health education. Further, less emphasis was placed on Quranic memorisation and interpretation. When Islamic subjects are discussed, the curriculum has been redirected at topics such as Islamic finance or inheritance. Thus, although the students are studying Islamic education for the same number of hours as before, they are taking in curricula increasingly reflective of citizenship values rather than one reflective of traditionally accepted Islamic education methods or goals such as the memorisation of texts” (Wainscott 2015, p. 648). Unlike classes dispensed in medersas and katatibs, this change affected all Moroccan

¹⁶⁵ Interview, Religious Policies, 3.

¹⁶⁶ Interview, Religious policies, 10.

¹⁶⁷ Interview, Religious policies, 1; Interview, Religious Policies, 3; Interview, Religious policies, 10. For a close analysis of the changes to Moroccan textbooks in the 2000s, see Wainscott (2014, 2015)

pupils since the lessons are taught in Moroccan public schools (Wainscott 2015). One change is particularly telling. A committee composed of experts appointed by the Minister of Education was charged with evaluating the revised Moroccan textbooks. Although rather disinterested in political debates, the committee initially approved the deletion of a lesson on the Commander of the Faithful as proposed by the editor because the committee deemed it unfitting with other matters in the book. Whereas it had been present before 2002, the lesson on the king's religious authority was therefore excluded between 2002 and 2008. In 2008, however, it was reintroduced upon the intervention of an oulema council that seemingly sought opportunities to legitimise the monarchy, yet another proof of the tamed nature of religious scholars in Morocco (Wainscott 2014, 49f.). To ensure the attractiveness of Morocco's religious education, families are incentivised to send their children to traditional schools. By setting out various national religious awards every year, the Habous Ministry tries to motivate pupils and students to give their best in religious practices that are linked to a certain degree of prestige in the Muslim world. The disciplines include memorisation and declamation of the Qur'an, the studies of the hadiths, calligraphy, arabesque writing and religious thinking:

- Prix Mohammed VI des écoles coraniques (katatibs coraniques) (created by royal Dahir in 2002)
- Prix Mohammed VI de mémorisation, de déclamation, de tajwid et d'exégèse du Saint Coran (created in 2005)
- Prix Mohammed VI de la calligraphie marocaine (created in 2007)
- Prix Mohammed VI d'Ahl Al-Hadith (created in 2008)
- Prix Mohammed VI de la pensée et des études islamiques
- Prix Mohammed VI d'Ahl Al-Quoraâne
- Prix Mohammed VI de l'arabesque marocaine sur papier (created in 2014)

These prizes reward Moroccan pupils and students from an early age up until the university level for high performances in religious practices. Carrying Mohammed VI's name, they promise a special royal and Sherifian aura to their winners, hence bolstering the king's spiritual authority.

Apart from the theological training for Moroccan citizens, the Traditional Education Directorate also supplements the public school system. It attributes high importance to its literacy courses. In the school year 2016/2017, the programme comprised 367 trainers, 986 pedagogical advisors, 7.470 tutors (encadrants) and 6.892 mosques where the courses were offered. The



Figure 15: King Mohammed VI pretending to provide literacy courses for illiterate women in a Moroccan mosque
Source: Habous Ministry (2017).

women (99,53%).¹⁶⁸ Outside the cities, the provincial delegations of the Habous Ministry are responsible for providing afternoon literacy courses in the mosques. With their traditional/religious training, academic knowledge in modern disciplines and a certain mastery of French and local varieties of Amazigh or Hassanic language, they are thus supposed to promote literacy and national values in the country. As Figure 15 published on the website of Habous Ministry's website shows, the literacy programme is closely associated with the king, almost as if he was personally providing the courses to fight illiteracy in his capacity as highest imam of the country.¹⁶⁹ The programme "is carried out in accordance with the enlightened vision of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, *amir al mouminine*, to combat ignorance and illiteracy by teaching reading and writing in mosques as places of worship and learning, and spaces for religious awareness, preaching and guidance."¹⁷⁰

In this regard, the provincial delegations of the Habous Ministry also work as surveillance satellites of the ministry and the General Directorate of Internal Affairs (DGAI), an intelligence and security body attached to the governors of the provinces. They help to identify the disloyal behaviour of local imams, who are then dismissed and prohibited from preaching (Aourid 2021, pp. 125–127). They contribute to enforcing the king's order forbidding imams from publicly defending political positions. In 2017, Moroccan media reported that Ahmed Toufiq's ministry had fired 200 imams for political activism and propaganda in favour of one of the major political

level 1 of the literacy courses reached 237.567 persons, of which about 50,71% lived in the rural areas of the kingdom. Among these people was a strong gender imbalance. 93,76% of the beneficiaries were women, and 6,24% were men. Another 65.132 attended level 2 of the programme, with an inversed pattern of participants from urban (77,40%) and rural areas (22,60%) and an even more pronounced predomination of

¹⁶⁸ Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques - Direction de l'Enseignement Traditionnel (2017).

¹⁶⁹ Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques - Direction de l'Enseignement Traditionnel (2017).

¹⁷⁰ le Matin (2022c)

parties backed by a religious association¹⁷¹ – most likely the PJD with the MUR. This underlines once more how much the security and the religious sector are intertwined and how much the securitisation of the state system is a priority, especially in the religious sector. Mosques, Qur’anic schools, and other establishments of traditional education must also be considered essential tools for power maintenance. The importance of the literacy programmes is also underlined by the fact that the ministry tried its best to maintain them during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whereas mosques and madersas remained closed for several months because „the safety of the body takes precedence over ritual and religion”, the ministry still made sure that over 7.000 lessons for primary school, collège, lycée and bachelor classes were recorded in sessions of 20-25 minutes each and broadcasted on television and a designated platform. To reach the students, the Habous Ministry sealed an agreement with telecommunication providers like Maroc Telecom, who allegedly donated 30.000 SIM cards (along with some tablets) for underprivileged pupils to enable homeschooling. Of these SIM cards, only 2000-2500 could not be distributed because the entitled receivers did not have a smartphone or similar devices.¹⁷²

6.1.3.4. National religious broadcasters

As we have seen above, the royally sanctioned views on the religious field are diffused into society through the (partially new) institutions for national education and research (e.g. the *Rabita Mohammadia of Moroccan Oulema*, the *Mohammed VI Institute for Qur’anic Lectures and Studies* or the *Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, Murshidin and Murshidat*, the *Mohammed VI Foundation of African Oulema*). Beyond these institutes’ teaching programmes, events, and outreach activities, national and international radio and TV broadcasting also play a crucial role.¹⁷³ The radio channel *Radio Mohammed VI du Saint Coran* dedicates up to 80% of its programme to reciting the Qur’an, Qur’anic research, prayers and predication. Since its creation in 2004, it has become the most listened radio broadcaster in the kingdom, with a market share of almost 15% (in 2023).¹⁷⁴

Conversely, the public TV channel *Assadissa* (created in 2006) is far from achieving similar success. With its name („the sixth”), the channel does not coincidentally refer to both King Mohammed VI and its sixth position among the other public channels of the SNRT (Wainscott 2017, p. 125). It successively augmented its broadcasting hours, bringing it up from 6 hours per

¹⁷¹ T.J. (2017).

¹⁷² Interview, Religious Policies, 6.

¹⁷³ According to (Abourabi, 2020, p. 203) this channel - that can be received in Europe, the Mediterranean area, and the Middle East - was created to counter extremism that damages the image of Islam.

¹⁷⁴ Chabâa (2023).

day (2006) to 10 (2008), 12 (2010), 14 (2014) and finally 24 (2022).¹⁷⁵ According to the Habous Ministry, its programme – just like its radio sibling – is dedicated to a „message of tolerance and openness, inspired by the Holy Qur’an and the Sunna of the Prophet Sidna Mohammed” to „highlight Morocco’s religious orientations, based (...) on the uniqueness of the faith and the Malekite rite”. Furthermore, it aims at countering „extremists who damage the image of Islam” by broadcasting live or pre-recorded religious events and providing on-air time for Moroccan oulema.¹⁷⁶ This means that even beyond the Friday prayers in the kingdom’s mosques, where the king’s subjects encounter his religious spokespeople (i.e. the imams and oulema) in person, the monarchy’s religious messages are also available 24/7 to the Moroccan population, exposing them to royally sanctioned views about Islam and the supreme spiritual authority of the king. Wainscott (2017, p. 126) argued that the reasons for the radio station’s popularity reside in

- a) the station’s programmatic decision to broadcast a positive image of Islam instead of focussing on countering violent extremism,
- b) the channel’s use of the Moroccan Arabic dialect Darija and in the selection of guests who mainly come from Moroccan cities and bring in a local factor,
- c) the depiction of progressive values going beyond typical Islamic issues and including topics such as arts and women’s rights,
- d) the channel’s approach to rely not on a single mufti as leading religious interpreter but on the full panoply of Morocco’s religious bureaucracy,
- e) the channel’s optimistic view on Islam which sets it apart from its Gulf competitors that portray the religion as being under permanent attack rather than emphasising every Muslim individual’s responsibility to solve his/her problems thanks to his/her faith.

This demonstrates the regime’s awareness that if the state wants to harness the advantages of media in conveying a message, this requires a modern approach that abandons traditional rigorism and adopts a consumer-friendly and appealing modern appearance.

6.1.4. Monitoring and Co-opting Disloyal Narratives

While the king, in his function as *amir al mouminine*, is the highest spiritual authority in the country, he is counselled by the Higher Council of Oulema (CSO), which he presides over. With the reform of the religious sphere, the Habous Ministry earned the right to select and appoint oulema directly to the CSO. Before, the latter used to be composed of oulema who had served on regional councils before their appointment on the national level. The new selection process leaves great discretion to the ministry since the selection criteria remain rather vaguely

¹⁷⁵ mediamarketing (2022).

¹⁷⁶ Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques (2004).

described by the king, who had commanded that the theologians must be „known and renowned for their loyalty to the constants and sacred institutions of the nation and for their capacity to combine religious erudition with openness to modernity” (Wainscott 2017, 108f.). By the same reform, the council is the sole institution in Morocco entitled to elaborate and suggest legally binding religious interpretations (fatwas) to the king, who issues them upon approval. As Wainscott (2017, p. 110) argued, this caveat strongly restrains the power of the religious experts who once used to be an important element of Morocco’s checks and balances and reduces them to tamed bureaucrats. With its local branches in all the regions and major cities, it reaches deep into Moroccan society, whose concerns and needs it is supposed to listen to and provide. Although the monarchy claims that „Moroccan Islam” is one of moderation and tolerance, the CSO and its local branches have also become vital for the monarchy to integrate more conservative and even orthodox views.¹⁷⁷

6.1.4.1. Keeping the balance between repression and co-option

In fact, according to the king’s former classmate and speaker Hassan Aourid (2021, 124 and 127), the CSO and its local branches are an important means of co-opting influential religious forces. For example, the former head of the governing party PJD’s ideological thinktank MUR (Movement for Unity and Reform), Farid al Ansari, was appointed president of the Oulema Council in the Meknès-Tafilalet region (until he died in 2009). Similarly, the conservative Mustapha Benhamza was made president of the Oulema Council in Oujda. In April 2004, the preacher (khatib) of the kingdom’s biggest mosque (the Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca), Redouane Benchekroun, became president of the Oulema Council in Casablanca. Only weeks later, in his publicly broadcasted Friday speech of 25 June 2004, this conservative imam fustigated light clothing like bathing suits for women and gender-mixed workplaces as *haram*. Although this sermon only intervened a few months after the royally sponsored reform of the Moudawana, the personal status code, which had considerably promoted the rights of women in Moroccan society, and although public pressure was high to replace Benchekroun, the imam remained in office. In 2005, he was even honoured by the king’s attendance at his sermon in the Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca. There, he commended the king for his political guidance and spiritual leadership as *amir al mouminine*, thereby affirming and bolstering the king’s legitimacy in front of his audience.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ State actors and modernist civil society actors would call these views “intégristes” in analogy to French pejorative terminology for Christian traditionalists.

¹⁷⁸ Le Matin.ma (2005).

It was not until 2010 that he was dismissed by the Habous Ministry when he campaigned heavily against Mawazine, the king's favourite music festival in Rabat. This festival used to enjoy public funding and royal patronage as a beacon of the monarchy's course of modernity and openness to Western lifestyles. It has featured Moroccan bands and internationally renowned artists like Whitney Houston, Kylie Minogue, Alicia Keys, Stevie Wonder, and, in its 2010 edition, the singer Elton John. With its Western-style vibes, the festival had long been a bone of contention between modernists and conservative preachers. In 2010, Benchekroun attracted the royal wrath by calling upon the Moroccan people to stay away from „criminal and misguided homosexuals” like Elton John who, „at a time when Morocco is experiencing unprecedented development at all levels under the leadership of the Commander of the Faithful” appear in the kingdom like a „vicious plant” that is „inciting debauchery”.¹⁷⁹ However, shortly after, the government had to revise its decision and reinstate Benchekroun when protests against the sacking became too intense, and the pressure from the conservative camp got too high. Later, Benchekroun was even given a seat in the CSO, which is presided over by the king himself.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, in 2012, public pressure from the conservative camp made the festival's organisers refrain from further public sponsorship, including through *Royal Air Maroc*, the *Office chérifien des phosphates* or the *Caisse de dépôt et de gestion*.¹⁸¹ The case of Benchekroun shows that the monarchy's relationship with these conservative currents is not always an easy one, even less one of love and affection, but one of a pragmatic symbiosis. It is a relationship marked by episodes of repression and episodes of concessions and mutual curry-favouring. It mirrors the constant struggle for a balance between the modernists and the conservatives. While the CSO has become an important instrument of co-option, the range of manoeuvring and the significance of this supreme consultative religious institution appears very limited, almost symbolic.

6.1.4.2. Who is right? Struggle over orthodoxy and fatwa in a divided society

This is illustrated by two incidents that raise questions about the CSO's formally exclusive capacity to issue fatwas on demand.¹⁸² One of the most prominent incidents arrived on 8 October 2007 when the king requested the CSO to draft a *fatwa* that would define the areas

¹⁷⁹ Aswab (2010b).

¹⁸⁰ Jaabouk (2015).

¹⁸¹ Yabiladi (2012). Cf. also Bayahya (2015, pp. 194–201). In a similar case, the power struggles between the conservative camp and the royally supported modernists partially pushed the organisers of the Festival of Casablanca to yield to the opposition of the PJD. They integrated modern Islamic music into the festival programme to obtain an abstention (instead of a “no”) by the PJD in the final vote in the municipal council and preserve the appearance of democratic legitimation. Cf. Chahir (2010).

¹⁸² For an overview of some prominent cases of fatwas issued by the CSO, see Boussouf (2018, pp. 248–255).

where, in his capacity as Commander of the Faithful, he would be entitled to act in the public interest (*maslaha*). Unsurprisingly, the CSO's *fatwa* effectively declared the king a supreme mufti by explaining that the king was allowed to rule within all areas where the Qur'an did not provide explicit judgments and where jurists disagreed (Bouasria 2013, p. 43). While this first incident demonstrates the degree to which the monarchy considers the Moroccan oulema as its mouthpiece, the second incident illustrates how their margin of manoeuvre is actively curtailed. In 2013, the CSO sparked a scandal when one of its recent fatwas became public. In this fatwa issued (yet not published) in 2009 or 2012, the oulema declared that, according to Islamic law, Muslims who rejected their faith „should be condemned to death”.¹⁸³ This edict even contradicted Moroccan law: Article 220 of the penal states that „anyone attempting to undermine the faith of a Muslim or convert him to another religion” is punishable by six and up to three years in prison. While the Interministerial Delegation for Human Rights and the Habous Ministry both declared that they had not called upon the CSO to formulate such a fatwa, the text set up national and international observers alike. Ahmed Toufiq relativised the CSO's ruling in the following weeks by stating that the council had issued an „opinion and not a fatwa” about apostasy. On behalf of the king, the ministry also prepared a Friday sermon to be diffused in all Moroccan mosques, stating that there shall be no force in the Islamic religion. Furthermore, a few weeks later, the CSO produced another fatwa. This time, the ruling read much more moderately and avoided any reference to the death penalty.¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, Mahjoub El Hiba, a senior human rights official in the government, also declared that “What was published in the document attributed to the Higher Council of Oulema does not concern our government and commits us to nothing.”¹⁸⁵ The Interministerial Delegation for Human Rights confirmed that, according to the Habous Ministry, the opinion of the council was „advisory” and not „binding”, because the king had not endorsed it.¹⁸⁶ The claim that the fatwa was not binding for the government was surprising given that CSO is the only Moroccan institution legally entitled to issue fatwas. The denial contradicts a statement by one of my interlocutors, himself a high-ranking Habous Ministry official, who claimed that the king had personally

¹⁸³ Morocco World News (2013) and Royaume du Maroc - Ministère de la Justice et des Libertés - Direction de Législation (2018).

¹⁸⁴ Interview, Religious Policies, 4.

¹⁸⁵ Morocco World News (2013).

¹⁸⁶ The scandal even made the headlines in the US International Religious Freedom Report for 2013. It caused the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada to publish a report with the UNHCR on the “The situation of individuals who abjure Islam (who apostatize), including their treatment by society and by the authorities; the repercussions of a fatwa of the High Council of Ulemas condemning apostates to death, including the reaction of the government (April 2013-August 2014).” Cf. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (2014) and United States Department of State - Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (2013).

asked the CSO to issue a fatwa on the matter. Yet, allegedly, he had been totally unhappy with the initial text which explains the government's tergiversations.¹⁸⁷ Since there is no point in fatwas if they are not binding, the ministry's claim shows clear emancipation from religious institutions and strongly emphasises the sole religious authority of the king. As if to demonstrate this, still in 2013, the case of a young Moroccan in Taounate made the headlines who had converted to Christianity seven years before and was now arrested and sentenced based on article 220 of the penal code for proselytism.¹⁸⁸ The case further fuelled the debate in Morocco.¹⁸⁹ By the end of the year, the former political detainee, human rights activist and former PAM official Salah el Ouadi – a former friend of the king's advisor Fouad Ali el Himma – founded a new NGO advocating for the abrogation of article 220 of the penal code.¹⁹⁰ In this heated political atmosphere, only months year later, in 2014, the Appellate Court of Fès revised the 30-month prison verdict of the young Moroccan Christian and set him free.¹⁹¹ Again, a few years later, in 2017, the CSO formally backtracked by contextualising the Qur'anic death edict it had earlier referred to. It declared that given the danger an apostate would have posed to the young Islamic nation in the days of the Prophet, the „most accurate understanding, and the most consistent with the Islamic legislation and the practical way of the Prophet, peace be upon him, is that the killing of the apostate is meant for the traitor of the group, the one disclosing secrets, [...] the equivalent of treason in international law.”¹⁹² Therefore, no religious text would be needed for a crime already dealt with in secular criminal codes in all countries worldwide.¹⁹³

This incident shows how much the regime struggles with its conservative legacy and how much leeway Moroccan courts enjoy when they know the monarch behind them. Furthermore, the case demonstrates that the monarchy strives for acceptance and recognition in both camps – the conservative and modernist ones. At the same time, both views are only tolerated as long as they unconditionally support the monarchy and recognise the king's utmost religious authority as *amir al mousline*. This complicated constellation and fragile balance between diverging religious factions can lead to curious situations where the king's role as moderator becomes particularly visible.

¹⁸⁷ Interview, Religious Policies, 4.

¹⁸⁸ Jaabouk (2013a).

¹⁸⁹ Saghi (2014).

¹⁹⁰ Jaabouk (2014a).

¹⁹¹ Sghir-Janjar (2017) and Saghi (2014).

¹⁹² Jabrane (2017).

¹⁹³ Laroui (2017).

In August 2019, a 28-year-old woman, Hajar Raissouni, was arrested after she had left a gynaecologist's clinic in Rabat. Along with her partner and her doctor, Raissouni was sued for abortion, a crime persecuted by the Moroccan penal code. She was forced to undergo a medical examination against her will and punished with one year in prison. Since no concrete evidence for an abortion could be brought to light – her doctor and Raissouni claimed she had been treated for internal bleeding – Raissouni, journalists, members of the moderate Islamist party PJD and women's rights activists all over the country and beyond accused the Moroccan authorities of making up a case against the young woman to intimidate and silence her. This was plausible since Raissouni is a renowned reporter for the critical Arabophone newspaper *Akhbar al-Yaoum* and a niece of Ahmed Raissouni, one of the most prominent conservative intellectuals in the country and the Arab world who has heavily criticised the Moroccan institutions in the past. Also, his niece had been occupying the Moroccan authorities with her favourable positions regarding the Islamist currents in the country as well as the democratic and social rights movement *hirak* in the Rif region. In reaction to Raissouni's conviction for illegal abortion, the CNDH issued a statement on the need to reform the penal code with regard to abortion. Already in 2015, King Mohammed VI had called for a reform of the respective laws for pregnancy cases that „resulted from incest or rape” or that risk „serious malformations and incurable diseases of the foetus”.¹⁹⁴ The royal commission charged with formulating a draft was composed of representatives from the CNDH, the Habous Ministry, and the Ministry of Justice. It presented its proposal to the parliament a few months later. As of mid-2024, however, the law has not been dealt with.¹⁹⁵ Given the international critical headlines and the intense national debate about the right to abortion ignited by the Raissouni case, it was not surprising that King Mohammed VI granted Raissouni a royal pardon, releasing her with her partner and doctor after only a few weeks in prison in October 2019. However, the charges and the sentence against Raissouni, her fiancé and her doctor have not been dropped.¹⁹⁶ The Moroccan Justice Ministry explained King Mohammed VI's pardon as „an act of compassion and mercy”, adding that Raissouni and her fiancé wanted to establish a family legally.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Chafcouloff and AFP (2015). For now, abortions are only legal if the pregnancy constitutes an immediate risk to the pregnant person. According to NGO numbers, up to 600-800 clandestine abortions take place in Morocco every day, many of them under disastrous conditions.

¹⁹⁵ Ironically, ever since 2016, it has been Hajar Raissouni's uncle Ahmed Raissouni, former head and co-founder of the PJD's ideological arm MUR (Movement of Unity and Reform), who had urged the PJD's relatively open leadership under Prime Minister el Othmani not to table the reform. Cf. also Kozłowski (2022b).

¹⁹⁶ Crétois (2019), Amnesty International (2019a) and Jeune Afrique with AFP (2019b).

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Rushworth (2019). The political and societal debate was refreshed in September 2022 when a 15-year-old girl died miserably. She had undergone an unsafe, clandestine and non-consentaneous abortion after she had been abused and raped. Cf. Kozłowski (2022b) and Saih (2022).

While the king cannot afford to unilaterally liberalise established conservative laws due to his position as Commander of the Faithful, cases like this can help enhance his legitimacy. Since he has not revoked the charges but only suspended the sentence, he can appear to be both a defender of the established moral and legal system and a generous sponsor of societal change. At the same time, the case was a useful warning to all critical voices in the country that the regime will always find charges on which uneasy individuals could be silenced. In such situations, only loyalty to the monarchy can save the opposition from being arrested, and only the king's generosity ensures justice. If the constants of the monarchy, i.e. the royal authority, are perceived to be at stake, however, the regime shows no mercy. For instance, the civil society organisation Racines was shut down in December 2018 after years of critical activities promoting democratic culture through cultural projects. Yet, one time in August 2018, Racines hosted « *1 dîner 2 cons* », a round table discussion and broadcasted it via *YouTube*. The stream featured critique against Moroccan officials (including the king himself) for committing or not preventing corruption within the state administration in the context of national development and the response to the demands of the *hirak*. The authorities perceived this event to have crossed a red line. The association was dissolved for disrespect of Morocco's association statute involving assault on the Islamic religion, ostentatious alcohol consumption, and defamation of officials.¹⁹⁸ Adel Essaadani, former coordinator of the Racines association, criticised the dissolution and the lack of separation of powers. He also demonstrated the absurdity of the act by highlighting the hypocrisy of the monarchy: „When we analyse the royal speeches, we find there this plea for accountability and the enhancement of public service; but when we assess it, administrations try to silence us, against the royal will.”¹⁹⁹ This vision is only partly confirmed by public actors like national library director, Driss Khrouz. In an interview with the author, Khrouz claimed that he used to host events organised by Racines to promote civic rights. Yet, he stated that at some point, Racines „messed up” with their activities and that the consequential dissolution of the association was no matter of censorship, which was proven by the fact that the fruits of their work were still available online.²⁰⁰ This explanation would seem plausible if there had not been similar incidents before and after Racines' dissolution which rather point towards a systematic cultural censorship on moral/religious grounds. For instance, a comparable case had already happened in 2015 when film director Nabil Ayyouch's movie

¹⁹⁸ The judgement was confirmed in second instance in April 2019. The author disposes of the trial documents and confirms the critique advanced by Racines and Moroccan as well as international media, Amnesty international and Human Rights Watch: Zine (2019a) and Amnesty International (2019b); with AFP (2019); Saadani (2019).

¹⁹⁹ Zine (2019b).

²⁰⁰ Interview, National Library, 1.

„Much loved” was prohibited from display because the authorities perceived the setting within the prostitution milieu in Morocco as „serious outrage to moral values and to Moroccan women and a flagrant attack on the image of Morocco”.²⁰¹

6.1.5. Royal Grace and Co-option through Penitentiary Activities

In Morocco, the war on terror is commonly perceived as essential for maintaining public order and the king’s religious authority. Yet, the rather recent public commitment against the Salafi and radical community comes at the risk of bolstering the contestation potential among this group of thinking, which had long been an ally to the regime in its struggle against the socialist and/or the Sufi sheikhs (see chapter 6.1.1.). Against the backdrop of the king’s national reconciliation initiative in the early 2000s, it is therefore hardly surprising that between 2004 and 2007, dozens of convicted Islamists were released from prison or enjoyed reductions in their punishments and improvements in their detention conditions. Among those benefitting from improvements and sentence reduction were Abdelwahab Rafiki (better known as Abou Hafs), Mohamed Fizazi and Omar Haddouchi, all of them – despite their ideological differences – convicted for having ideologically inspired the kamikaze attacks of 2003 by their takfirist speeches. This shows that prisons are located right at the heart of the monarchy’s legitimization attempts using the interplay between Morocco’s religious and security policy. In fact, religious policies extend right into Morocco’s prisons.²⁰²

El-Said (2013, 179f.) point out that since Ahmed Abbadi was appointed Secretary General of the Rabita Mohammedia in 2006, he has been working to conduct a dialogue with radicals outside the prisons through the institute’s internet programme. Nevertheless, the state initially failed to build upon its experiences from the transitional justice process of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER), launched by the king in 2004. It rather actively curtailed initiatives from several detainees in the Salé prison who wanted to form intellectual circles in 2007 where religious questions could be discussed. Instead, the authorities insisted that the detainees send a letter to the king first asking for his royal pardon. Furthermore, detainees were required to prepare a text stating their responsibilities in the 2003 terror attacks, recanting all radical ideas and declaring their full support for the monarchy. While by November 2008, the Minister of Justice still claimed he knew nothing about the detainees’ initiative, the general director of the CSO declared that his council was ready to start a dialogue with the convicted Islamists if they accepted that „the detainees must uphold the basic Moroccan foundations first,

²⁰¹ MAP (2015d, 2015e). Ironically, the prohibition yielded a public huge run on the film which used to be available on YouTube in Morocco:

²⁰² Interview, Religious Policies, 6.

including the *ashar'iyah* precept, Maliki school, Sunni-Sufism, and the system of rule based on *al bay'a* (loyalty) to the regime" (El-Said 2013, 179f.). Although some detainees accepted the conditions, Moroccan authorities could not agree on any comprehensive deradicalisation programme. It was only years later, after another round of bloody terror attacks in Marrakesh in 2011, that the government pulled itself together.

Since 2015, the Moroccan authorities claim to have revised their approach to the penitentiary system. A more comprehensive programme for the rehabilitation of prisoners, especially those convicted of terrorism, has been in place since 2017 and involves the *General Delegation for Prison Administration and Reintegration* (DGAPR), the *Rabita Mohammedia League for Religious Scholars* (Rabita) and the *National Council for Human Rights* (CNDH) (Hmimnat 2019a, p. 41). It is called *Moussalaha* (reconciliation) and deliberately alludes to the royal initiative for national reconciliation that took place in the 2000s under the auspices of the IER. According to Mohamed Salah Tamek, high delegate of the DGAPR, „Morocco has reconciled with itself through the IER, which involved activists from left-wing movements after they were imprisoned for their ideas, even if they did not carry weapons. Now it is the detainees in terrorism cases who are asking for reconciliation.” He added that „a reconciliation programme includes reconciliation with oneself, with the religious text and with others”.²⁰³ *Moussalaha* is thus based on the same rationale as the IER and inscribes itself in the king's reform dynamics. Since prisoners used to become even more radical in prison, they are now given a chance to reconcile with themselves, society, their religion and the state. It is made clear that sincere repentance and participation in the programme can be a way to petition for a royal pardon successfully: „The Ministry of Justice, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Human Rights Department have all contributed to this programme, which was originally a courageous initiative by High Delegate Mohamed Salah Tamek”, explained Moulay Driss Aguelmam, Director of Prisoner Security and Prisons at the DGAPR. According to Aguelmam, not all those convicted of terrorism – around a thousand in Morocco – have access to it. Rather, the beneficiaries of the voluntary programme are hand-picked based on the applicants' behaviour in prison and a written request showing the applicant's sincere readiness to repent. As of 2019, 30% of *Moussalaha* applicants were rejected. Only about 40 to 50 inmates were admitted per edition of the programme, eventually resulting in the release of almost half of the beneficiaries. According to Aguelmam, the DGPAR had no intention of lowering this threshold to maintain the programme's quality. On the contrary, the 13th edition of the programme only had 22

²⁰³ Saih (2021).

participants. As of February 2024, 322 inmates have benefitted from the programme in 14 editions since 2017.²⁰⁴ In April 2022, the number of participants had already been at 222, of which 156 had ultimately been released (116 were granted a royal pardon), and another 15 enjoyed a reduction of their sentence, bringing the share of beneficiaries of royal grace up to 63,27%.²⁰⁵

In November 2023, the regime decided to expand on the programme's experience by institutionalising its mechanisms to ensure sustainability. On 3 November, the secretary general of the Rabita Mohammedia, Ahmed Abbadi, the high delegate of the DGAPR, Mohamed Salah Tamek, the Minister Delegate in charge of the Budget, Fouzi Lekjaa, the President of the CNDH, Amina Bouayach, and the coordinator of the Mohammed VI Foundation for the Reintegration of Inmates, Abdelouahed Jamali Idrissi signed an agreement for the creation of the Moussalaha Centre. Speaking on the occasion, Abbadi said that the creation of this centre followed the high directives of King Mohammed VI to capitalise „on the experience and best practices accumulated under the Moussalaha programme for the rehabilitation and reintegration of convicts in cases of extremism and terrorism, which has played an important and effective role in the fight against extremism among inmates.”²⁰⁶ The direct reference to the king's will shows that, from the regime's perspective, the Moussalaha programme has so far been a success story. The analysis of national and international media reports yields the impression that the same showcase-ex-convicts are repeatedly sent to the interviews, e.g., Abdellah El Youssoufi or Mohammed Damir. The latter was allegedly part of the circle of those involved in the 2003 attacks in Casablanca and had been sentenced to death – a sentence later converted into 30 years of prison. His actual involvement is unclear, though, and he may have been just a by-catch of the police. During his imprisonment, Damir obtained three degrees. After completing the Moussalaha programme and his release, he started a PhD at Hassan II University in Casablanca. He also worked as a temporary researcher for the Rabita Mohammedia, i.e. the very institute that accompanied him during his rehabilitation.²⁰⁷ In any case, the few ex-convicts and former participants of Moussalaha who (are allowed to) speak to the media all talk about the hollowness of their earlier religious preoccupations. They contrast their former reasoning with the depth of the readings and reflections stimulated by the Moussalaha programme, which now enable them to contextualise and interpret religious texts. As a result, they claim to have found

²⁰⁴ Rahhou (2024b).

²⁰⁵ Maroc Diplomatique with MAP (2022) and le Matin (2022d). As of 2021, allegedly only one case of recidivism had been registered, namely a person with psychological problems. Cf. Saih (2021).

²⁰⁶ MAP (2023e).

²⁰⁷ F. Iraqi (2019d); Fatwa Islah and Khabbachi (2022).

the path to peace and tolerance. In this regard, the conversations with Ahmed Abbadi of the Rabita Mohammedia and Driss Yazami of the CNDH were eye-opening. They allegedly helped them to reconcile with themselves and their faith. In fact, the programme comprises about 69 collective sessions of over 207 hours provided over about ten weeks.²⁰⁸ Moussalaha provides workshops in various areas: religious training, legal training (so that Jihadists become aware of and accept the judgements issued against them), human rights training and socio-economic training (to give Jihadists the tools to be self-sufficient when they leave prison). The programme also has a psychological support aspect, which is only open to psychologists accredited by the Ministry of Health who have completed at least 2.400 hours of clinical training in a psychiatric hospital. As an element of their workshops, the convicts are held to produce the best possible radical discourse before deconstructing it. Furthermore, sessions are devoted to presenting audio-visual recordings of testimonies from the families of victims of terrorism to make convicted prisoners aware of the extent of the damage caused by violent extremism and their effect on the stability and security of society (Association nationale des Auditeurs jeunes de l'Institut des Hautes Etudes de Défense nationale 2018, p. 6).

But there is also massive criticism against the programme. For instance, there are media reports about convicts of terrorism who would have been forced to participate in the programme – an allegation categorically denied by the directory of the prison in question in Kenitra.²⁰⁹ While the accusation could not be verified, other studies blame the programme for not living up to its promises. The Carnegie Endowment revealed that only convicts were selected to participate in Moussalaha who were already on the path to repentance and disillusionment with Jihadi ideologies. Furthermore, the programme does not always care for ex-convicts after their release. It is also said that the regime publicly promotes prominent examples such as former extremist Abu Hafs and instrumentalises them to emphasise Morocco's capabilities in the field of deradicalisation internationally (Masbah & Ahmadoun 2019). Already in 2014 – i.e. three years before the first edition of the programme – Mohammed Salah Tamek, high delegate of the DGAPR, had spoken at the Washington Institute and presented the Moroccan experience and expertise in bringing radical Islamists back to reason.²¹⁰ Yet, ever since the new programme started, the regime has intensively exploited it as a soft power resource. The project is presented as being unique worldwide and directly linked to the king's religious strategy to reform the penitentiary system, which could serve as a model for other countries such as France or the

²⁰⁸ F. Iraqi (2019d).

²⁰⁹ H24Info with MAP (2018b).

²¹⁰ Tamek (2014).

USA.²¹¹ For instance, one former Jihadi interviewed by researchers of Carnegie Endowment cast doubt on the effectiveness of the programme by cynically asking, „Reconciliation between whom and whom?”. Another ex-convict and participant of Moussalaha assured that the programme actually aims at making the convicts renounce „violence, accepting pluralistic interpretations of religious texts, and recognizing the legitimacy of the regime (the monarchy)” (Masbah & Ahmadoun 2019). This clearly shows that (at least some of) the programme’s participants experience rehabilitation as a way to make them accept the king’s authority. Furthermore, Hmimnat (2019a) criticises the programme’s concept of reconciliation as problematic because it tries to enforce the complex task of self-reconciliation in a setting of „institutional constraint or forced conditions”. Also, the aspect of reconciliation with the sacred text is controversial because the inmates do not have a problem with the text itself but defend an interpretation of the text that is fundamentally different from the interpretation provided by the official religious establishment. Finally, the aspect of reconciliation with society is diffuse since it remains unclear which parts of society are meant. Obviously, not all relevant strands of society are represented in the process. Most notably, families of victims of terrorist acts, former radicals like Abu Hafs and other prominent former Salafi Jihadists, who made a credible case of self-deradicalisation before their release from prison, have been completely marginalised (Hmimnat 2019a, p. 43). The programme has thus become a tool of the monarchy to reduce contestation and bolster the legitimacy of the monarchy among one of the most critical (and potentially dangerous) social groups in the kingdom, i.e. the radical and Jihadi Islamists. Given the small share of convicts having participated and still participating in the programme, it is questionable whether Moussalaha will ever have a measurable impact on the radical and Jihadi Islamist community. Former inmates even claim that their change of ideology is considered treason by some of their former comrades in prison.²¹²

At the same time, the programme’s small size may ultimately channel the ambitions of radical Islamist prisoners serving long sentences. The limited number of places within the programme may fuel the competition among the convicts to be selected as one of the lucky guys to get a second chance: This vague yet still real promise of a fresh start and a better future is always associated with the king and the distant perspective of royal pardon.²¹³ All a convicted extremist needs to do to be released is to credibly commit to the rules of the monarchy and publicly confess his repentance and recognition of the king’s spiritual and worldly authority. As we have

²¹¹ AFP (2021); Saih (2021).

²¹² Fatwa Islah and Khabbachi (2022).

²¹³ Cf. for instance AFP (2021).

seen above, El Maarouf and Belghazi (2021, p. 3) argued that the royal pardon is „a mode of gifting” that „encapsulates the authoritative position of the monarch operating within, and enabled by the neopatrimonial political arrangement. Royal amnesties are hence part of ‘the contrasting ways rulers may establish legitimate authority by securing consent (compliance) from their subjects’”. According to El Maarouf and Belghazi (2021), a royal pardon is more than a gift; it is part of the reservoir of almost mythical visual metaphors symbolising the relation of mutual allegiance between the king and his subjects, which builds upon a patrimonial concept of exchange and reciprocity. The gesture draws upon the spiritual authority of the king as *amir al mouminine* and shares the prophetic baraka yielded by the sovereign thanks to his sherifian lineage. His pardon, therefore, „amounts almost to divine forgiveness” (El Maarouf & Belghazi 2021, p. 13). While this represents a chance for the monarchy to make the detainees return to the royal path, „linking participation in the program with the privilege of receiving immediate royal pardon can hinder the principal concept framing this program and question its credibility” (Hmimnat 2019a, p. 42). In fact, in an interview, a high-ranking official of the Habous Ministry admitted that some of the released radicals have not been honest about their repentance, which is why the intelligence services needed to stay vigilant.²¹⁴

6.1.6. Cracks on the Surface and the Need for non-religious sources of legitimacy

Daadaoui (2011, p. 94) argued that rituals of power are still very virulent in Morocco. They can help explain the „stability of monarchical authoritarianism in Morocco”. Based on a representative survey conducted among 287 respondents in the greater Marrakesh region between December 2006 and January 2007, he holds that most people are dissatisfied with the government’s performance (75,6% responded that it was very bad or bad). They overwhelmingly distrust state institutions like local authorities (71,8%), police (82,1%), parties (83,6%), army (39%) and the courts (80,5%). By contrast, the population’s support for the king appears strong: 65,5% of the respondents trust or somewhat trust their king, against 26,8% who expressed their (great) distrust. Also, the belief in the religious and traditional righteousness of his power symbols – such as the king’s boon (baraka), his descent from the Prophet Mohammed (sherifian lineage), and his position as Commander of the Faithful – is highly significant (each above 72%). Furthermore, performing the oath of allegiance (bay’a) is perceived as important due to religious (33%) or traditional (21,6%) reasons or because it constitutes a special relationship between the king and the people (30,4%) (Daadaoui 2011, pp. 87–95). This data shows that the spiritual legitimacy of the king is still a relevant factor for the monarchy’s hold

²¹⁴ Interview, Religious Policies, 6.

on power. While I generally agree with this view, we also need to acknowledge that building solely upon religion and tradition will no longer be sufficient to uphold the monarchy's rule. For instance, Munson (1993, p. 130) shows that, already under Hassan II, the belief in the king's baraka „did not imply reverential devotion to him” but can also be associated with ritual insults against the king.

Even more importantly, unlike his charismatic father, King Mohammed VI could, only to a limited extent, rely on his religious authority as *amir al mouminine* upon his enthronement (Hegasy 2017b, p. 100). Hence, according to Hegasy (2017a, 121f.) and Daadaoui (2011, 133f.), the bay'a is today subject to very explicit and provocative critique from parts of civil society that denounce the medieval, oppressive and humiliating character of the oath and ceremony of allegiance. In fact, despite the state's permanent efforts to uphold the monarchy's religious authority, the latter risks eroding. This becomes visible not only considering the terror attacks of New York (2001), Casablanca (2003), Madrid (2004), Marrakech (2011) and the Atlas Mountains (2018). The spiritual legitimacy is also jeopardised by the number of people turning away from religion in general or at least from the official religious channels.

While official data on the religious practices of Moroccans are not publicly available, El Ayadi et al. (2006) conducted a sociological study on the religious values and practices of 1156 Moroccan individuals. This survey yielded interesting insights into the daily lives of a sample selected representatively with regard to geographical region, gender, age, residence, marital status, profession, and level of education. It holds that for a large part of Moroccan youth in the 2000s (18-24 years), Islam had become a cultural background, more than an orientation for daily life. Large parts of the younger generation described themselves as either non-practising Muslims (27,6%) or non-religious (11,3%) against only 4,8% non-practising Muslims and 2,1% non-religious among people aged over 60. At the same time, the influence of traditional institutionalised forms of religious practice had lost significance compared to individual forms of practice. Given the easier access to information through modern technologies, the younger generation chose their sources about religious matters on a much more autonomous and individual basis. Only 4,4% of people between 18-24 years prayed all five daily prayers in a mosque, against 9,1% of the ones older than 60. The collective Friday prayer was celebrated by 72% on a more (51,7%) or less (20,5%) regular basis. The younger generation, in particular, attended the collective Friday prayer less regularly: Only 64,8% of the 18-24 agers against 82% of those older than 60. 35,2% of young Moroccans claimed never to attend it, which is almost twice as large a share as among the people older than 60 (18%). Similar results were yielded for religious holidays and Ramadan. At the same time, the poll showed a larger fragmentation

and polarisation with regard to their political opinions. While the younger generation had become more tolerant regarding other religions and non-religious people, also the approval for Jihadist movements had increased. 25,1% of literate and 11,4% of illiterate people between 18-24 years approved of the Jihadist movement. By contrast, among the people older than 60, only 18,9% of literate and 6,5% of illiterate persons agreed with them. Also, the number of disapproving and undecided people had decreased with age. Overall, the influence of state-dominated religious institutions seemed to have reduced.

Avi Spiegel (2015) argued that rejecting official state authorities that interpret Islam has contributed to the growth of Islamic/Islamist movements, even among young members of these movements. Yet religious „authority is progressively constructed as permeable, like clay, crafted to fit new realities, opportunities, and responsibilities, adjusted and understood to fit each person’s own aims – not the other way around” (Spiegel 2015, p. 156). This means that youth increasingly question monopolies of knowledge and information formerly held by oulema. They move away from formalised training towards laypeople and the internet. Qur’an reading and exegesis are increasingly conducted individually or privately among peers, contributing to the diversification and fragmentation of religious education (Spiegel 2015, 160ff.).

Statistically, this trend was confirmed in 2012 by a study conducted on behalf of the American Think Tank PEW Forum on Religion & Public Life. They surveyed 1472 Moroccan Muslims in a stratified area of 15 regions proportional to population size and urban/rural population (margin of error +/- 4,3 points). According to this survey, 98% of the Moroccans interviewed by the think tank said they believed in God and the prophet Muhammad, 89% claimed that religion was very important in their lives, and 69% prayed all or several of the five daily prayers. Yet, only 28% admitted they went to mosque more than once a week, and another 26% claimed to attend mosque at least for the jumma prayer on Fridays, totalling 54% of mosque attendance at least once a week. 39% read the Qur’an every day, against 58% who read it less than once a day and 1% never. 92% give zakat (alms), and 98% fast during the Holy Month of Ramadan. Against the official doctrine of tolerance, 34% believed there is only one interpretation of Islam. 51% denied that Shia Muslims were Muslims, against 33% who affirmed they were Muslims and 16% who were either undecided or had not heard of Shia. Interestingly, despite the state’s promotion of Sufism, only 43% were convinced that Sufis were Muslims, against 41% who claimed the opposite and 16% who were undecided or had not heard of Sufis. Only 26% said visiting Shrines was acceptable. This underlines that while spirituality remains virulent,

religious practice is far from uniform. Also, state-sponsored religious authorities, as found in mosques or Sufi brotherhoods, are of only limited reach within society.

A few years later, the 2019 Arab Barometer yielded different numbers, showing that 38% of all Moroccans claimed to be religious, against 44% somewhat religious and 13% not religious. While in 2006, nearly 58% postulated that religious leaders should have a say in government decisions, this ratio dropped to only 21% in 2018. Especially younger generations are against the involvement of religious leaders in politics (12% among the 18-29 agers and 15% of those between 30-39 against 34% of those between 50-59 and 40% among those older than 60). Similarly, the better educated, the less they deem religion important and ask for the implication of religious leaders in politics or favour laws based on the sharia. There is evidence that during times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, people's spiritual engagement increased. While in 2018, 13% of all Moroccans said they were not religious, the 2022 Arab Barometer yielded only 6%. Interestingly, the number of non-religious people has decreased, especially among the younger generations (22% of Moroccans aged 18-29 said they were not religious in 2018, against 10% in 2021). At the same time, 90% claimed to be either religious or somewhat religious. Furthermore, 64% of the sample admitted praying daily, while 20% claimed they listen to the Qur'an every day. As we have seen, publicly admitting being a non-believer or having left the Islamic faith constitutes a punishable crime or at least entails a break with social conventions. Therefore, people might not always be honest about their religiosity, and the actual numbers might be far lower. In a background discussion, a foreign diplomat claimed to dispose of internal official numbers of the Moroccan government, which show that most Moroccans were nowadays cultural Muslims, with only about 15% of all Moroccans attending mosque regularly (the ratio allegedly doubles during Ramadan).²¹⁵

This data dovetails with public debates that have emerged in the Moroccan public in recent years about the utility of the government's continuing mosque programme. Journalists, civil society actors, politicians, and even religious leaders have questioned why state and private donors invest so much in constructing mosques and training imams while the kingdom lacks engineers, doctors, hospitals, schools, and universities.²¹⁶ In November 2017, inhabitants of the poor Haut Anza neighbourhood of Agadir provoked a scandal by starting a petition to stop the construction of a new mosque called Youssef Ibn Tachfine for a budget of 35 million Dirhams financed by a donors' association. The initiators protested against the waste of funds, saying

²¹⁵ Interview, International relations, 1.

²¹⁶ See for instance Berkani (2017); Boudarham (2017c); Boukhari (2020).

that „building a huge mosque at exorbitant cost is not a priority for a neighbourhood that lacks everything“, including basic infrastructure for the population like schools, haemodialysis centres, libraries or sports facilities, theatres etc. In a similar vein, in 2018, the inhabitants of the Gauthier neighbourhood in Casablanca, close to the Moussa Ibnou Noussair prefecture, started a petition against the demolition of a parc that was supposed to be replaced by a donor’s mosque.²¹⁷ Also, in some of my interviews, my interlocutors questioned the national priority of mosque construction before other policy fields. For instance, one former high-ranking official of the Ministry of Culture asked why there were over 50.000 mosques but less than 100 cultural centres in Morocco. He also wondered how it was possible to build 100-150 new mosques every year while the Ministry of Culture could only afford to provide the population with up to four new multi-functional cultural centres that would open up people’s minds. For him, it was regrettable that religion always had priority over other sectors due to a lack of political will, for example, in the Ministry of the Interior, which did not allow for balance in this situation.²¹⁸

Furthermore, in the wake of the renewal of diplomatic relations between Israel and Morocco, many Moroccans have begun to turn away from the mosques since they were instrumentalised to justify the regime’s normalisation approach despite the opposed public opinion. Especially since the recent war in Gaza, which started after the Hamas’ terror attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, many people, including large shares of the youth, decry Israel’s military operations as genocide. They cannot understand nor support the regime’s „deafening silence” and the king’s refusal to speak about Morocco’s approach to dealing with Israel’s acts. Hence, large demonstrations urge the Moroccan leadership to take a clear stance against Israel in the conflict and show solidarity with Palestinians. At the same time, authorities imprison activists and imams who criticise the kingdom’s normalisation policies. While, according to researcher Aziz Chahir, the country experiences an „increased repression at mosques”, more and more people stay away from public prayers, including during Ramadan.²¹⁹ This data, of course, should not be equalled to a drop in the people’s trust in the monarchy. While data on the monarchy’s popularity in Morocco is scarce, statistics about other political actors can be used as a proxy to estimate the palace’s comparative popularity potential. According to the 2019 Arab Barometer, the number of people saying they have a great deal or quite a lot of trust in political institutions like the government dropped from 39% (2006) and 43% (2016) to only 29% (2018). Among

²¹⁷ Boudarham (2017c); lesinfos.ma (2018).

²¹⁸ Interview, Cultural policies, 5.

²¹⁹ Edroos (2024).

young people, the trust in the government is particularly low, i.e. 17%. On the same horizon, the overall number of people having a great deal or quite a lot of trust in the parliament composed by the political parties dropped from 25% (2006) to 21% (2018), while the trust in the judiciary has increased from 37% (2006) to 60% (in 2018). This data shows that although the room for manoeuvre for elected officials has increased since the beginning of Mohammed VI's rule, the people's trust in the government and the political parties represented in the parliament has decreased.

The overall popularity weakness of other political institutions in Morocco leaves room for the monarchy to fill the void. The following chapters, therefore, deal with how the monarchy tries to enlarge its traditional power claims that rely primarily on the bay'a and the king's religious authority by new references to a more diverse national identity. Daadaoui (2011, 80 and 149) argued that Islam is the „overarching identity determinant of all Moroccans” that creates national consensus, a shared feeling of belonging that transcends other identity traits such as Sahraoui, Amazigh or secular elements of society. He concedes that their demands have been addressed (rather than oppressed) by channelling them into ritualised forms of participation, e.g. through national councils. This is certainly right. However, taking the Islamic component as a given ignores societal mutations. It increases the risk of overlooking new developments and potential interplays between new and traditional claims to legitimacy. The following chapters will show that, while trying to preserve what is considered the traditional constants of the Moroccan culture, the regime has stretched its traditional identity concept to provide a home for formerly marginalised societal strands such as the Amazigh, Hassanian, Jewish or cosmopolitan-modernist populace. The next chapters will demonstrate how the traditional legitimacy claims help construct these new claims that, once established, are meant to support the traditional power structures of the monarchy. Building upon the bay'a or the king's religious authority, the regime performs cultural actions that promote the cultural identities of the respective populaces to rally them behind the monarchy. Through cultural manipulation, co-option, repression and careful negotiations, their cultural references are integrated as new components into the national identity discourse that gravitates around the king as the warrantor and defender of social peace and national cohesion.

6.2. Cultural Mainstreaming or the Makhzenisation of the People

6.2.1. With Cultural Heritage to modernity: the King's Culture Revolution

Sonja Hegasy (2017a) has shown that the claim to historical authenticity (*asala*) and true Moroccanness (*maghribiya*) is at the core of the monarchy's self-portrayal and key to the

construction and securisation of its right to rule. Making new and foreign governance concepts authentically resonate within the domestic context of historical and Islamic traditions is essential to maintaining power against the backdrop of independence from colonial rule, globalisation and contestation against the regime. As I will demonstrate in the following, this identitarian strife for recognition of its claim to authenticity transpires into all areas of the regime's cultural policy.

As an art passionate,²²⁰ at a very early moment of his reign, only four months after his enthronisation, King Mohammed VI sent a royal letter to the participants at the 23rd session of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee in November 1999 in Marrakesh. In this letter, after commending the UNESCO's accomplishments, the king called for

„a dynamic strategy to be integrated within our development plans; not an embalming of our heritage within a sacralized vision of the past. This calls for the establishing of strong links between the legacy of the past and the present creativity of modern man, for tomorrow's heritage is what we invent today. If is mandatory, then, to make of man's heritage a common ground for an exchange between civilizations, generations and historical eras. Ladies and Gentlemen, as eminent specialists, experts, scholars and technical officials in charge of cultural affairs in your countries, you are aware of the fact that the historical importance of a nation is due to its ancestral urban vestiges, intellectual products, scientific inventions and civilizational achievements. Just as we believe that men, wherever they may be, made some contribution or other in the edification and consolidation of universal culture, We also believe that the maturity of a nation is judged by its awareness of the importance of its heritage and the interest it shows in protecting and renovating it.“²²¹

In this letter, the Moroccan sovereign shared his conviction that a modern nation's civilisational authenticity is measured by the creativity of cultural innovation and the degree to which it takes care of its ancestral heritage. As he explained in the rest of his speech, this applies to tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including architectural monuments, craftsmanship and oral traditions. By citing monuments restored and constructed under his father, he situated himself in the latter's continuity, stressing the dynastical responsibility for preserving Moroccan heritage, which he accepts to carry for his nation. Like his father, he would make tradition serve modernity and committed to spearheading the new dynamics he postulated for his own country and the whole international community. This royal ambition is highly symbolic. From the outset of his rule, King Mohammed VI has provided the lens through which all future investments into Morocco's cultural heritage must be seen. Through this verbal act, the monarchy is established as the reason for the cultural maturity of the Moroccan kingdom, and the king himself is the warrantor of the authenticity of the nation. This royal message has become the foundational stone and a primary reference for governmental actions in the cultural field. Since

²²⁰ This has been stressed very often in my interviews by both government officials and civil society. Cf. for instance Interview, Cultural policies, 6; Interview, Museum, 3; Interview, Artist, 1.

²²¹ Mohammed VI (1999).

then, all cultural policies must be interpreted against the backdrop of this royal vision to enhance the Moroccan kingdom's civilisational value within the concert of nations. The enthronement of Mohammed VI hence marks a turning point in Morocco's cultural heritage policy, which has thus far been dubbed a „non-policy” which, at best, had worked on urgent cases in an improvised and hasty manner (Skounti 2004, p. 41). With regards to the implementation of this royal vision, the Ministry of Culture (the exact denomination of the ministry changed several times ever since the creation of the ministry) would be the intuitive champion of cultural policies in Morocco.

However, the real responsibilities in the cultural sector are far more complex and distributed among the ministries and other state bodies. On the level of a global vision, the royal palace, including royal advisors like André Azoulay, plays an essential role. On a strategic level and the level of funding, the Ministry of Culture (hereafter also called Culture Ministry with its regional branches established in 2006) is complemented by the Ministry of the Interior (and its delegates on regional and local levels like the governors and walis), the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs, the Ministry of Housing, Urbanism and territorial Organisation (hereafter also called Housing Ministry), the Ministry of Tourism and Craftwork, the National Museum Foundation (FNM), Royal Institut for Amazigh Culture (IRCAM), the Conseil Consultatif des Droit de l'Homme (CCDH)/Conseil National des Droits de l'Homme (CNDH) and the High Commissariat for Former Resistance Fighters and Former Members of the Liberation Army. On an executive level, specific agencies like Agence pour le Développement et la Réhabilitation de la Ville de Fès (ADER, for the Fès-Meknès-region), the Centre de conservation et de Réhabilitation du patrimoine architectural Atlasique et Subatlasique (CERKAS, for the Atlas-region) and development agencies like Agency for the re-organisation of the Bouregreg Valley (for Rabat) or the Agence du Nord (for the northern provinces), Agence du Sud (for the southern provinces) or the Agence de l'Oriental (for the northeastern provinces) are actively taking care of the preservation of cultural heritage in the country. On the command of the ministries or walis, the works are often carried out by companies like the state-owned al Omrane Holding or Societies for Local Development (SDLs).²²² In cities like Essaouira or Casablanca, also civil society actors are very prominent, like the Association Essaouira Mogador or Casamémoire²²³ and can arguably be considered as crony organisations of the state, complementing or substituting state actions with financial state support. This power distribution has historical, practical and political reasons. In the following

²²² Interviews, Cultural heritage, 8 -12.

²²³ Interview, Jewish heritage, 1+3 +4; Interview, Cultural heritage, 4. Cf. also Garret (2010).

chapters, some of these institutions will be presented according to their role in mainstreaming and legitimating the king's position, a process which I call „makhzenisation” of the Moroccan people.

6.2.1.1. The Ministry of Culture and its Financial Dilemma

Founded in 1968 the ministry adopted the cultural policy logic of France under Charles de Gaulle's culture Minister André Malraux. His reform of the cultural governance sector also inspired the Moroccan system structurally and contentwise.²²⁴ Similar to its French counterpart, the Moroccan Ministry of Culture is divided into three main directorates: a) the book, library and archive directorate, b) the cultural heritage directorate and c) the arts directorate. These content-related sections are completed by one administrative and finance directorate and a division for local and international cooperation. Each section comprises divisions, again divided into various subdivisions called services. The heritage directorate includes a division for studies and technical inventories, a division for general heritage, and a division for moveable and underwater heritage. The arts directorate, in turn, comprises a theatre division, a music and choreography division, a plastic art division and a festival division.²²⁵ Since the enthronement of King Mohammed VI, the Culture Ministry's investment budget has risen radically from ~25 million in 2000 to ~350 million Dirhams in 2020.²²⁶ According to a high-ranking ministry official, this stark budget increase within the last 20 years can be explained

„by force of circumstance. It's because the public authorities have understood the value of cultural policy, particularly in terms of, let's say, counteracting extremism. Because in a cultural centre, for example, the theatre, because in the cultural centres, we organise workshops on expression for the theatre; this learning helps to channel people's internal violence and to direct them towards creation and not towards closing themselves off. They don't close themselves off anymore because when you interpret a classic work by Molière, you get to know a foreign culture. So let's say you have the prefects in France, we have the governors [in Morocco]. They want cultural establishments. It allows them to pacify young people's relationship with society, with the power-holders [le pouvoir]. Because we organise activities, seminars, training courses in artistic and cultural expression. So it's very important for the country. We're beginning to feel the importance of culture and art. It's about emancipation [...] It's about people looking forward, not back. So there really is an improvement.”²²⁷

While the overall budget of the Culture Ministry is still far from reaching beyond 1% of the national budget, this statement shows that considerations of political stability loom large beneath the stark absolute increase of Morocco's cultural budget. It is about countering extremist views and silencing young people, making them look into the future and not insist on

²²⁴ Interview, Cultural policies, 6, cf. also Touzani (2017, 37f.)

²²⁵ For details on the ministry's structure see appendix 9.8.

²²⁶ According to the Moroccan Court of Audit (2022, pp. 91–99), between 2016 and 2020 alone, the funds allocated for the cultural sector in Morocco reached a total of 4,75 billion Dirham of which 2,68 billion Dirham (or 56,4%) were to be used for investments. The amount allocated by National Fund for Cultural Action (FNAC) to support artistic and cultural projects totalled 245,80 million Dirham in the same period.

²²⁷ Interview, Cultural policies, 3.

errors and deficiencies of the past. Zooming in on the management of cultural heritage, statistics by the Economic, Social and Environmental Council of the kingdom show that the national budget of the Culture Ministry dedicated to cultural heritage has increased dramatically between 2009 and 2021, totalling over 420 million Dirhams for over 150 projects (Figure 16).

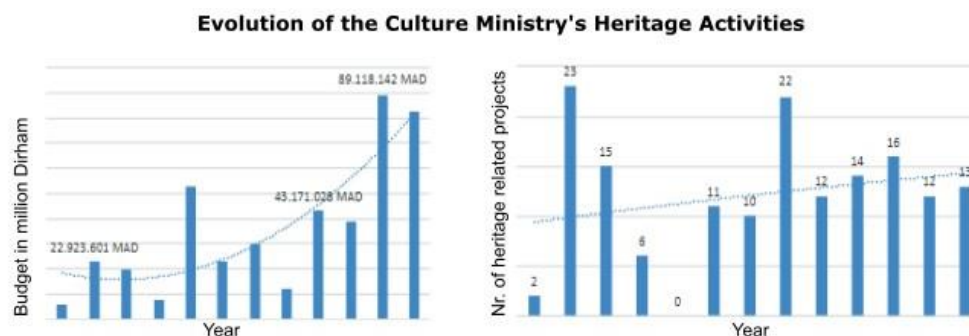


Figure 16: Evolution of the Culture Ministry's budget allocated for cultural heritage (left; in million Dirhams) and the number of heritage related projects (right) between 2009 and 2021²²⁸

The number of protected monuments has evolved even more impressively. While, between the independence and the enthronement of Mohammed VI, almost no inscriptions and classifications had taken place, both categories taken together have trespassed the colonial level of protection within 20 years of Mohammed VI's reign, even reaching over 250 protection titles by 2021 (Figure 17).

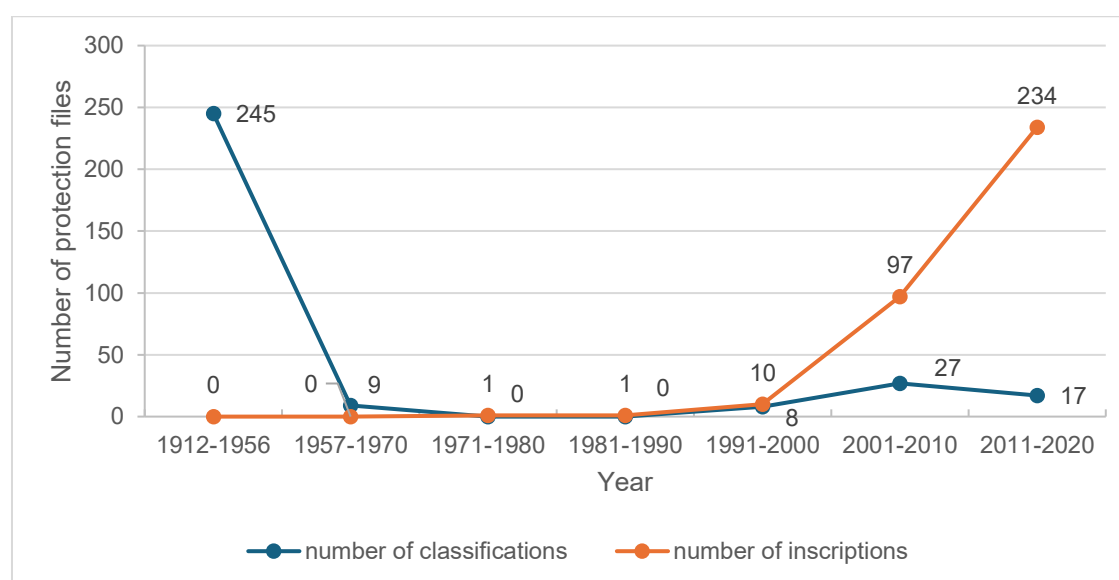


Figure 17: Evolution of the number of classifications (blue) and inscriptions (red) of cultural goods as cultural heritage between 1912 and 2020²²⁹

²²⁸ Adapted by the author and Laura Wegner from Conseil Economique, Social et Environnemental (2021, p. 18).

²²⁹ Adapted by the author and Laura Wegner from Conseil Economique, Social et Environnemental (2021, p. 24). According to the Court of Audit the number of classifications from 1914 to 2014 according to a general list of cultural heritage produced by the Ministry of Culture is as follows: Colonial period (1914 to 1956): 263; Independence (1956 to 2014): 48. The number of inscriptions from 1992 to 2014 was 166, and the number of sites inscribed by period is as follows: from 1992 to 2005: 50 and from 2006 to 2014: 116. This shows that there was a

Such investments are not self-explanatory. By 2016, for instance, 86,8% of Moroccans had never been to an archaeological site, 76,8% had never been to a museum, 59,9% had never been to historical monuments, 73,8% had never been to a traditional craftwork exposition, and 80,1% had never visited an art gallery within the last 12 months (Essaadani et al. 2016, 28f.). Considering the lack of sociological relevance, the recent investments in cultural infrastructure should be read as evidence of the royal interest in the cultural sector and an answer to specific political strains rather than a nationwide social need. Still in 2013, in a diagnosis of the conditions of Moroccan cultural heritage, the minister of culture and his staff clearly explained the problems in maintaining Morocco's cultural heritage sites.²³⁰ They criticised the fact that the Moroccan legislation regulating cultural heritage protection was not adapted to the requirements of modern times. Furthermore, they pointed out a lack of personnel and financial resources and awareness of the importance of national heritage:

„The situation is further aggravated by lack of a clear policy for cultural heritage, in the absence of global coverage of the territory in specialised technical institutions, capable of carrying out interventions rational and effective and in the absence of sufficient budgetary allocations and qualified and specialised personnel in all branches of heritage; able to trigger a new dynamic and a real strategy research, safeguard and promotion of our cultural heritage.

On the other hand, socio-cultural and educational problems are frequent. They are the consequence of the lack of public awareness of the importance of national heritage and the neglect and contempt for this sector, considered backwards-looking.”²³¹

To realise the king's ambitious plan to maintain and valorise the Moroccan cultural heritage, the report demands to raise the ministry's budget from 0,22-0,25% (between 2013 and 2015) to at least 1% of the national budget, which would still be a marginal sum.²³² In the 2014 version of the kingdom's *Heritage 2020 strategy*, we even find elaborate suggestions to tackle this problem. For instance, the strategy proposes using 10% of the tourist tax and 0,5 % of the sales figures of the *Pari Mutuel Urbain Maroc* (PMUM) for the maintenance of national heritage and using another 0,005 % on real estate and public and private development projects of more than

stark increase in inscriptions since the enthronisation of Mohammed VI. Since the 2011 uprisings, between 2012-2016, the Ministry of Culture inscribed or classified 237 monuments and moveable heritage which is quite significant considering the slow speed of protection in earlier years since independence. Cf. Cour des Comptes (2017b).

²³⁰ In 2012, large parts of the ministry worked with outdated methods and standards. The ministry lacked a political vision and financial means to work efficiently. Cf. interview, Cultural policies, 5.

²³¹ Ministère de la Culture - Direction du Patrimoine Culturel and Sbihi (2013, p. 29). One high-ranking ministry official explained that Morocco needs around 40 cultural cadres (archaeologists and artistic managers) every year. Many of these experts are already trained by state training institutions like the ISADAC and the INSAP but cannot be employed due to a lack of funds. Given the lack of staff and budget, currently the ministry mostly decides whether to renovate a monument or not based on the expected revenue to be generated by the site as soon as it is open for visit for tourists. Cf. Interview, Cultural policies, 3. According to INSAP, since 1986, INSAP has trained roughly 300 cadres, including conservationists and heritage managers, cf. INSAP (2020).

²³² Cf. Royaume du Maroc - Ministère de la Culture (2016). Still in 2021, Moroccan monitoring institutions come to the same conclusion, cf. Conseil Economique, Social et Environnemental (2021)

10 million Dirhams to support preventive archaeological work and impact studies. Furthermore, the strategy suggested updating the Moroccan heritage legislation, including fully formulated draft laws. One of the most interesting propositions in that regard is a draft for a decree which stipulates in its Article 1 that the Ministry of Culture shall create a « Comité des musées du Maroc », which would be charged with the authorisation or closure of museums in the kingdom and which shall award the quality label „Musée du Maroc“. The ministry would also nominate the president of the committee. The National Museum Foundation (FNM) would be represented within the committee, but just as one of several institutions belonging to the ministry. Also, the director of the committee would be appointed by the ministry.²³³ This draft clearly reads like an attempt by the ministry to secure its powers and attributions from the intervention of the FNM, which only reports to the king. It is no wonder that this draft – like the rest of the *Heritage 2020 strategy* - was never adopted or executed - at least not in that version (Conseil Economique, Social et Environnemental 2021, p. 20).²³⁴

Yet, the then Minister of Culture, Amine Sbihi, and his Secretary General of the Ministry of Culture, Lotfi Mrini, lobbied within the government and tried to convince then-prime-minister and PJD leader Abdelilah Benkirane. They obtained a public declaration from him announcing that the culture ministry's budget would soon be doubled. Confident that the tides had finally turned, the ministry prepared to double the budget in the new finance law for 2015 and sent their proposals to the king. The idea was that if the king found interest in the project, he would make a statement in a public speech – if only a single phrase – to express his royal backing and provide a favourable argument for the debate on the new finance law. However, the Culture Ministry's officials never heard back from the palace.²³⁵ The Secretary General then turned to the Prime Minister again, asking for arbitration. He argued that the augmentation of the budget would put Morocco in an advantageous position compared to other countries in the region. Even for his PJD, it could be interesting to adopt the proposal since it would be an easy political win if Benkirane raised the culture budget to meaningful amounts. But also, the Prime Minister never responded. The Ministry of Finance, in turn, asked for a final meeting with the Culture Ministry officials to validate the Finance Ministry's last proposition for the 2015 finance law before the constitutionally sanctioned deadline expired. However, since the proposition did not

²³³ Ministère de la Culture (2014a, p. 137). In an interview, a former high-ranking official of the culture ministry explained that, when he took stock of what needed to be done if the state was to take the preservation of the kingdom's cultural heritage seriously, his calculations yielded 4,5 billion Dirham (against an available budget of around 600 million Dh). Cf. Interview, Cultural policies, 5.

²³⁴ Cf. Interviews, Cultural policies, 5 + 9.

²³⁵ Interview, Cultural policies, 5.

contain the significant growth that had been promised, the Culture Ministry's secretary general refused to attend such a meeting as long as the Prime Minister had not followed up on his promise with a clear arbitration in favour of the culture ministry's proposition to double the budget. According to a former high-ranking official of the Culture Ministry, the Finance Ministry then probably complained to the Prime Minister, resulting in a complete financial blockade of the Culture Ministry's project. The Prime Minister eventually requested the Culture Minister to let go. At first, the latter was not brave enough to oppose the decision again. However, in the final government council, the Culture Minister declared that he did not accept the budget allocated for his ministry, threatening the adoption of the entire national budget. This was courageous because time was pressing already since the finance law had to be approved by the council of ministers in front of the king before being voted by the parliament. The Prime Minister then asked the Finance Minister to revise his proposal, but the latter remained firm. Ultimately, the 2015 finance law passed without the budgetary revolution that had been possible. Because of a lack of courage, the Moroccan government of Benkirane had missed a chance to appropriate the cultural sector and gain a stronger impact on the national identity discussion.

At the same time, the royal silence in the process implies that also the king was not ready to implement his vision of making culture a real driver for development as long as success was associated with the government and not himself. Confronted with this defeat, the secretary general of the Culture Ministry looked for alternative funds. He then proposed raising at least the entrance prices for historical monuments by a factor of 7 to 10 for foreign tourists to augment the genuine ministerial revenue from 20 million Dirhams annually (for ca. 2 million visitors per year) to 200 million Dirhams. The advantage of this measure was that it would not require the prime minister's approval. Despite initial idealistic reticence on the minister's side, the proposal was retained. For some major sites like the Palais Bahia in Marrakesh the revenue hence increased by a factor of 7.²³⁶ Given the lack of staff and budget, the ministry decided whether to renovate a monument or not based on the expected revenue to be generated by the site as soon as it opened for tourists. Furthermore, since former employees often did not hand out tickets or used to let visitors enter for free or go home before the site's closure, the ministry decided to launch public-private-partnerships with professional enterprises to take care of the sites' management, including the ticket counters, gastronomy etc. Given the novelty of the approach in the Moroccan context, the Culture Ministry even requested approval from the

²³⁶ Cf. Interview, Cultural policies, 10.

Finance Ministry and obtained it. The companies were then selected by a commission based on the principles of transparency and competition. Given their lack of professional expertise in the Moroccan market, the first partnerships were with multinationals that had to associate with Moroccan partners. The ministry hoped that, with this measure, the second generation of partnerships would only involve Moroccan enterprises that would have gained the necessary expertise to run the business in the meantime. Following this step, huge enterprises invested in the cultural sector and the ministry immediately multiplied its revenues by five. The Culture Ministry finally seemed to have won this round of the reform game. At the final step of financial negotiations with the enterprises, however, the royal palace intervened and suddenly ordered Culture Minister Amine Sbihi to stop the whole initiative without further explanation.²³⁷ It appears that, once again, the monarchy could not bear to see a government project outshine the king. This time, though, it had to actively intervene in order to prevent the project from succeeding, considering that, this time, the Culture Minister had obtained the Finance Ministry's approval.

Curiously, Culture Minister Amine Sbihi and his Secretary General Lotfi Mrini did not step down at first but were seemingly punished by the king for their alleged „failures” years later. On 24 October 2017, following the protests in the Rif region, King Mohammed VI fired four ministers and prohibited several former officials from ever serving in public office again. Among the latter category were Amine Sbihi, the Culture Minister until the government reshuffled in the spring of 2017, and his secretary general Lotfi Mrini. This step did not come completely unexpected. Already in April 2017, the Court of Audit had published its annual report on the use of public funds in 2015.²³⁸ Although, according to government officials, the project had not even properly started by the time of the Rif protests,²³⁹ the auditors' analysis of the Culture Ministry's performance was devastating. They criticised bad governance involving a lack of strategic planning, insufficient accounting, and untransparent and unmonitored grants benefitting non-functional culture groups.²⁴⁰ This analysis is curious because the two officials had done everything to improve the ministry's performance by reforming its financial structure. Therefore, it is likely that Sbihi and Mrini functioned as mere scapegoats for the king to calm

²³⁷ Cf. Interviews, Cultural policies, 3 + 5. The budget debates was not the only case where the king's jealousy resulted in a power struggle between state institutions. While the Habous Ministry, a government institution that only reports to the king, owns the physical structures of historical libraries attached to religious institutions, the Culture Ministry is depository of the libraries' archives. However, with the king's approval, the Habous Ministry urged the Culture Ministry to hand over the responsibility for these libraries as well.

²³⁸ Cour des Comptes (2017b).

²³⁹ Cf. Interview, Cultural policies, 5.

²⁴⁰ Cour des Comptes (2019a).

down protests in the contentious Rif region. They were easy victims of the government's failures and the king's power game.²⁴¹ That the whole process really was nothing more than a royal manoeuvre to bolster the monarchy as the supreme visionary political actor can be deduced from the fact that, in parallel, a new, royally sanctioned institution was procured with the administrative and budgetary powers Sbihi and Mrini had so passionately and desperately struggled for on behalf of the Culture Ministry.

6.2.1.2 The King's Lobbyist: Mehdi Qotbi's Power Struggle with the Ministry

Ever since the end of the French protectorate, the museums on Moroccan soil have been left untouched despite a directorate within the Culture Ministry responsible for the management of national museums. According to Pieprzak (2008, 48f., 2010, p. xiii), in 2000, the then-responsible director of the Culture Ministry went as far as to say about Moroccan museums that he was not interested „in national museums of the Third World. Memory that is useless is useless to preserve.” According to him, Third World museums were nothing more than prestige objects to bolster national image abroad and did not at all mirror local reality. Such statements from state officials demonstrate that the Moroccan state had not allocated sufficient funds to maintain and upgrade the museum landscape, including its museological approach, because it considered culture a luxury for elitist people.²⁴² Yet, even the country's modernist and progressive elites could not identify with the retrograde image presented by the museums' expositions. Museums, hence, remained on the fringes of society, probably perceived as a burden bequeathed by the Protectorate that was difficult to bear (Skounti 2010, p. 25). This resulted in a slow but steady degradation of the museum structures and their scenographies.²⁴³ Therefore, King Mohammed VI created the *National Foundation for Museums* (FNM) in 2010 to elaborate the necessary policies to reorganise and restructure the museum sector and ensure an optimised and efficient use of financial and human resources according to his cultural

²⁴¹ It is noteworthy that government officials close to the events understand the decision. One was convinced that, knowing how Moroccan politics and the political system work, scapegoats were needed in view of the Rif context. Whereas the minister had already been replaced during the government reshuffle, his Secretary General had stayed a few more months to ensure a smooth transition to the new administration. So, the moment he was fired, he was about to leave the ministry anyway. Hence, the royal decision was not a punishment for his work. According to one former official, the Moroccan saying “the makhzen has injured you, but he knows how to cicatrise as well” applies even to this case. According to him, it was “necessary to get rid of five or ten to calm the world, and in urgent situations, it is not important who” is concerned. He is convinced that those who “know well Morocco perfectly understand this, but, in democracies, one will understand nothing” about this. Cf. Interview, Cultural policies, 5. This analysis of Morocco's state system dovetails with the view of some Moroccan political scientists, see, for instance, Background conversation, Political system, 1.

²⁴² This view is confirmed by Abdelaziz el Idrissi, director of the Mohammed VI Museum for Modern and Contemporary Art and right hand of Mehdi Qotbi. Cf. interview, Museums, 2.

²⁴³ For a brief historical overview on the history of Moroccan museums from colonial times until the 21st century see Wagenhofer (2012).

innovation strategy. A high-ranking official of the FNM explained the context in clear words. According to him, there was

„the royal will to create a foundation that is much lighter [légère]. And much more focused on heritage issues. A foundation that can act quickly because heritage issues are questions of identity. And these are issues that can't wait. A heritage that is in danger must be preserved. It's a matter of urgency. We can't leave it at risk for generations to come. The legacy has to be ready now before we leave it because what is at risk today if we leave it, will disappear. I don't know what the state of our heritage will be tomorrow if we don't lay the foundations today for a genuine heritage preservation policy. And I think the foundation is doing that, too. [...] The best solution is to make an inventory, find out what we have, define it, digitise it and present it to the public. Because the best way to preserve an object is to present it and show it. Because as we say in our own language: we preserve best what we know well, what we know best".²⁴⁴

This statement underlined the high priority that Mohammed VI gives to preserving museum heritage and making it accessible in order to foster national identity. For this, the king conceived an institution that is vested with a high degree of flexibility and operates more swiftly, avoiding bureaucratic hurdles and cooperating more easily with the public and the private sector alike.²⁴⁵ The FNM was legally established through law n° 01-09 and promulgated by Dahir n° 1-10-21 on 18 April 2011. According to this law, among other objectives, the FNM was designed to take stock of the collections, improve national museology, promote the development of scientific research on the country's collections and enrich them with new archival or archaeological findings, engage in international exchange, repatriate stolen or illegally sold artefacts and enhance the attractiveness of national museums.

Since 17 December 2011, the FNM has been presided over by the king's cultural lobbyist, Mehdi Qotbi, an artist by profession who entertains a strong network with Moroccan cultural elites and French establishment, including the French government. By perpetuating the principle of executive monarchy in the arts sector and by giving the FNM a relative political (yet not financial) autonomy from government bodies, the king elevated culture to a national priority. One and a half years into his appointment, Qotbi confessed to the press: „I'm going to tell you something that may seem shocking: we have no museum skills in Morocco! And yet, I remain optimistic, because awareness is the most important thing for me. I know I have the full and absolute support of His Majesty; [Prime Minister] Abdelilah Benkirane's door is always open to me, and it's clear that the democratisation of culture is now at the heart of royal and state priorities, so I'm very hopeful.”²⁴⁶ This shows that from a very early moment on, the royal implication in restructuring the museum landscape has been very intense and far-reaching since

²⁴⁴ Interview, Museums, 2.

²⁴⁵ Interview, Museums, 2.

²⁴⁶ Bénit (2014).

it involves streamlining even the government of which the FNM is formally independent. In fact, in 2023, Qotbi stressed that this

„policy is first and foremost the result of a vision on the part of His Majesty, who decided to create the National Museums Foundation in 2011. Personally, I'm just an executor, a site manager or a worker among the other workers who are working to bring this great project to fruition, which means that today, Morocco, particularly through its policy of developing its museums, is a real example for the whole of Africa, as the President of Benin, Patrice Talon, and the First Lady of Côte d'Ivoire, Madame Dominique Ouattara, have told me. And Morocco is determined to share this expertise with the other countries of the continent by creating a major museum training centre in Rabat within the future Musée du Continent.”

Qotbi claimed that royal involvement has a strong impact on concrete policy decisions and even on the operational level:

„I start by preparing and writing notes that I pass on to His Majesty, and His Majesty guides me in the work I have to do. We all know Her Majesty's passion for art and culture, which are essential elements in the development and modernisation of a country.”²⁴⁷

This shows that the king intends to make the FNM the champion and spearhead of Morocco's cultural policies, especially with regard to the museum landscape. Nowadays, it is the preferred state instrument through which the king acts in the cultural policy field. Since the FNM became operational in 2014, and despite its relatively small budget of only 100 million Dirhams (~ 10 million euros), Mehdi Qotbi has organised huge expositions in cooperation with prominent museums like the Louvre in Paris, the Museum in Marseille, the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid, the Pushkin Museum in Moscow or the National Museum of China in Beijing. The expositions organised in Rabat at the new Mohammed VI Museum for Modern and Contemporary Art (MMVI), which was inaugurated by the king himself in October 2014, feature works of important artists like Giacometti, César, Picasso or Delacroix. For Qotbi, the king's decision to bundle the museum expertise within one governmentally independent institution was a strategic choice and a strong signal towards the Moroccans and the world. It presents a kingdom that opts for a path of openness, peace, tolerance, and human development.²⁴⁸ Against the backdrop that, at the beginning of King Mohammed VI's rule, Moroccan museums had still been considered elitist places and that local people felt deprived of their spaces by international tourists and national intellectual elites (Micheli 2020), the organisation of expositions of renowned artists and the creation of museums now results from the king's vision to „democratise culture” and provide everyone in Morocco with the opportunity to discover national and international masterpieces without having to travel abroad and spend a fortune on culture:

„So in 2014, the creation of the Mohammed VI Museum, the opening of the Mohammed VI Museum were the beginning for us. The beginning of a strong signal, a strong signal that was given both to

²⁴⁷ Fadwa Islah (2023).

²⁴⁸ Interview, Museums, 1.

Morocco, to Moroccans and also to the WORLD. In other words, the creation and opening of this museum, which for me has been the flagship, the visible symbol, of being able to really give life to a real museum right in the centre of Rabat, which has been christened „City of Light, Capital of Culture”, and this museum in the centre - I'd say - is a structuring project. And the first thing we did was to celebrate Moroccan creativity. To celebrate Moroccan creativity, in other words, to give ALL Moroccans the chance to discover their modern and contemporary HERITAGE, their artistic heritage. And that's how Moroccans could see and re-experience - because most of them didn't know - the richness and diversity of Moroccan artists and creators. And so, on every floor, basement, first floor and second floor, it was 100 years of Moroccan creation. And that's when we realised just how visionary His Majesty had been in making culture an essential element of development, and at the same time, democratising it means ensuring that Moroccans have access to it. And what I'm going to tell you next is an essential element that enables us to bring culture within the reach of everyone. It's about opening up and paying tribute to Moroccan creation while opening up to international creation”²⁴⁹

Qotbi's statement proves that, for the regime under Mohammed VI, culture is of utmost importance on essentially two levels: 1) from a nation-building perspective, it allows Moroccans to familiarise themselves with the civilisational achievements of the Moroccan nation and develop pride in the state's capacity to bring star artists to the country; 2) from a soft power perspective, it serves as a showcase for the world that allows to admire Moroccan culture. To obtain the desired outcome and succeed in the „democratisation” of culture, the FNM aspires to provide every Moroccan city with a museum. This so-called nationwide „museum revolution” is complemented by free entrance to the Mohammed VI Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art for the first two weeks of every new exposition, while the National Photography Museum in Rabat offers free entrance to all inhabitants of the neighbouring Ocean neighbourhood. Furthermore, it launched a partnership with the national railway society ONCF for the so-called *Train'Art* project to encourage tourists and Moroccan nationals alike to visit the kingdom's museums.²⁵⁰ It gives a 30% discount on the museum entrance fees for train ticket owners. It then negotiated a deal with the Ministry of National Education to organise regular playful visits to national museums for pupils and their teachers. By December 2023, they agreed on free entrance for guided tours.²⁵¹ Finally, since March 2022, the FNM has offered free entrance to national museums for pupils, students and their teachers on Wednesdays and Fridays.²⁵²

However, to associate this inclusive policy approach with the king's performances, the democratisation of culture is carried out to the elected government's detriment. Since the FNM became operational in 2014, we have seen a permanent power struggle between the FNM and the Ministry of Culture, which used to consider the FNM part of its dependent institutions. The founding law of the FNM stated that a list of museums to be handed over to the FNM was to

²⁴⁹ Interview, Museums, 1.

²⁵⁰ Chraïbi (2021a).

²⁵¹ Médias24 (2023); TelQuel (2021b).

²⁵² Fondation Nationale des Musées (2022).

be established by the Ministry of Culture. However, in February 2014, Amine Sbihi, then Culture Minister, was urged to put all 14 national museums at the disposal of the FNM. Naturally, this created a dispute between the Culture Minister and Mehdi Qotbi, who, unlike his counterpart, is not a member of the elected government. As a symptom of this dispute, when the minister was asked why he kept calling the museum of Volubilis a „Centre d’Interprétation“, he responded, „to prevent Qotbi from taking it from me“.²⁵³ According to Sbihi, „the Foundation is in charge of museum management, and this represents a real added value. At the same time, the Ministry of Culture has a duty to maintain control over scientific expertise, inventories and studies. This is the job of a ministry [...], which also oversees the Institut National des Sciences de l’Archéologie et du Patrimoine“, i.e. the state institution that provides academic research and the training of archaeology and museum experts. Considering the delay in upgrading national museums to international standards, Amine Sbihi warned that the “foundation can only move forward if it works with all the players involved and in a spirit of partnership and openness”. In Moroccan media, a political observer made this important remark about the law that created the FNM: „It should not be forgotten that the law establishing the National Museums Foundation was adopted before the new Constitution, that is to say, at a time when the institutional landscape was still confused.”²⁵⁴ The confusion of powers is thus legally inherent to the FNM. Mehdi Qotbi affirms himself that the king is heavily involved in the FNM. According to him, the foundation „is a project that was entirely conceived and designed by the King. He is following our progress very closely”.²⁵⁵ According to law 01.09, when creating the FNM, the original structural idea of the foundation was to have its president form a directorate that defines the FNM’s programme and evaluates its activities. The directorate would have been composed of experts in the field nominated by the „administration”, hence potentially representing also the Culture Ministry since it provides the funds and localities put at the FNM’s disposal. However, this directorate has never been formed, and the successive Culture Ministers had been too shy to insist, obviously afraid of any conflict with its royally sanctioned president, Mehdi Qotbi. For a former government official who accompanied the early years of the FNM, it is only logical that the FNM started to grow since

²⁵³ Nerjis Rerhayé (2014). For the importance of the Volubilis site within the regional tourism strategy cf. M. Makdoun (2014).

²⁵⁴ Bénit (2014); Nerjis Rerhayé (2014, 2015).

²⁵⁵ TelQuel (2013a).

this is how „sovereign ministries and entities of sovereignty” [i.e. state institutions only depending on the royal palace] work; they are bulimic.”²⁵⁶

Consequently, the royal influence on Morocco’s cultural policies through the FNM was even reinforced in May 2021:²⁵⁷ After a relatively short parliamentary debate since December 2020,²⁵⁸ two new laws were passed: law 55.20 amending law 01.09, which created the FNM, and law 56.20 in extension of law 22.80 on cultural heritage.²⁵⁹ This legislation considerably extends the competencies of Qotbi’s FNM. Law 56.20 requires all museums of other public institutions to register their exhibitions and collections, describe them in detail and adapt them to international standards within three years with the support of FNM. As suggested years before under Amine Sbihi, a seal of approval, called „Musées du Maroc” is also to be introduced – this time with the FNM being in charge. This means that all private museums that want to be recognised as such must henceforth receive a certificate of approval from the FNM; otherwise, they will face heavy penalties. Misuse of the seal of approval and import/export of cultural goods that the FNM has not approved are also punished. Within four years of receiving the seal, the pertinence of the museums’ exhibitions should then be evaluated. According to Qotbi, all of this contributes to the country’s „museum revolution“ under the inspiration of King Mohammed VI. By underlining that the new laws execute the royal will, Qotbi emphasised the crucial role that the king plays in establishing the kingdom among the leading nations in the cultural field. Qotbi also stressed that the new legislation was facilitated, among other things, by the culture minister Othman el Ferdaous, who seems to have defended the project in parliament and the government council. The government’s Secretary General was also personally involved in drafting the law, as was support from the financial authorities. Qotbi praised this governmental support as extraordinary, considering prior ministers had always tried to hinder the process.²⁶⁰ After over ten years of existence and operation under legally fuzzy auspices, the FNM thus became an executive body recognised by law under the new constitution. Under this legislation, Qotbi will still be reporting to the king alone. This self-disempowerment of the government to the benefit of the king and his entourage has been achieved by parliamentary means and holds legal legitimacy. But more than that, it now also seems to enjoy a relative ideological or state-theoretical legitimation: In one of my interviews

²⁵⁶ Interview, Cultural policies, 5. According to the former official, the lack of accountability is unlawful and hence problematic.

²⁵⁷ Guisser (2021b); H. Hatim (2020); MAP (2021d); Taillandier (2021).

²⁵⁸ Chambre des Représentants (2020-2021a, 2020-2021b).

²⁵⁹ For the flaws of the previous legislation see Skounti (2004).

²⁶⁰ Taillandier (2021).

conducted with a high-ranking official at the Culture Ministry in March 2020, the latter admitted that, at first, with the creation of the FNM and the transfer of all national museums under the responsibility of the FNM, the ministry was afraid to lose its prerogatives to a new competitor although the technical expertise was rather on the ministry's side. According to him, after years of observing the „new management” of the FNM and its „budgetary flexibility”, the ministry officials are now convinced of the FNM's importance. They are now ready to acknowledge that FNM is doing better than the ministry „ever could” due to „shitty” administrative formalities they need to respect unlike the FNM. They see that while the ministry had always limited its work on preservation and did its best to valorise the heritage, the FNM now takes stock of cultural resources which had not even been known of before. They also delve into new concepts and attract new national and international partners. So, as long as the objectives that Morocco is determined to accomplish are reached, one should not care which state institution is in the lead and by what means the objectives are achieved. The official even went as far as to draw a parallel with countries in the Gulf region, where some states no longer have or never had a ministry dedicated to cultural affairs.²⁶¹ Such statements emphasise how much Moroccan state institutions are streamlined nowadays or at least have come to terms with the prominence of (para-)monarchical institutions in decision-making.

Finally, Mehdi Qotbi praised the new law and its regulations as unique on the African continent and was seemingly proud of the international approval.²⁶² This equals an attempt at international legitimisation. Despite timid suggestions to politicise culture in the *Heritage 2020* strategy, the Ministry of Culture seems to bear a rather unpolitical view of monuments, archaeological sites, or immaterial heritage. Formulations like the idea to „promote the values of citizenship and pride of belonging” and to use cultural heritage as „a tool for the tuition/orientation [encadrement] and cultural education of citizens and a useful support to development”²⁶³ remain the exception.

The Culture Ministry is mainly composed of technocrats and scientists, such as UNESCO consultant and INSAP professor Ahmed Skounti, who also contribute to internal strategy papers and inscription/classification projects. The ministry seems to perceive Morocco's heritage as

²⁶¹ Interview, Cultural policies, 4.

²⁶² Guisser (2021b).

²⁶³ Ministère de la Culture (2014a, p. 39). According to former Culture Minister Amine Sbihi, this objectif was even the most important one of the *Heritage 2020* strategy: “The first objective is for heritage to reinforce the values of identity and citizenship. This means taking action to raise awareness of our heritage, disseminate it, include it in school textbooks, or simply make our roots known to the widest possible audience. It's a set of actions that make heritage a factor of identity and national pride” H. Mekouar (2014a). However, the strategy has never been thoroughly implemented.

a bearer of civilisational value and strong economic potential.²⁶⁴ By contrast, Mehdi Qotbi, from the outset, has presented his FNM as a soft power instrument for the kingdom of Morocco. For instance, in 2015, he positioned his mission within the broader orientation of the king to make culture a means to exert diplomatic influence:

„His Majesty King Mohammed VI has made culture and the arts a lever for development, giving them the place they deserve. He also urged in several of his speeches all the actors of the world of diplomacy to integrate the new rules of soft power, thus giving rise to real cultural diplomacy, a diplomacy equipped with a clear and coherent global strategy of influence that the Kingdom consolidates over the years.”²⁶⁵

The use of academic concepts like Joseph Nye’s „soft power” in Qotbi’s narrative is another telling example of authoritarian learning. It proves that the regime observes new trends worldwide for its policy concepts. In 2017, the Court of Audit criticised a lack of strategic perspective in the Ministry of Culture (Cour des Comptes 2017b). Most likely, this had to do with a lack of willingness to incorporate the cultural discourse into a nationalist mission. As we will see later, such politicisation spilt over to the Ministry of Culture only years later with the appointment of Othman Ferdaous as minister of culture in 2020 and even more so after Mohamed Mehdi Bensaid took over the reins at the ministry after the parliamentary elections of autumn 2021. Although, on the surface, relations between Mohamed Mehdi Bensaid may appear unproblematic, the Ministry of Culture has not entirely surrendered to the hegemony of the royally backed FNM. In early 2024, sources from within the FNM considered a very technical law project on the „Protection, Conservation and Promotion Cultural Heritage” proposed by the government as a de facto disempowerment of the FNM. If passed by parliament, all renovation, restoration or other interventions in the cultural heritage field shall be approved by the ministry. Similarly, all moveable artefacts need the ministry’s approval before any restoration, borrowing or marketing operation. Furthermore, all private and public museums would have to tolerate controls and surveillance from the ministry. On the one side, with this law in force, the work of the FNM could be slowed down considerably and depend on the mercy of the ministry, de facto re-establishing the pre-2011 situation. On the other side, however, the law could prove particularly useful in the current constellation given that Abdelaziz el Idrissi, the director of the Mohammed VI Museum for Modern and Contemporary Art, is said to have become the relevant official within the Ministry of Culture who is de facto

²⁶⁴ Interview, Cultural heritage, 3, Interview, Cultural heritage, 5, Interview, Cultural policies, 5, Interview, Cultural policies, 10.

²⁶⁵ Nait Youssef (2016). From the private sector, there is also critique against this soft power focus. For instance, whereas private art collectors and museum owners like Othman Lazraq of the MACAAL in Marrakesh commend the cultural leadership of King Mohammed VI, they also wonder why Qotbi always seeks the approval of the West while he could also rely on local partners. Cf. Interview, Museum, 3.

in charge of all museums in the country.²⁶⁶ From a ministry's perspective, this law project is an understandable attempt to regain visibility. With the FNM, the ministry has seen its competencies dwindle and be reduced to a mere provider of funds without a word in national museums' strategic, scenographical or administrative affairs. The FNM has become a competitor within a rather unfair competition. While the ministry underlines the rules of the democratic game with elections, changing ministers and accountability vis-à-vis both citizens and the king, the FNM has carte blanche to carry out any project with the king's backing. Thanks to Mehdi Qotbi's enormous cultural and political network, the monarchy's returns on investment are also clearly higher. Qotbi maintains excellent relations with France's former Culture Minister and today's President of the Arab World Institute (IMA) in Paris, Jack Lang and all former Presidents of the Republic since Jacques Chirac. The latter made Qotbi a Knight of the Legion of Honor in 2000. Then Qotbi was promoted to an Officer of the Legion of Honor by Chirac's successor, Nicolas Sarkozy, and then to a Commander of the Legion of Honor in 2016 by President François Hollande. Also, current French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife are very close to Qotbi. Brigitte Macron even wears Qotbi's fashion designs. Her husband promoted Qotbi to a Grand Officer of the National Order of Merit in April 2024, one of the highest French distinctions. At the occasion of the medal awarding, Qotbi, in a tone of understatement, addressed his gratitude to the French Republic and the Moroccan king, thereby bolstering the monarch's position among one of the world's most powerful leaders.²⁶⁷ He portrays his king as a highly sophisticated, cosmopolitan and civilised ruler of good taste by emphasising Mohammed VI's high appreciation and sensibility for culture:

„This distinction honours me because it pays tribute, beyond my person, to the marvellous teamwork accomplished by the National Foundation of Museums, which, under the enlightened leadership of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, and with the great support and interest that our Sovereign has for culture and the arts, has produced major new national and international exhibitions and is helping to preserve and publicise our rich multicultural heritage throughout the world.”²⁶⁸

As I will show in the following paragraphs, this self-promotion is part of Mohammed VI's soft power strategy, which he conducts through culture and museums in particular and which is vital to the king's international legitimisation efforts. Notably, on 31 July 2024, Emmanuel Macron implicitly declared that France would henceforth recognise Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara and support Morocco's autonomy plan.²⁶⁹ While it is uncertain to which degree Morocco's soft power efforts have led to or facilitated this decision of Macron's, it is beyond

²⁶⁶ Informal conversation, Cultural heritage, 3.

²⁶⁷ Cf. for instance Fadwa Islah (2022); Lamlili (2017b).

²⁶⁸ MAP (2024a).

²⁶⁹ Gormezano (2024); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates (2024).

doubt that Moroccan cultural lobbyists like Mehdi Qotbi have contributed to creating a positive Moroccan image among French leaders.

6.2.1.3. The Museum Revolution

The historical turn in Moroccan cultural policies under Mohammed VI is particularly marked by the so-called „museum revolution” spearheaded by Mehdi Qotbi and his FNM. At the beginning of Mohammed VI’s reign, Morocco disposed of 25 museums, of which 16 belonged to the Ministry of Culture, four to other state institutions, one to a municipality, and four were private (Skounti 2004, p. 41). While many of Morocco’s most emblematic national (not private) museums nowadays belong to the FNM, some have remained independent. Nevertheless, most share the same sophisticated scenography (at least in comparison to the museums of older generations) and bear a political message with a strong potential to legitimise Morocco’s political regime or back up and justify royal activities. Conversely, as shown by Sonia Hegasy (2019, 256f.), private museums that potentially contest the monarchy’s legitimacy by questioning the kingdom’s glorified past are shut down, and their owners are sometimes even sued on absurd grounds.²⁷⁰ The following paragraphs will introduce the reader to some of these museums, which have a political mission of national scope. Other museums and memorials which target local or ethnic communities as part of a cultural reconciliation strategy will be explained in more detail in other chapters of this book.

6.2.1.3.1. Mohammed VI Museum for Modern and Contemporary Arts and the democratisation of culture

The foundational stone of the Mohammed VI Museum for Modern and Contemporary Arts (MMVI) was laid in 2006 (Pieprzak 2010, p. 162).²⁷¹ Its creation needs to be seen in the same context of Moroccans’ reconciliation with their history, initiated by King Mohammed VI with the reconciliation commission at the beginning of his reign and translated into national legislation with the 2011 constitution and its preamble on Morocco’s cultural diversity and continues in the creation of national archives or the Grand Théâtre de Rabat.²⁷² It is thus a

²⁷⁰ The example of the private museum on the military history of the liberation army mentioned in Hegasy’s article shows that this applied even before the adoption of the new museum law 56.20 in 2021.

²⁷¹ The museum was in huge parts financed by the Fonds Hassan II pour le développement économique et social. The latter was created by the late King Hassan II in 1999 but has effectively been used only since Mohammed VI to fund projects, which did not necessarily reach unanimity within the national government. This financial flexibility makes it a parallel institution at the palace’s disposal, which decides on the allocation of the funds while avoiding accountability. The construction of the MMVI was one of the first projects to be funded by the Fonds Hassan II, which underlines its prominence among royal priorities. Cf. Interview, Cultural heritage, 6.

²⁷² Interview, Museums, 2. Wagenhofer (2012) confirms this argument but also underlines the ambivalent character of Morocco’s recent museum projects. While the diversity element plays a role, the old museums’ colonial legacy has never been revised despite official claims.

project that follows the same logic as the material and collective compensation programmes that aimed at patching up the bond between the monarchy and its subjects after the Years of Lead under Hassan II. This means it is intrinsically concerned with regime legitimacy. The logic of elite culture contributing to the sacralisation of the royalty and an image of appropriate modernity had prevailed in Morocco's galleries even during the early years of Mohammed VI's rule and helped assert the monarchy's power (Pieprzak 2010, pp. 49–65). For the new museum project, the Culture Ministry claimed to adopt a more democratic and inclusive approach, breaking with the past image of elitist spaces (Pieprzak 2010, p. 163). However, from the outset, the museum project has attracted critique and engendered controversy since curators and artists „felt left out of the process” regarding design and concept and feared that the museum would become „an empty gesture to the global community, a symbolic architecture to prove that Morocco is not behind the times” (Pieprzak 2013, p. 427). The constructions halted and were delayed several times, including in the spring of 2011 (Pieprzak 2013, p. 432) when massive protests shook the country. This shows that the regime was keen on not being blamed for elitist extravagance while people protested for reforms. Whereas contemporary Moroccan artists strive to „create a collective memory of art and modernity” (Pieprzak 2013, p. 435) by making modern and contemporary art easily accessible for everyone and remembering the Years of Lead in an artistic way, the new museum appeared to reproduce elitist top-down patterns that may „disguise deep socioeconomic injustice and inequality” (Pieprzak 2013, p. 433). Finally inaugurated by the king after a delay of many years on 7 October 2014, the museum lies in the very heart of the new town of the Moroccan capital Rabat, at the Mohammed V Boulevard between the royal palace, the Rabat Ville train station, and the Hassan neighbourhood. Contrary to the publicly pronounced critiques against the project, according to Mehdi Qotbi, the museum is also a „flagship” of the FNM's implementation of the king's cultural democratisation plan. Its director, Abdelaziz el Idrissi, a former cadre from the Culture Ministry,²⁷³ is Mehdi Qotbi's right hand and accompanies every new museum project in the country. He understands his mission to democratise culture in the following terms:

„So how can the museum contribute to cultural policy in a country like ours? Firstly, through the museum's contribution to developing the local scene. And that's what we do when we bring in an exhibition for young or not-so-young Moroccan artists. Secondly, by opening the door to major exhibitions from outside, by creating a space capable of hosting a major exhibition from outside. Because it's not easy to bring in a major exhibition. You have to be able to receive it. So it's important because it also allows Moroccans - that's what I called earlier the democratisation of cultural action. Democratising culture means giving people the opportunity to see things that are happening elsewhere. Quite simply. Because if we don't, we'll be stuck essentially chewing on what we produce ourselves - without seeing what's happening around us. If we don't, we'll end up with people who can afford to queue outside an international museum. It is essentially these people who will have the opportunity to see the works of art.

²⁷³ Al Maghribi (2013).

The others will be content to watch it on TV. So if we don't bring in the great artists - that's it - we remain elitist. And the museum is not only, it is not an elitist institution; it is an institution that has to work on the dissemination of art, on propagation, on broadcasting [divulgarion de l'art, sur la propagation, sur la diffusion] in the cultural sense of the term."²⁷⁴

For Idrissi (and the new cultural policy regime he represents), the democratisation of culture thus essentially means making foreign art productions and expositions available to Moroccans to open Moroccans' cultural horizons. By contrast, it is not about Moroccan art in the first place. Moroccan artists were not a priority, which is underlined by the fact that, until 2021, the museum did not dispose of a modern or contemporary art collection of its own. According to Mehdi Qotbi, the museum was still in its acquisition phase, hoping for and encouraging donations from wealthy private art owners.²⁷⁵ The political dimension of the MMVI, in turn, must be measured against the historical background of Moroccan museum history. According to Idrissi, before the creation of the MMVI, museums in Morocco evolved in essentially two phases. The first phase, which lasted during the protectorate, concentrated on ethnographical contents. The second phase started with discovering great archaeological sites like Volubilis and others in the North of Morocco. During these two stages, museums have taken on a civilisational and identity-related character. The MMVI, in turn, is supposed to head a new generation of museums „transcending cognitive interrogations to address Morocco's position in contemporary artistic geography, as a country at the crossroads of European, African, Arab, Islamic and Amazigh civilisations" reflecting „the artistic image of a country with a long history and open to others."²⁷⁶ The MMVI is supposed to convey a political message about a historical turn in Moroccan cultural policies where all influences and components of Moroccan identity are granted visibility and the historical yet unbroken greatness of Moroccan civilisation is portrayed. For Idrissi, „Moroccan museums are no longer graveyards for antique objects, but now spaces full of life thanks to a rich and diversified cultural program". They are „mirrors" that reflect the new cultural and social reality of modern Morocco; they are no longer just an exhibition space but also a place for communication, awareness-raising and entertainment: „Museums no longer welcome visitors from an intellectual elite. The notion of the museum has changed, and Moroccans are increasingly consuming the museum product, provided that it is of high quality and that they can identify with it".²⁷⁷

For this, the new expositions need to resonate with the audience. Expositions about Picasso, Delacroix or Giacometti hence cannot be conceived like in Paris. They need to consider the

²⁷⁴ Interview, Museums, 2.

²⁷⁵ Interview, Museums, 1.

²⁷⁶ MAP (2014d).

²⁷⁷ Libé Culture (2021).

Moroccan context, showcase these artists' relationship with Morocco, and demonstrate how their experiences in Morocco influenced their work.²⁷⁸ These accounts show that, for the Moroccan monarchy under Mohammed VI, museums have become places that must be well-designed to function as spaces for political communication. This includes important messages such as the contribution of Moroccan civilisation to internationally renowned high culture. Questions of museology and scenography have hence become crucial for the regime to forge patriotic feelings and emphasise Morocco's prominent place in world culture. This explains the surprising political, financial and human resources effort invested into the museum domain compared to the time before Mohammed VI's rule. However, the artistic reality defies these claims and challenges the official narrative. Considering the poor didactic presentation of exposition pieces in Moroccan museums, including MMVI, one high-ranking representative of a foreign cultural institution considered Morocco's museum revolution a window-dressing for international tourists. He labelled Morocco's cultural policy approach a „selfie policy”, i.e. a cultural policy that only deems worth preserving and valorising those cultural elements which have a tourist potential and provide a nice photo motive.²⁷⁹ Furthermore, a Moroccan artist and art professor interviewed by the author in Rabat confirmed the impression that the MMVI is „inspired by a makhzenian ideology” and that it is nothing more but a „showcase of the Makhzen for the outside”, providing „an imaginary of lies” for foreigners. Hence, he claimed that a true Moroccan artist would never expose his work in the museum. For good reasons, as it seems. The professor reported cases of what he called „preventive censorship” and „political censorship” of artworks. The professor claimed that, ahead of occasions when the king's presence is announced (like in the context of the MMVI's inaugural exposition), „men in black” come by to remove problematic pieces that could potentially affect „sacralities which must not be touched” like the king and his family or religious issues.²⁸⁰ Similar practices are reported by international cultural institutions in Morocco, which are obliged to submit the films they present to the Moroccan Center of Cinematography (CCM) before the screening and have the movie approved or censored. By 2020, foreign cultural institutions were even required to pay 150 Dirhams for the CCM's „service” if they did not want to be pushed out of the public space.²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ Interview, Museums, 2.

²⁷⁹ Interview, International culture cooperation, 1.

²⁸⁰ Interview, Artist, 1. My interlocutor explicitly mentioned Simohammed Fettaka's photographic series “False” (2012), depicting a usually marginalised homeless person dressed in a fine suit in an official posture typical for the king in a Makhzen palace. Cf. Pascal Beausse (2017). For similar cases of artistic censorship see Bernstein (2019) and Fa (2023). They evoke cases where art pieces did not correspond with the religious and moral red lines of the monarchy.

²⁸¹ Interview, International culture cooperation, 1. Classical reasons for censorship of films are nudity or homosexuality while explicit violence passes easily.

Such practices reproduce classical patterns of cultural repression along the lines of traditional political and religious red lines, undermine all claims to cultural democratisation and underline the FNM's window-dressing strategy for an international audience. Admittedly, in some cases, the decision not to promote or even censure artistic expression appears to be taken against the general cultural orientation provided by the king and his direct collaborators.²⁸²

6.2.1.3.2. The Justice Museum – National narratives on the rule of law

As for the encouragement of the creation of new museums by other Moroccan authorities, the fruits are already visible. In December 2019, the Ministry of Justice agreed with the FNM to cede two sites in Larache and Oujda to Qotbi's institution.²⁸³ After an initial visit in April 2021 by the FNM to Tetouan, a partnership agreement was concluded with the Ministry of Justice in August 2021. The ministry handed over three buildings to Qotbi's FNM, including two structures in Tetouan, which, built in Andalusian style, formerly served as first instance tribunal in Tetouan. Next to raising awareness among the people and contributing to the country's socio-economic development, the new museums are part of realising the royal vision to provide every Moroccan city with a museum. According to Mehdi Qotbi, they should help „democratise culture” and make it „accessible for all Moroccans”. He considered it a great idea that „places which have done justice to people will become places of cultural justice”.²⁸⁴ One of the two buildings shall be converted into a museum that documents Tetouan's history and culture. The other is meant to become a museum that preserves the city's architectural heritage in the justice domain. It is supposed to make the role of justice in establishing the rule of law in Morocco more tangible. Renovated for a budget of 15 million Dirhams, the building should become a „genuine institutional museum”.²⁸⁵ It is about the diffusion of „memory” of the judiciary's evolution in Morocco from Hammourabi until today, featuring objects, clothing, furniture, documents, legal texts and statistics concerning the judicial sector.²⁸⁶ For Mehdi Qotbi, „culture will now go where justice was active, to enable the conservation of this intangible heritage that has helped to consolidate the history of our country, namely the constitution of a state based on

²⁸² Interview, International culture cooperation, 1.

²⁸³ Before 2019, apparently there had already been talks with the previous justice minister Mohammed Aujar (in office until October 2019) which have then successfully continued with Mohammed Ben Abdelkader in the spirit of administrative continuity. The work launched in September 2021 and continued under the new Minister of Justice Abdellatif Ouahbi.

Cf. Chakir Alaoui and Benmini (2019).

²⁸⁴ Chakir Alaoui and Benmini (2019).

²⁸⁵ Atlasinfo (2021).

²⁸⁶ Jadraoui (2022).

the rule of law through justice“.²⁸⁷ Considering that all Freedom House reports since 2017 state that the judiciary is not independent of the monarchy and that torture or arbitrary detention are used to punish opposition forces, this means that the new museum in Tetouan is supposed to serve as a showcase and cultural underpinning of the regime’s official narrative about democracy and the rule of law.²⁸⁸ Hence, the new museum will become another instrument of the monarchy to legitimise the authoritarian system while mainstreaming the discourse about legal justice and civil liberties among the domestic public and international visitors. Interestingly, the Jewish judiciary, i.e. the rabbinic tribunals, are also mentioned in the museum as a symbol of tolerance and diversity to showcase how much the kingdom’s legal system cares about Morocco’s Jewish heritage and how much it takes into account religious minorities.²⁸⁹

6.2.1.3.3. Jewish Heritage Promotion – Real Tolerance or Window-Dressing?

On the 10th of December 2020, many observers of Moroccan policies were taken by surprise when the United States of America declared to recognise Morocco’s claims on the internationally debated territory of Western Sahara in exchange for Morocco normalising its diplomatic relations with Israel. It is crucial to take into account the perception of Israel and Jews in Morocco’s general public opinion to understand the risk the Moroccan regime takes by promoting Jewish heritage and even more so by normalising political relations with Israel. In the 2003 terror attacks in Casablanca targetted locations frequently visited by Jews such as a Jewish community centre (Wainscott 2017, p. 4). In 2006, a Moroccan „ won the prize for the best cartoon denying the holocaust in a contest sponsored by Iran” (Gottreich 2020, p. 180). It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the new actions in favour of the Jewish community are also in line with and often linked to the new policies that restructure the religious field under the „spiritual security”-programme. There are no large-scale studies about the Moroccans’ stance towards Jews and Israel. However, according to a smaller yet representative sociological study by El Ayadi et al. (2006), 66,3% of the 1156 interviewed people felt closer to an Afghani Muslim than a Moroccan Jew (12,9%). This statistic stands out even more starkly when looking

²⁸⁷ C. Alaoui and Boukouyane (2021).

²⁸⁸ The Freedom House Report of 2024 for instance states the following: “The court system is not independent of the monarch; the king chairs the Supreme Council of the Judiciary. In practice, the courts are regularly used to punish perceived opponents of the government, including dissenting Islamists, human rights and anticorruption activists, and critics of Moroccan rule in Western Sahara. Local courts are perceived as corrupt and serving powerful interests.” Furthermore, police “frequently violate legal and procedural safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention, and many convictions rely on confessions that are coerced. Pretrial detainees are reportedly held beyond a one-year limit, and there are no legal provisions allowing for pretrial detainees to challenge their detentions in court. Some suspects, particularly those accused of terrorism, are held in secret detention for days or weeks before formal charges are filed.” Freedom House also reports that cases “of excessive force by police and torture in custody continue to occur. Prisons often suffer from overcrowding.” Cf. Freedom House (2024).

²⁸⁹ C. Alaoui and Boukouyane (2021).

at the number of people older than 60 years who have seen the consequences of the two Arab-Israeli wars: 82,1% of them (against 6,9%) felt closer to an Afghani Muslim than a Moroccan Jew, while among the under 25-years-old the difference is less pronounced, yet still more than significant (52,9% vs. 16,72%). While the Moroccan religious history has been marked by the frequentation of the same sanctuaries of religious saints acknowledged by both Muslims and Jews, in 2006 over 41% of the Moroccans disapproved of the idea of maintaining such shared sanctuaries and the shared practices around them (only 19,2% being supportive), with over 45,6% of the Moroccans also being against the diffusion of such shared festivals by the media (with 24,1% being supportive). Benstead (2019) showed that, in 2016, 37,3 % of all Moroccans were convinced that Israel was to blame for the rise of Daesh. Furthermore, according to her, the support in Morocco for recognising Israel fell from 32 % in 2006 to 24 % in 2011. She suggested that liberalisations in those countries affected by the social uprisings could explain this decline and similar developments in the MENA region. New avenues for expressing attitudes towards foreign policies were opened at this time, and the tendency to falsify polls about such topics was reduced. In 2013 and 2018, new legislation to withdraw the Moroccan nationality from Jewish settlers of Moroccan descent in the West Bank and to criminalise all political and economic normalisation with Israel was brought to the Moroccan parliament by the moderate Islamists of PJD, the monarchist party PAM and other parties (in collaboration with civil society organisations)²⁹⁰ yet were not followed by a debate²⁹¹ – allegedly due to royal intervention. In November 2020, the German Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation and KEEVON Global Research published a more up-to-date study shortly before the official normalisation of relations between Morocco and Israel in December 2020 (Brakel & Barak 2020). According to this study, 70% of the interviewed Moroccans declared having an unfavourable view of Israel, ranking highest among all scrutinised Arab countries. In the same poll, 63% of the Moroccans did not support the recent normalisations of relations between other Arab countries (such as UAE and Bahrein) and Israel. In comparison, 43% of them were even convinced that Israel constitutes the biggest threat to regional security, and 61% outrightly refused that Israel had the right to exist as a nation-state of the Jewish people (when asked about Israel's right to exist without mentioning its Jewish identity, still 56% opposed the statement).

Nevertheless, the presence of Jews in Morocco has always been exploited by the Moroccan regime. The virtual absence of Jews in the kingdom nowadays (a tiny number of around 2000-3000 individuals in a population of over 30 million, mainly Muslim people remain) plays in the

²⁹⁰ Y. Dahmani (2017); Jaabouk (2013b).

²⁹¹ Ahdani (2018); Hakimi (2021); Oudrhiri (2018a); Saint Perier and Ait Akdim (2013).

hands of the Moroccan regime. The exodus of thousands of Jewish families from Morocco and the lamentable situation of Jewish heritage in the country, which is the result of years of omission and disinterest, curiously and paradoxically lay the ground for today's strategy to capitalise on the regime's decision to preserve and renovate Jewish memory. The kingdom today can claim to protect Jewish heritage in Muslim land while also pointing to the unbroken presence of Jews in Morocco who allegedly have always been under the protection of a Muslim ruler (Berdugo [2010] 2012). The very fact that Muslims take care of Jewish memory is the real selling point nowadays. This narrative change, of course, did not come overnight but resulted from authoritarian learning. In the sense of Cull (2019), the regime proved itself an excellent listener to internal actors and external partners. Externally, the monarchy seems to have understood that the international community (and the USA, Israel and the West in particular) are sensible to topics relating to the worldwide promotion of religious freedom (Wainscott 2017, p. 91). Internally, one of the driving forces of this politics of rapprochement is the king's advisor André Azoulay, himself a Moroccan Jew. Born in Essaouira, the experienced PR professional, Azoulay had been made royal advisor by Hassan II in 1991 after he had worked for BNP Paribas Bank in Paris. Under Mohammed VI, he maintained his position and has since worked as an indefatigable lobbyist in Morocco and abroad to make the kingdom's narrative about a diverse, tolerant and moderate society heard and acknowledged. Throughout his career, Azoulay has backed up his claims with actions. In an interview with the author, André Azoulay explained his idea to revitalise the Jewish history of his hometown Essaouira and how to exploit it for the development of the city:

„Incidentally, this glorious time [in the 19th century] – we can say – was somewhat a Golden Age for the city of Essaouira, economically, diplomatically, and demographically. It may be a bit reductive and probably caricatural, but the inhabitants of Essaouira have associated this Golden Age with the Jewish presence; it is a bit short and short-cut, and it is obviously more complex than that. But mythology – we know that and need to understand what we have learnt concerning the Greeks- that Greek mythology is not about scientific exactness of history but **about having the mythology serve a bigger project**. So, when I was appointed [advisor of the king] and when people saw that I am of Jewish faith and that I had taken responsibilities with the king, a certain **popular dynamic** and **popular expectation** was set rolling that maybe Essaouira would maybe get back its old [golden] days and that with **André Azoulay close to the king** everything will be different. **So I told myself: Why not have this myth as well - just like the Greeks have succeeded in doing it – serve a purpose?**”²⁹²

What André Azoulay, a trained PR strategist, explained is not only telling with regards to the culture-oriented nature of Essaouira's development concept, but it is also revealing about the way culture is used in Morocco to appeal to an international public that believes in universal values of tolerance and pluralism. This becomes particularly evident in the case of Bayt Dakira in Essaouira, which – after years of renovation – was inaugurated in January 2020 in a ceremony

²⁹² Interview, Jewish heritage, 1.

broadly covered by national and international media in the presence of King Mohammed VI and several international officials, including the UNESCO director-general, Audrey Azoulay, the German ambassador Götz Schmidt-Bremme and the Director of the Moroccan office of the German Konrad-Adenauer Foundation Steffen Krüger.²⁹³ According to several interviews conducted by the author with Moroccan officials close to the dossier, the project originated in the king's advisor,²⁹⁴ André Azoulay, learning about the lamentable state of the former synagogue of the Morocco-British Jewish family, Simon Attia. He decided to transform the ruinous building into a pedagogical centre. He got personally involved in acquiring national and international funds from Germany and other partner states for its renovation and valorisation between 2014 and 2018.²⁹⁵ The project was finally carried out in collaboration with André Azoulay's civil society group, Association Essaouira Mogador, the Moroccan Ministry for Culture, and the Jewish community. In an interview with the author, a high-ranking official of Bayt Dakira insisted that although the project was initiated by André Azoulay (Figure 18) and carried out in collaboration between various national and international partners, it was,



Figure 18: In May 2024, Royal advisor André Azoulay receives the author in Bayt Dakira and explains the Moroccan exceptionalism referring to amir al mouminine and the protection Moroccan Jews have historically enjoyed under the Moroccan sultans and kings

²⁹³ Cf. MAP (2020a).

²⁹⁴ Interview, Jewish heritage, 5 ; Interview, Jewish heritage, 6.

²⁹⁵ Interview, Jewish heritage, 6 ; Interview, International relations, 4.

above all, a national project, pushed for and directed by the Moroccan state of which the Ministry of Culture is the representative in cultural matters.

Thus, according to her, the state's mission for Bayt Dakira was to show to the world that a peaceful living together was possible, that culture can reunite the people where politics have failed to do so, and that this culture was the culture of every each and one of the Moroccans which is why she wants the house to be understood as „baytuna – our house”, belonging to the whole Moroccan nation as a symbol of unity. In the words of an official of Bayt Dakira, it is supposed to be a „petit Maroc”, a small space which can stand for the whole country in all its plurality.²⁹⁶ The place was designed not to be a backwards-oriented history museum but instead, as a location combining the spirituality of the freshly renovated emblematic synagogue Simon Attia already mentioned above, a scientific dimension with the three research institutions and the component of active commemoration of the peaceful coexistence and permanent cultural exchange between the Jewish and Muslim population of the city which provides perspective for its continuation in the future of the country as a whole.²⁹⁷



Figure 19: Royal advisor André Azoulay welcoming the author under the code-mixed banners in Bayt Dakira in May 2024

This idea is underlined by the two holy scripts, Torah and Qur'an, exposed in the atrium „communicating with each other”²⁹⁸ and symbolic banners exposed in the entrance and elsewhere, which feature two code-mixed slogans blending typical Muslim and Jewish greetings of peace: *Shalom Alaykoun* – *Salam Lekoulam* (Figure 19). Another important focus of the place is King Mohammed V's relationship with the Jews of his country and his role in saving Jews from Nazi persecution during WW2. This dovetails with Boum (2020, p. 209) who argued that memorial spaces like Bayt Dakira are central to „the branding of a

²⁹⁶ Interview, Jewish heritage, 6.

²⁹⁷ See also le Matin (2019b).

²⁹⁸ Conversation with André Azoulay, conducted at Bayt Dakira, on 12 May 2024.

Moroccan ‘convivencia’ (coexistence)”. For Boum, this branding involves a sort of intellectual revival of the peaceful and mutually enriching multiethnic and multiconfessional setting of medieval Andalusia and its use as a „Moroccan cultural and interfaith commodity”. During the king’s visit to Bayt Dakira on the 15 January 2020, André Azoulay underscored the way he wants the inauguration of the research centre to be perceived. According to him, under the leadership of King Mohammed VI, the leader of the faithful (not only the Muslims), Morocco provides „the compass” to a world severely in need of orientation in times of moral decline. This narrative reveals that the museum is designed in a logic that Katarzyna Pieprzak called „museology of disaster”. This museum concept arranges collections and conceives narratives in a way that conveys an image of stark contrast with and an alternative to a disastrous reality outside full of threats (Pieprzak 2020). Unlike the usual claims made by Moroccan officials like André Azoulay, the creation of this memorial is part of Morocco’s outreach efforts. The most apparent evidence stems from the fact that the inauguration of Bayt Dakira has made a headline on the website of Morocco’s Foreign Ministry:

„The Sovereign’s visit to this building reflects the particular interest that HM the King, Amir Al-Mouminine, grants to the cultural and religious heritage of the Moroccan Jewish community and His permanent desire to preserve the richness and diversity of the spiritual components of the Kingdom and its authentic heritage. [...] The elders may rest in peace. Moroccan Jewish memory has its guardians. Of all generations and all faiths, these Moroccans by birth or heart are now mobilized, each according to their capacities and living space, to preserve, perpetuate and promote Moroccan Judaism as a singular and often exemplary component of Morocco’s diverse identity.”²⁹⁹

In this article, the Foreign Ministry attempts to bolster the king’s image on an international level



Figure 20: Mohammed VI (centre) inaugurating Bayt Dakira in January 2020. Rabbi David Pinto (left) and Rabbi Joseph Israel (right) showing the king the Torah, put on display in the Synagogue Simon Attia. Source: MAP (2020)

by positioning the sovereign as the promoter of a pluralistic and inclusive national identity and a protector of diversity and Jewish memory. By having the great rabbi of Casablanca, Joseph Israel, speak a benediction for King Mohammed VI, the monarchy demonstrated to the Jewish community worldwide that

Moroccan Jews stand behind the king’s mission for peace and that they acknowledge the

²⁹⁹ Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, de la Coopération Africaine et des Marocains Résidant à l’Etranger (2020).

spiritual and political authority of *amir al mouminine* (Figure 20).³⁰⁰ The article also mentions all the credits received from UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay and other national and international high-level guests, thereby trying to create a bandwagon effect that invites other international actors to join the honourable cause of Morocco's king.³⁰¹ These findings add yet other dimensions to the findings of Karakaya and Baer (2019), who have argued that the cosmopolitisation of the Holocaust remembrance has provided contemporary nation-states of sometimes dubious democratic posture with a new cultural tool kit. By „claiming an adherence to an absolute universal”, this cultural toolbox helps the regime bolster „its historically shaped legitimisation profile by adding yet another style that disguises its familiar nationalism” (Karakaya & Baer 2019, p. 725). The Moroccan case, in turn, suggests that cherishing Jewish heritage as national heritage can provide authoritarian states with opportunities to garner international support to fulfil important domestic promises, both political and economic.

6.2.2. Celebrating Folklore: Cultural Heritage and State Propaganda³⁰²

The international cultural *Moussem d'Asilah* started as a street art festival, founded by the Moroccan former minister of foreign affairs and long-time mayor of Asilah, Mohammed Benaissa, and his artist friend Mohammed Melehi. Since its creation, the festival has enjoyed the high patronage of the king, which assures its financial survival and allows the organisers to invite artists from across the world. Benaissa explained the circumstances of the festival's creation in the following terms:

³⁰⁰ Morocco's message is heard: Some Israeli media praise and acknowledge Morocco's "diplomacy on the ground" and see it in some way as a prelude to upcoming normalisations between the two countries, cf. AFP (2020a). However, the message might also be addressed to the domestic public, which must be reassured about the socio-political hierarchy between the Jewish community and the monarchy. The gesture is supposed to demonstrate that Jews are not dominating the state (as common conspiracy theories in the region tell) but naturally acknowledge their positions as subjects of the king. For one example of these conspiracy theories, cf. Boum (2013a, 149ff.). Also see Chahir (2020): « le nôtre [le roi Mohammed VI] aussi a signé... Je le savais bien, le Mossad [renseignements israéliens] ne rigole pas, c'est lui qui protège les gouvernants arabes... » (Ours [King Mohammed VI] also signed... I knew it, Mossad [Israeli intelligence] doesn't mess around, it's the Mossad that protects the Arab rulers...'). When in July 2022, Morocco's Minister of the Interior announced the restructuring of the Jewish community, a very active civil society organisation called *Moroccan Observatory Against Normalisation* warned the public in similar words: "We are establishing a new Israel in Morocco, and there is no exaggeration in that," Ahmed Wehman said. He added: "The Moroccan people reject this American domination and the Zionist tyranny which tries to impose its will. We are resisting, and I expect a new era to begin soon in Morocco — a reality that seeks to impose Zionism and a people that resists." Cf. The Algemeiner (2022a).

³⁰¹ In late 2020 the Centre d'études et de recherches sur le droit hébraïque which is hosted by Bayt Dakira even edited a « beau livre », a book combining pictures and texts, which celebrates the Moroccan exceptionalism with regards to the promotion of cultural diversity. This book was published by their cooperation partner, the German Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation. It features a lot of royal messages and articles praising King Mohammed VI. Cf. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (2020).

³⁰² This chapter expands on an earlier article published by the author with Katharina Nicolai in 2022 in *Mediterranean Politics* which focuses on the soft power dimension of Moroccan festivals. Cf. Wüst and Nicolai (2022)

In 1981, the late King Hassan II told me this: Do you know a famous park in London? I immediately knew he was referring to the Hyde Park speakers' corner. He said: Let Asilah become Morocco's speakers' corner, [...] Asilah has [ever since] contributed to improving Morocco's image in the international scene besides becoming a gateway to building bridges between peoples and civilisations and a platform of cultural dialogue.³⁰³

As this quote shows, the festival of Asilah was, from the outset, meant to become a tool to provide the kingdom of Morocco with a harbour and showcase of free speech and intercultural dialogue within an otherwise autocratic country. Already back then, these efforts went hand in hand with place branding activities that promote the cultural visibility of a city or region and boost a positive image of Morocco both domestically and abroad.

Outside the state-regulated religious field, the legitimating impact and reach of Morocco's cultural policy depends significantly on the engagement and networks of individual actors like Benaissa, who enjoy public and/or royal support, both symbolically and financially. Festivals are cultural events which enable cultural expression and consumption. By emotionally and performatively involving the attending public, they celebrate and help reproduce immaterial cultural heritage such as traditional music, dances or other rituals and traditions or provide room for innovative artistic performances. In Morocco, they have since long been an instrument for the monarchy to upgrade its image on a national and international scale. As outlined by Boum (2012, p. 23), King Hassan II used *moussems*, i.e. religious rituals jointly celebrated by Muslims and Jews in honour and worship of holy men,³⁰⁴ to bolster his rule. Hassan II particularly supported Sufi orders associated with venerated saints and had himself photographed while praying for them. Hence, many *moussems* commence and end their rituals with prayers in the king's name, featuring state symbols or portraits of the monarch. Furthermore, Boum (2007, p. 231) argued that, after independence, „folk dances and music have emerged as a potent icon of the Moroccan national identity. [...] As the state started to build its tourism industry, it turned to the colonial discourse on dance and nationhood to reinforce its nationalist model of 'historical authenticity of its past.' Berber [*sic*] were the central commodity in this commercial package. Ahouach, Ahidous and other 'Berber' folk dances were taken from the villages in the Atlas Mountains and commoditized for an (inter)national arts market.” Building upon orientalist clichés of the exotic, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Tourism advertised Amazigh dances and music. They promoted them through official ceremonies to showcase the authenticity of Moroccan culture (Aslan 2014, 110f.). At the same time, this auto-exoticisation serves to bolster the monarchy's position within the Moroccan population and instil a sense of

³⁰³ Guerraoui (2018). See also Gómez López (2017).

³⁰⁴ For the religious and sociological importance of *moussems* see for instance Naji (2011). For a detailed explanation of the difference between *moussems* and festival see Ziou Ziou (2016).

national belonging and cultural uniqueness (Boum 2007). As we will see later, at the brink of the 21st century, the Amazigh movement forced the monarchy to abandon its folkloristic narrative inherited from the colonial powers to re-establish and raise awareness for their cultural originality and local specificities (Boum 2007, p. 234).³⁰⁵ Overall, *moussems* have become a tool to bolster the state's control over remote territories and sneak its political or economic agenda into original cultural or religious rituals (M. Berriane et al. 2016). However, while there might have been some changes to the state's festival policy, to a large extent, the basic logic behind organising festivals has remained the same, i.e. a blend of economic and political principles. Although claiming to serve development, festivals until today ultimately result in the touristic commercialisation of folklore. Also, the motive has remained the same: Like in the past, festivals are useful to silence Amazigh dissent by claiming to improve local economies (Boum 2012, p. 23). Yet, as I will show in the following, this technique goes beyond the instrumentalisation of Amazigh folklore but still emphasises an authentic Moroccan identity that pretends to blend tradition with innovation while ultimately bolstering the image of the king.

Today, the promotion of these events shows how much Mohammed VI uses cultural policies to make a clear cut with the past of his father's reign and strives for a new and modern public perception of the monarchy. Unlike his father, who preferred private, intimate concerts behind the walls of the royal palace, Mohammed VI, from the outset of his rule, has kick-started a new festival dynamic, creating and taking on the patronage of Moussems and festivals all over the country (Boum 2007, p. 234) (Figure 21).³⁰⁶

³⁰⁵ This impression was also confirmed by my own data. One official of the Ministry of Culture told me that the festivals sensitize the population for Moroccan intangible heritage and valorise artists who "used to be marginalised for a long time" and who are called "folkloristic" although the ministry nowadays "no more uses this terminology". Concerning the selection process for the promotion of festivals, the official insisted that his ministry grants total freedom of expression to the artist, knowing that 100% of objectivity cannot be reached. Cf. Interview, Cultural policies, 4.

³⁰⁶ Boum (2012, p. 22) speaks of up to 150 festivals and moussems that take place in Morocco every year. For an incomplete overview of state-supported festivals see Ministère de la Culture (2014b).

Former cultural policy official Massaïa (2013, p. 103) argued that, since the installation of the alternation government in 1998, rather than acting as a mere facilitator and sponsor of cultural action, the Ministry of Culture has transformed into a cultural production agency trying to monopolise the success of the festivals in the country. Festivals have become an element of mass mediation of Moroccan culture in the urban sphere (Spadola 2014).

Former Culture Minister Mohammed Achaari himself, however, interpreted the rising number of festivals as a symbol of the country's „good sociocultural health”, with many people taking advantage of their new liberties to express themselves after a long period of repression (N. Makdoun 2014, p. 63). Whereas religious and ethnic festivals have always been numerous in Morocco, El Maarouf (2012, 2013) has demonstrated that music festivals have begun to thrive, especially ever since the Casablanca terror attacks of 2003, which called the young king's path

of liberalisation and his concept of promoting religious co-existence into question. While, just like the other festivals, they have an economic purpose, they also fulfil the political and social purpose of fighting local terrorism by reconciling the society, promoting social peace and creating a cathartic sense of togetherness in times of societal schizophrenia tearing Moroccans apart between „religious doctrines and scepticism towards overt religiosity” (El Maarouf 2012, p. 70). According to El Maarouf (2012, 74f.), Moroccan policy-makers have appropriated the music



Figure 21: Map of Moroccan Festivals organised by the Ministry of Culture

sector and use festivals as their „newest peace-seeking strategies, postmodern tools of

hegemony”: Music festivals „have ceased to be festivals. They have transformed into counter-terrorism scenarios and constructed cultural events. Festivals are anti-violence projects.” El Maarouf (2012, p. 86) argued that the Moroccan state utilises festivals to patch „up the sentiments of resentment that once existed between itself and the people. Through festivals, it has endowed the people with the possibility to overthrow the makhzan (the state) as the ultimate holder of ownership”.

I agree that festivals have become important cultural actions that make the regime’s new identity programme of peace and tolerance experienceable for a large transnational public. At the same time, I also hold that this empowerment only happens on the surface and ultimately helps to reproduce traditional identity structures that bolster the monarchical regime as the supreme depository and warrantor of „authentic” Moroccan culture, which is defined in terms of a blend of traditions and modern values. In this regard, Graiouid and Belghazi (2013, p. 262) argued that state patronage, including royal support of cultural production (direct or via cronies), „enables the promotion of a practice that undermines and contains the impact of the PJD and the Islamists in the cultural scene, while foregrounding in the public sphere a liberal and open understanding of culture” especially (but not exclusively) in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings when PJD won the elections and political Islam gained political influence within the Moroccan government. Yet, Chahir (2010) has shown that festivals’ conception, planning and organisation reveal the ideological polarisation and inherently autocratic mentality that prevail in Morocco’s cultural sphere, even at a local decision-making level. This divide prevents locally elected representatives from agreeing and insisting on democratic procedures across parties, ultimately leaving leadership and responsibility to the monarchy and powers associated with or dependent on the palace: Elected representatives with a conservative or nationalist background oppose ideas to promote modern Western-style events by claiming to defend what they perceive to be authentic Moroccan culture inspired by Islamic laws and values including the prohibition of mixed-gender events and permissiveness. Others, again, request the representation of local traditions and languages. Modernist local authorities, in turn, push for the adoption of festivals by trying to bypass the municipal council. They use connections to the royal palace, obtain royal patronage, try to dissuade and discourage opposition against the festival by referring to royal speeches and install organisation agencies that proceed with the event planning without consulting the municipal council. They emphasise the festival’s allegedly civilising character that shall have the potential to morally complete Moroccan citizens and protect society against Islamist extremism that could destabilise social peace. Hence, Chahir’s study proves how much conceptual framing and organisational procedures bolster official royalist narratives and

strengthen the leadership position of the king in questions of culture and identity. In this context, it is also important to underline that festivals have become major assets to Morocco's international attractiveness and soft power (Belghazi 2006; Dines 2020; Graioud & Belghazi 2013; Wüst & Nicolai 2022) but also to convey an image of modernity to a national public. As of 2016, 56,4% of all Moroccans had attended a cultural event in the last 12 months, with over 45% of them attending dance or music festivals, moussems or multidisciplinary events (Essaadani et al. 2016, 26f.).

6.2.2.1. Mawazine – the Prototype of the King's Festivals

Some festivals have become crucial tools in the touristification of Moroccan cities since they help create a positive city image. The *Mawazine* festival is a case in point, featuring prominent international popular music stars (El Naggare 2018). Created in 2001, the festival periodically creates over 3000 jobs and prompts a 30 % rise in tourist activities in Rabat, attracting people from all over the world (Bayahya 2015; Graioud & Belghazi 2013).³⁰⁷ This has not always been the case. In 2006, King Mohammed VI decided to grant his royal patronage to the then medium-scale festival *Mawazine* in Rabat. By appointing his private secretary, Mohammed Mounir Majidi, president of the Association Maroc Cultures that organises the festival, he made sure that the festival got impregnated with a royal aura and was able to grow. According to former members of the festival's organising team, some bands and artists were handpicked or suggested by the king and his entourage. Purportedly, he is personally behind the invitation of international stars like Stevie Wonder, Whitney Houston, Lionel Richie, and other Soul, Funk and R'n'b idols of his youth.

However, there is also a political dimension to the choice of international stars. In an interview with Telquel, one cultural actor close to the festival management explained that it is „obvious that through this festival, he [*scil.* King Mohammed VI] wants to prove to the world that Morocco is not the bush”. According to the same source, the artists' „fees are almost never negotiated, and that their every whim is granted.” In return, most of these stars are so flattered by the royal invitation that they become ambassadors of the country abroad (Ziou Ziou 2016) and more importantly become compliant instruments in the propaganda machinery of the monarchy. At the end of their performances, many of them drape themselves in the Moroccan

³⁰⁷ The festival aims at free entrance to 90% of all concerts. The festival's website claims that Mawazine directly or indirectly contributes to 5000 jobs and has generated since 2011, a plus of 22% in Rabat's tourism turnover. Retail, catering and transport allegedly even see their sales increase by an average of 30% during the festival. The hotel occupancy rate is 100% for 4-5 star hotels and 63% for other hotels, which is up to four times more than in normal periods. Cf. Festival Mawazine (2024).

flag and do not hesitate to warmly thank „the royal family for its welcome and support”.³⁰⁸ They, hence, repeat and confirm the monarchy’s claims of modernity, generosity and closeness to the people. Ziou Ziou (2016) went as far as to say that Mawazine has become for Mohammed VI what the Fête du Trône used to be for his father Hassan II: a symbol of royal power and proximity with the people. Mawazine has a strong civic mission (Dines 2020) to inculcate the population with national values of tolerance, openness, appreciation of diversity and a sense of Moroccan authenticity, tradition and innovation, all associated with the monarchy.

However, in 2011, during the uprisings in the region, strong public voices, including some demonstrators of the 20 February Movement, called for the cancellation of all the festivals, particularly, Mawazine, which was deemed „too ostentatious”. Many cultural actors saw the question of whether to maintain or cancel the event as a test of the regime’s tenacity. „We were all on our toes waiting for the royal decision. The cancellation of Mawazine could have meant the cancellation of other summer music events. The decision to keep it on allowed festival organisers to go ahead”, recalled an event professional in an interview with TelQuel.³⁰⁹ This might imply that the monarchy evaluated the potential for distraction from current grievances and the chance for image wins from major cultural events like Mawazine more important than the risk of criticism. This went as far as making the ruling PJD-led government defend the festival despite its own critical position against the event: In 2012, for instance, Lahbib Choubani, Minister for Relations with Parliament, declared in an interview that „it is not reasonable for public money to be swallowed up in a sumptuous and ostentatious festival”. This was a thinly veiled attack on Mawazine, which Prime Minister and PJD leader Abdelilah Benkirane tried to gloss over by stating in the media a few days later that the royal festival „should not disappear because it has won its audience”.³¹⁰ This may seem surprising, given that he and his ruling conservative party, PJD, had regularly criticised the event in the past. Therefore, obliged and tamed by his exposed position as the head of the government, Benkirane’s explanation shows that the young, modernist, cosmopolitan public targeted by the Mawazine festival is crucial for the regime since it constitutes an important support base for the monarchy. Nouredine Ayouch, an important cultural lobbyist close to the royal palace, explained this as follows: „Few people know this, but Mohammed VI is in favour of free artistic expression, and no government will be able to change that. He will always be there to deal with

³⁰⁸ TelQuel (2013a). El Maarouf (2013, pp. 73–75) also interpreted this display of the Moroccan flag as a “neopatriotic iconization and condensing of national identity” in the context of a collective anti-terrorism statement in the aftermath of the 2011 terror attacks of Marrakesh.

³⁰⁹ TelQuel (2013a).

³¹⁰ TelQuel (2013a).

any excesses”.³¹¹ This means that in times of political turmoil which also touched the kingdom in 2011/12, considerations to maintain the appearance of good governance and respect of rule of law prevailed in the risk assessment.³¹² Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that Mawazine plays an important role within the monarchy’s strategy to rebrand the Moroccan capital Rabat to make it a beacon of Morocco’s cultural authenticity between tradition and modernity. Yet, despite the decision to keep the festival programmed, the monarchy nevertheless withdrew state subsidies (Dines 2020, 2021) to avoid becoming the direct target of public anger.

6.2.2.2. The Gnawa Festival: a Symbol of Diversity

Within only five years, between 2010 and 2014, the overall budget for festivals and theatre productions increased from 620.119,00 dirhams to 1.768.360,00 dirhams (Cour des Comptes 2017b, p. 7). This budgetary evolution shows the importance of festivals and theatres for the self-perception of the regime. Like the Moussem of Asilah and Mawazine, the idea of good governance is also conveyed by festivals like the *Festival Gnaoua et Musiques du monde*, founded in Essaouira in 1998 on the basis of already existing initiatives. It showcases the tolerance for minority cultures otherwise neglected and marginalised.³¹³ The Gnaoua are part of the black Moroccan population, which are descendants of former slaves from Sub-Saharan West Africa. As described by el Hamel (2013), despite their history of abduction and enslavement, they have acculturated in Morocco and do not seem to show any desire to return to their ancestors’ homelands due to their pride in belonging to Islamic culture and purported descent from the prophet Mohammed’s companion Sidna Bilâl, himself a freedman. They have carved out a specific spiritually constructed place in society. Their Islamic beliefs manifest in the conviction that God can only be approached through religious rites and practices that draw upon their African heritage of music, dances and trance. Initially, the Gnawa used this heritage to „express the feeling of being subalterns and to heal the pain of their abduction” and „cope with the horrors of servitude and its legacies” (el Hamel 2013, p. 289). Over the decades, however, the mystic order of the Gnawa changed several times. Since the 1920s, when they were perceived as „disorganized beggars often forced to perform in the streets for survival” they developed into more organised „professional singers and musicians” (el Hamel 2013, p. 295). Their blend of spiritual and musical rites has inspired other artists, from pop to blues

³¹¹ TelQuel (2013a).

³¹² As we have seen above in chapter 6.1., however, the regime is always confronted with the complicated challenge to strike a balance between the more conservative and the liberal strands of the society.

³¹³ Interview, Festival industry, 1.

and jazz, who mixed their styles with Gnawa music. Also, the Gnawa themselves have continuously modernised their musical concepts and made them „more secular with more commercial appeal” (el Hamel 2013, p. 296).

Supported by royal advisor André Azoulay (G. Becker 2014, p. 46), who is originally from Essaouira, the Gnawa festival was created on a private initiative of business lady and communication specialist Neila Tazi with a modest budget of not even 600.000 Dirhams. Kapchan (2008a) describes how Neila Tazi or André Azoulay have commended the dissociation of Gnawa music and rituals from the Gnawa’s traditional spiritual role in Moroccan society to make it culturally accessible to a larger, transnational audience. Responding to public critique by visitors and foreigners unfamiliar with Gnawa rituals and spirituality, the traditional sacrifice of sheep and the all-night ceremonies to heal those possessed by spirits have gradually been neglected, resulting in a desacralisation of Gnawa traditions. Today, the use of trance, music and occasional hashish consumption amounts to a carnivalesque enactment of diversity within a large-scale tourist production. This dissociation facilitates a process Kapchan (2008a, p. 58) called „sonic translation”. It allows national and international visitors to become a „community of affect” and jointly celebrate emptied metaphors of spirituality, i.e. the „festive sacred”.

It took 19 years until the municipality was convinced of the contribution to the local economy and signed an agreement with the festival, bringing the budget up to 15 million Dirhams in 2018



(with 1 million by the municipality). This change was achieved when the organisers of the Gnaoua Festival managed to prove the economic and cultural benefits of the festival. According to a study conducted by the consulting firm *Valyans Foundation* in 2014 on behalf of the foundation, for every Dirham spent on the organisation of the festival, 17 Dirhams are generated in the town through the influx of people who wish to

Figure 22: Factsheet on the benefits and Achievements of the Gnawa Festival in Essaouira according to a study conducted by Valyans Foundation

attend.³¹⁴ André Azoulay, the royal advisor and president of the Essaouira Mogador Association, point to the fact that ever since the re-dynamisation measures of the city of Essaouira started, the number of hotels, hostels and riads have multiplied significantly. On their website (Figure 22),³¹⁵ the organisers of the festival present data that allegedly prove the overwhelmingly positive impact on Essaouira's economic and social development: The organisers claim that more than 1,7 billion Dirhams have been generated in 16 years of the festival's existence. The success is also underlined by the long list of national and international sponsors and partners contributing to the festival over the last few years, such as the CIH bank, Renault, Sofitel, and the ACCOR Hotel group. The Ministry of Culture and the National Tourism Office massively advertise for the annual event. Furthermore, broad media coverage has been secured through partnerships with international broadcasters such as rfi, France24, Euronews, and French radio channels such as france inter, france culture and france musique. Promoting Gnawa artists through a state-sponsored festival also underlines Morocco's claim to Africanity. It ostensibly showcases its rootedness in the African continent, which gives cultural legitimacy to the kingdom's aspirations of becoming a bridge builder between Africa and the West (Abourabi, p. 188ff.). At the same time, such performances have become part of a larger agenda that euphemises the question of slavery in Moroccan society (Schmitz 2012, p. 118). By propagating a commercialised image of diversity, mutual recognition, tolerance and connectivity with Africa, the festival veils the Gnawa's roots in slavery (Kapchan 2008a, p. 54). It hides the enforced army recruitment of black people in Morocco under the current Alawite dynasty since Moulay Ismail and the continuation of dependent positions of former slaves vis-à-vis their former masters under forms of clientship and paternalism even after their manumission and the abolishment of slavery during colonialism.³¹⁶ Even beyond slavery, blackness in Morocco is often associated with sorcery and black magic (Schmitz 2012, 118f.), which 85% of Moroccans believe in (El Ayadi et al. 2006).³¹⁷ It also covers racialised tensions between ethnic Amazigh, Arab and black people living in Morocco as they have been described, for instance, by Silverstein (2005, 2010) and Menin (2016).

³¹⁴ Interview, Festival industry, 1, see also Michbal (2018) and Conseil Economique, Social et Environnemental - La Commission de la Société du Savoir et de l'Information (2016, p. 47).

³¹⁵ Essaouira Gnaoua & World Music Festival (2024).

³¹⁶ For concise studies on Moroccan black history including slavery and contemporary views see Mohammed Ennaji (1994) and el Hamel (2008); (2013).

³¹⁷ El Ayadi et al. (2006) also showed that the Sufi zaouiyas tend to be increasingly neglected. As shown by Naji (2011) many of the cultic practices around these places are nowadays preserved through the modification of rituals gradually entailing the inversion of roles among former black slaves and masters.

The aspirations to make the Gnawa festival a monument of Moroccan diversity were underpinned, once again, by the preparation of a UNESCO application, eventually successful in 2019 with the inscription of Gnawa performances and rituals on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.³¹⁸ As Naji (2011) describes, the social prestige engendered by this internationalisation alters the old rituals, which used to link the Sherifian sons of masters with the sons of slaves who claim descent from Sidna Bilal. While the sons of former masters stayed in their marginalised villages and suffered social and economic decline, many sons of former slaves often went to the cities. They sometimes even reached influential positions as clerks, merchants or lawyers. By contrast, a century ago, the forefathers of the Gnawa may still have served as slaves within the black army of the sultan, who relied on them as loyal guards to avoid any dependency on tribal warriors with changing loyalties. Even after the abolishment of slavery in the 20th century, many former slaves were kept close to the palace as loyal servants (el Hamel 2013, 239f.). I argue that today, the monarchy's promotion of the Gnawa may potentially reinstate the former relationship under changed auspices. Not enslavement, but the prospects of wealth and social prestige from the aura of royal patronage and international fame from the touristic promotion of Gnawa culture are the monarchy's tools to co-opt the black population. It allows the regime to make Moroccan blacks part of the national identity discourse that, once more, centres around the king. Yet, ultimately it was only the festival's annually reproduced economic success and international acclaim that convinced the Moroccan state to invest into the perpetuation of the event and support its inscription on the UNESCO list of humanity's intangible world heritage. After the preparation of the application file by Neila Tazi and her colleagues and its submission to the Culture Ministry, it took once more ten years until the state supported the approach and proceeded to its promotion at the UNESCO.³¹⁹ The economic development lense for cultural heritage dovetails with the ministry's overall strategy „to industrialise Morocco's creative sector" like the handicraft sector and make creators, artists and designers „think like businesspeople", knowing how to „negotiate and do marketing by themselves" without having to ask the ministry for help.³²⁰ This logic also applies to the creator of the Gnawa festival. Neila Tazi, born in Washington/USA, as the daughter of a Moroccan high cadre at the World Bank, not only created the Gnawa festival; she is also president of the Moroccan *Federation of Cultural and Creative Industries* and, in this function, has been elected to the second chamber of Morocco's national parliament. There,

³¹⁸ UNESCO (2019b). The inscription was the result of joint efforts of the state and the Yerma Gnawa Association, founded by Neila Tazi in 2009 to preserve and promote the ancestral oral traditions of the Gnawa.

³¹⁹ Interview, Festival industry, 1.

³²⁰ Interview, Cultural policies, 8.

she served as vice-president until 2021 before becoming president of the *Commission des affaires étrangères, de la défense nationale et des Marocains résidant à l'étranger* in the same chamber.³²¹ Hence, being a credible cultural actor and a renowned communication specialist, she actively forges the monarch's international reputation as a promoter of „arts, culture, creativity and heritage”.³²² This shows that the organisation of festivals – and the promotion of culture in general – has nowadays become a pillar (if not to say an instrument) for the legitimisation of the king. It appears that cultural initiatives from the civil society, like Neila Tazi's Gnawa festival, often have to face financial deficits unless they can make a publicly visible contribution to the official national discourse of diversity, openness and economic development under the rule of King Mohammed VI. This narrative qualifies the initiatives for state support in financial form and royal patronage. The organisation of festivals is, hence, an essential part of a mutually beneficial environment between the royal patron and his subject client. Ziou Ziou (2016) went as far as to say that the royally sponsored festival policies have created a new elite. This new socio-political class is an instrument to enlarge the monarchy's support base.³²³

6.2.2.3. Promoting Religious Tolerance – the Spiritual Festivals in Fès

To mainstream the king's religious model the royally supported *Festival de Fès des Musiques Sacrées du Monde* (founded in 1994) and the *Festival de Fès de la Culture Soufie* (founded in 2007) play an essential role. The festivals explicitly relate to the Moroccan Sufi tradition and contribute to the religious mainstreaming in the kingdom by reemphasising the Sufi component of the kingdom's national identity among the Moroccan public while embracing all world religions. El Maarouf (2012) argued that the festivals in Fès are, hence, essential in the Moroccan state's new anti-terrorism strategy after the 2003 Casablanca bombings because they visibly display acceptance of all religious and spiritual worldviews. By allowing diverse communities to feel like one, the festivals provide space for everyone to experience this spirit of peace and tolerance and to reconcile with the state, various strands of Moroccan society, and foreign cultures. In this context, choosing Fès as an event location is highly symbolic, given the imperial city's longstanding spiritual tradition. The interaction of tangible with intangible, i.e. musical heritage performed within or against the backdrop of emblematic monuments of royal architectural grandeur, becomes a potent tool to enable the urban public to reappropriate their environment and make them identify with their religious and political legacy (Belghazi 2006;

³²¹ H. Alaoui (2021); International Finance Corporation (2023).

³²² Cf. for instance MAP (2023b).

³²³ For a detailed analysis of the monarchy's cultural patronage, see also Graioud and Belghazi (2013).

N. Makdoun 2014, p. 66). The festivals bolster the religious importance of Fès in the continuity of its former glory and help to brand the city as the 'Spiritual Capital of Morocco'. The appearance of general acceptance is further underlined by emphasising the international recognition Moroccan Sufi culture obtains from people worldwide. The festivals indeed contribute to the international broadcasting of the kingdom's choice for a Sufi-inspired tolerant Islam (Belghazi 2006; Wüst & Nicolai 2022).

Using the musical and creative traits of religion, the festivals reach out to a national and international audience alike, inviting all to a Moroccan cultural experience (Kapchan 2008a, 2008b)).³²⁴ In the case of the 2021 edition of the *Festival de Fès de la Culture Soufie*, for instance, the team of institutional partners comprising the Habous Ministry, the Ministry of Culture and the National Tourism Office has been complemented by the Institut Francais, the official French cultural diplomacy agency, a clear proof for Morocco's success in garnering international support through cultural means. Even more interesting is the case of the *Festival de Fès des Musiques Sacrées du Monde*. By inviting international artists from other religious horizons to perform in Morocco's „spiritual capital”, the festival organisers from civil society contribute to Morocco's new nation brand as a soft power resource. They underscore the kingdom's image of openness and tolerance as well as its aspirations to becoming an inter-civilisational bridge builder of international reputation.³²⁵ Accordingly, Faouzi Skalli, the founder of the two festivals, pointed out in an interview with the author that his festivals fill a certain gap in the world market. He claimed that Morocco's cultural identity is uniquely tolerant and open toward other cultures and religions, and that festivals such as that of musique sacrée would be „hard to imagine that in another country in the Islamic world.”³²⁶ A certain success of these aspirations may be seen in the fact that next to the support of international companies like Volvo and Citroen, the festival also enjoys the backing of the Institut Francais and the French Republic. Just like Faouzi Skalli, the festivals' creator,³²⁷ Abderrafih Zouitene, the president of the *Fondation Esprit de Fès*, glories in the fact that in „2018, the Executive Board of UNESCO entered into an official partnership with the Spirit of Fes Foundation. Likewise, the UN has designated the Fes Festival and its Forum as an event contributing significantly to

³²⁴ Cf. also Interview, Festival industry, 2. Many authors like Qaissi (2019, 96ff.) see the risk of promoting “exoticism” and “folklorisation” of Moroccan culture for economic benefits and authors like Laan (2012) have indeed collected accounts of people who criticise the commercial character of the festival as detrimental to the authentic Sufism.

³²⁵ Cf. also Abourabi (2020, 134ff.).

³²⁶ Interview, Festival industry, 2.

³²⁷ Interview, Festival industry, 2.

the dialogue between civilisations”.³²⁸ This claim is exaggerated but has a true core. The alleged distinction by the United Nations goes back to 2001 when the United Nations celebrated the „Year of Dialogue among Civilizations”. For this occasion, the UN Secretary General’s personal representative for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, Giandomenico Picco, worked together with the Director-General of UNESCO and with several eminent persons to compile a book entitled *Crossing the Divide: Dialogue among Civilizations*.³²⁹ The end of this book features short biographies of „unsung heroes of dialogue”, among whom Fouzi Skalli is presented with his festivals (Abu-'l-Mağd, Aḥmad Kamāl et al. 2001).

How much the festival in Fès is intertwined with considerations of political stability and economic development and to what extent the prominent spiritual argument works as a cover for tourism promotion can be assessed by a closer look at the CV of the festival’s conference president, Abderrafih Zouitene. In addition to his role as President of the Fondation Esprit de Fès et du Festival de Fès des Musiques Sacrées du Monde, Abderrafih Zouitene worked as executive director general of the national airline Royal Air Maroc (RAM) and Director General of Morocco’s National Tourism Office (until October 2018). He was crucial in conceiving and implementing Morocco’s Tourism 2020 Strategy in both positions.³³⁰ In two interviews with Jeune Afrique, Zouitene explained that he wants Fès to be perceived as a city of tolerance and openness towards other cultures and countries in Africa and the world. Most importantly, however, he wants Morocco’s culture to be considered a great culture that sends a message of peace to the world thanks to its diversity and harmonic combination of different influences. According to Zouitene, culture and heritage play an essential role for the citizens of Morocco themselves, as they create cohesion and a sense of openness and tolerance. He then emphasised the massive importance of urban (=cultural) tourism for Morocco. With international networking and the very cost-intensive so-called effect mapping, he aims to put Moroccan festivals on the global agenda of international festivals. He attributes the African aspect of the festivals to the close shared history. He shows that Morocco’s cultural policy dovetails with a general dynamic of partnership at eye level, which was initiated by Mohammed VI and includes other aspects such as the construction of hospitals, the donation of fishing boats or the regularisation of African migrants playing an important role. In 2015, *Leon l’Africain* was also brought to the stage in a major musical show, embodied by the Franco-American-Moroccan

³²⁸ Cf. Zouitene (2019).

³²⁹ Cf. United Nations General Assembly (2001).

³³⁰ A.J. ; Chik (2021).

singer Said Taghmaoui.³³¹ This shows that the state uses the festivals to improve its image worldwide, especially in Africa. Beyond this geopolitical dimension, festivals are also used to raise awareness among the local and foreign population and generally for important political issues. As we have seen above, this happens in the mosques, but it is also relevant at the Festival de Fès des Musiques Sacrées du Monde. One telling example is raising awareness for environmental protection, e.g. in the wake of COP22 in Marrakesh in 2016: For instance, in 2017, the festival's theme was „Water and the Sacred”.³³²

Cultural festivals receive support from the Moroccan monarchy to showcase Morocco's tolerance, religious moderation, democratic orientation and reliability as an international partner country under King Mohammed VI. The Moroccan nation brand, therefore, integrates buzzwords that resonate within the value systems of its mainly Western target group in Europe and the USA. We can see here the outcome of what Joseph Nye would call careful „listening” in public diplomacy to generate soft power since „by definition, soft power means getting others to want the same outcomes you want”, which „requires an understanding of how they are hearing your messages and adapting them accordingly” (Nye 2008, p. 103). Yet, what upsets conservatives about Morocco's music festivals like Mawazine in Rabat, the Gnawa festival in Essaouira or the *Festival de Fès des Musiques Sacrées du Monde*, is the very fact that they redefine the sacred by making it a collective celebration of interfaith and even secular worship of the aesthetic to produce counternarratives against the global challenge of religious extremism (Kapchan 2008b). By actively promoting this redefinition and by putting old traditions into new global contexts, the monarchy, on the one side, risks upsetting religious traditionalists. On the other side, however, it reaches new publics by making its claims to universal values such as modernity and mutual tolerance tangible (or rather experienceable) for anyone even beyond Moroccan borders.³³³ Furthermore, the regime opens Sufi traditions up to outsiders, bolstering

³³¹ F. Dahmani (2015).

³³² Fes Festival of World Sacred Music (2017) and Zouitene (2017).

³³³ Belghazi (2006) contends this analysis by insisting on high ticket prices, which attract an elitist audience and reproduce existing social hierarchies. The elitist character of the *Festival de Fès des Musiques Sacrées du Monde*, especially through the use of French as a main language, is also underlined by Azzaoui (2019). She additionally emphasizes the festival's contribution to the economic development of the city of Fès and the intercultural dialogue. Laan (2012) argued that there is a tension between commercialisation and spiritual experience, which can lead to disappointment. Yet, she also stressed that many performers skillfully bridge the extremes and deem it more important that their religious message is passed. I hence do not fully agree with the elitism argument because although ticket prices of up to 1000 Dirhams for an all-access-pass might limit direct access to some economically potent (often international) people, the festival remains an open-air event which allows anyone to experience and enjoy the performances within the monumental setting of imperial architectural heritage – especially during the free Moroccan performances in the evening.

its legitimacy by promoting Sufism as one of the monarchy's acclaimed pillars of Morocco's moderate interpretation of Islam (Kapchan 2008b, p. 477).



Figure 23: Screenshot of a documentary on the Festival de Fès de la Culture Soufie, broadcast on al Aoula in 2018 with the musicians gathering in front of a giant image of King Mohammed VI

The *Festival de Fès de la Culture Soufie* is reported on in national and international media. In 2018 and 2019, the first Moroccan TV channel, Al Aoula (Figure 23),³³⁴ and the second French channel, France 2,³³⁵ produced reportages featuring snippets from a discussion forum about religions' (particularly Sufism's) contribution to peace. Furthermore, musical-spiritual acts by members of Sufi tariqas (sufi brotherhoods) from all over the world performed in front of a large photograph of Mohammed VI, almost casually underlining the king's religious authority and his support for and from Sufi brotherhoods. Sufi culture is mainstreamed as a universal cultural heritage of humanity (Mesgguid 2021). The zaouiya's mausoleum is substituted by the whole city, and the exclusive circle of initiated Sufi disciples is extended to include the entire humanity, with King Mohammed VI replacing the traditional Sufi saint as the emblematic figure of worship. At the same time, the state is keen on maintaining Fès' image of Morocco's spiritual capital, harbouring excellence in religious science and preserving Islamic tradition. To date, holy places like the mosque of Qaraouiyyine University, the mausoleum of Moulay Idris II or the zaouiya of Ahmad al-Tidjani (founder of Tidjaniyya Sufi brotherhood that expanded to North and West Africa) are reserved for Muslim visitors. They continue to function as destinations of Islamic (yet not necessarily less commercialised) pilgrimages – for national and

³³⁴ Festival de Fès de la Culture Soufie (2019).

³³⁵ El Ouazzani (2019).

foreign pilgrims alike, mainly from West Africa, who also recognise and worship the Moroccan kings as their spiritual leaders and descendants of the Prophet Mohammed (J. Berriane 2015; Carboni & Perelli 2018).

Paradoxically, however, with the state investing heavily in the festivals – be it in an honest attempt to preserve and promote marginalised cultures or as a way to push economic development and legitimise the monarchy – the risk of abuse and detrimental effects on the regime’s credibility may also rise. The example of the *Festival de Fès des musiques sacrées* shows this perfectly well. On 26 February 2021, the chamber responsible for the persecution of financial crimes at the Appellate Court in Fès sued Abderrafih Zouitene and Faouzi Skalli (among other officials of the festival) for fraud and embezzlement of public funds. In 2016, a report from the foundation’s financial controller detected an unjustified deficit of more than 6 million Dirhams. Furthermore, Zouitene was accused of having misappropriated 470.000 Dirhams to rent a plane to visit Milan with his daughter. Moreover, he was tried for falsifying the minutes of the foundation’s general assembly of 2015 and transferring administrative and accounting documents to an unknown destination. While the festival’s former officials were both convicted (alongside other responsible managers and contractors) for one year in jail and the payment of 20.000 Dirhams each,³³⁶ an appellate court in 2023 changed the verdict into one one-year suspended sentence for Zouitene and discharged Skalli.³³⁷ However, for now, there is no sign that such scandals will have any impact on the festival scene and the readiness of the monarchy to continue relying upon them to legitimise the king and his activities.

6.2.3. The Capitalist Temptation: Seducing by the Prospect of Economic Benefits

6.2.3.1. Performance Legitimation through Cultural Tourism

According to the OECD, in 2019, the pre-pandemic direct contribution of tourism to Morocco’s GDP totalled 82,1 billion Dirhams or 7,1% of total GDP. The tourism sector provided an estimated 565.000 jobs (5,0 % of total employment). In this context, international tourism plays an important role. Between 2010 and 2019, Morocco managed to increase the number of international arrivals from 9,3 million to about 12,9 million tourists. In 2019, the last year before the COVID-19 pandemic, Morocco was ranked 34th worldwide in terms of international arrivals, making the country the most visited among all African and MENA countries. Despite a substantial decrease of 78,5% to 2,8 million arrivals and a drop in revenue from international

³³⁶ Benadad (2022); Hespress FR (2022).

³³⁷ Amourag (2023).

tourism to 36,4 billion Dirhams in 2020, Morocco projected a full tourism recovery to pre-pandemic levels by 2023.³³⁸ According to the UNWTO Tourism Barometer, Morocco experienced an increase in its international tourism receipts during the first 10 to 11 months of 2023 by 34%.³³⁹

These numbers conceal that Morocco's rise to a preferred tourist destination is a recent development. While under Hassan II, the tourism sector remained a secondary factor in Morocco's economic development (Almeida-García 2018, p. 48), this has changed considerably under his son's rule. On 10 January 2001, King Mohammed VI declared at the National Session on Tourism that he considered the promotion of tourism a critical tool „to triumph in the economic and social Jihad and create jobs”.³⁴⁰ This fascinating blend of religious and economic terminology underlined the monarch's ambition to capitalise on his spiritual authority to combat poverty, unemployment and social misery. As we will see, up to this day, this performance claim underlies all political actions in Morocco's tourism sector. Despite the king's command to build upon Morocco's „civilisational heritage and secular culture, known for its traditional hospitality” and use the country's „rich and varied architecture, gastronomy, costumes, crafts and folk arts”, the new tourism strategy dubbed Vision 2010 mainly focussed on the implementation of the *Plan Azur* which concentrated on the creation of six large beach resorts in the kingdom. However, the plan's implementation process was strongly affected by the 2008 financial crisis (Almeida-García 2018, 59f.). By 2010, the strategy was replaced by Vision 2020, which had a much broader scope. In order to „improve the living conditions and standard of living of all” Moroccan citizens and become an „emerging country on the international scene”, all undersigning ministries and state institutions under the effective presidency of King Mohammed VI were „resolutely committed to building a modern, high-performance society that respects its values, a prosperous nation where life is good, which offers the prospect of a better future to all its young people, which is concerned on a daily basis with reducing inequality and exclusion, and which is committed to preserving its natural resources, its cultural values and its civilisational heritage”. In this undertaking, Morocco aimed at making tourism a „powerful locomotive of economic growth” and a „formidable instrument of international promotion”. To „anchor itself to Europe”, Morocco wants to offer „the image of a Kingdom with a long history and a rich civilisational heritage, that of a welcoming, tolerant people open to the world, that of a country that looks to the future and to modernity with

³³⁸ OECD (2010) and UNWTO (2019).

³³⁹ UNWTO (2024).

³⁴⁰ Mohammed VI (2001b).

confidence and determination, and finally that of a responsible Nation committed to adopting the values and principles of sustainable development” (Royaume du Maroc 2010, p. 5). The strategy committed Morocco to a path of economic growth in which even culture is measured by its revenue-generating potential.

Vision 2010 and Vision 2020 are, hence, part of what can be called a „fever of strategies” and a return of strategic planning following neoliberal paradigms promoted by international organisations like the World Bank (Hibou & Ṭozy 2020, 455f.). Withdrawing the responsibility for drafting such plans from ministries and elected representatives (Hibou & Ṭozy 2020, p. 456), Vision 2020 was conceived by international consulting giants like McKinsey and Valyans.³⁴¹ The Vision 2020 set itself the goal to make Morocco one of 20 leading tourist destinations, to create 200.000 new beds, double the tourist arrivals from Europe and attract one million visitors from emerging countries, triple the number of domestic tourism, creating 470.000 new jobs to generate 140 billion Dirhams from tourism until 2020. To fulfil the monarchy’s ambitious performance claim, Morocco wanted to build its sustainable development project upon a lasting management of its natural resources and, above all, upon its „authenticity based on the influence of our culture and traditions, in their hospitality, refinement and openness” (Royaume du Maroc 2010, p. 8).

This intense focus on cultural aspects in the tourism strategy is mirrored in the implementation plans formulated by Vision 2020: The strategy defined eight regions. Each was sketched as suitable for promoting one specific tourism sector (Figure 24). While two of them (Morocco’s Mediterranean coast and the Atlantic coasts in the south) were supposed to promote beach tourism, the south of the Western Sahara, the Atlas regions and the valleys in the east were to become green destinations for nature tourism. Four regions, in turn, were designated to welcome tourists in culture, heritage, business and others, namely Marrakech Atlantique (including Marrakesh, Toubkal, Essaouira), Maroc Centre (including Fès, Meknès, Ifrane), Cap Nord (including Tanger, Tetouan, Chefchaouen, Asilah, Larache) and Centre Atlantique (Casablanca, Rabat, El Jadida) (Royaume du Maroc 2010, p. 12).

³⁴¹ Dalil and Chahid (2022) and el Fassi (2015). To finance the consulting firms’ study interventions, the Hassan II Fund for Economic and Social Development allocated a budget of 100 million Dirhams.

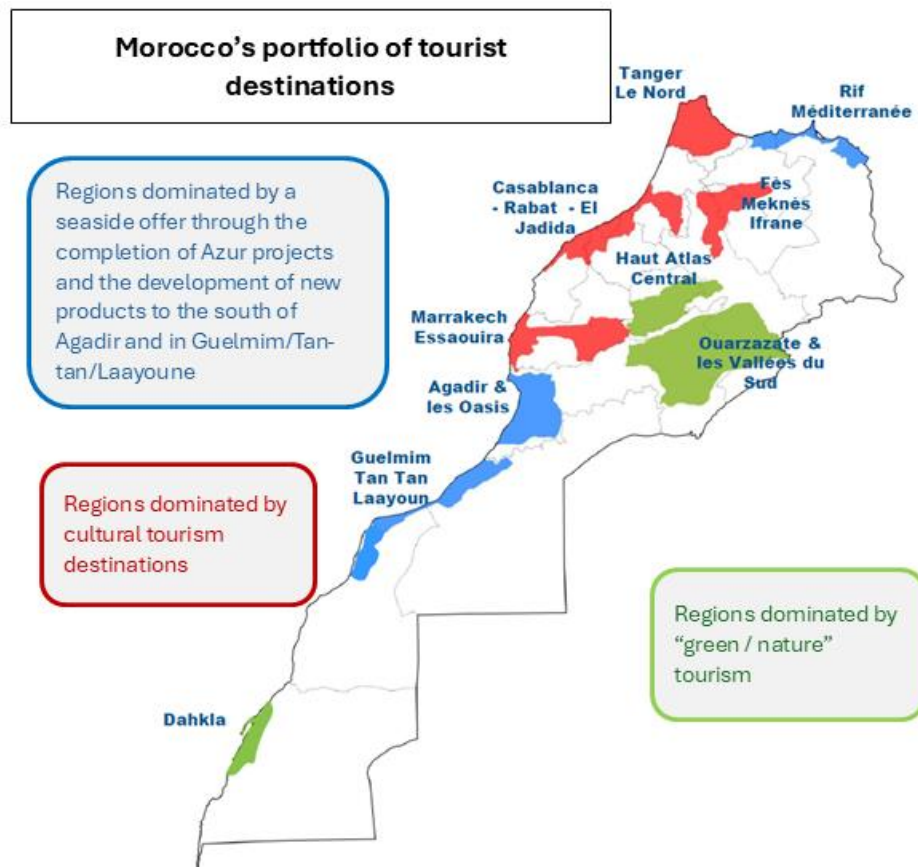


Figure 24: Morocco's portfolio of tourist destinations ³⁴²

For these last destinations to thrive touristically, the ministries formulated the *Programme Patrimoine et Heritage*. It aimed to „enhance Morocco’s cultural identity by structuring and promoting the kingdom’s tangible and intangible heritage, and develop coherent and attractive tourism products” (Royaume du Maroc 2010, p. 14). This involved the authentic renovation and rehabilitation of historical buildings and monuments, the enhancement of tourist infrastructure, including museums and the installation of tourist circuits in the medinas of the imperial cities, and the promotion of festivals (Ministère du Tourisme 2013, p. 23). The financial volume needed to implement the strategy was estimated at 177 billion Dirhams in 2011. Its finance structure is complex and involves state and private investors: In November 2010, the Moroccan Tourism Development Fund (FMDT) was created to accompany the strategy. It was carried by the state and the Fonds Hassan II pour le développement économique et social as well as partner countries. In 2011, King Mohammed VI impulsed the creation of an investment fund to back up his *Vision 2020* strategy. The new fund called Wessal Capital involves the Kingdom of Morocco (via the FMDT) and the Gulf states of VAE (via the Aabar fund), Qatar (via Qatar’s investment authority Qatar Holding), Kuwait (via Al Ajial fund) and Saudi Arabia (via the Public Investment Fund, PIF) which invest a total of 3,4 billion Dollar

³⁴² Adapted from Ministère du Tourisme (2013, 17,18,23).

(~2,5 billion euros). In 2014, Mohammed VI presided over the launching ceremony for the fund's second investment project (the first being Wessal Casablanca Port), i.e. Wessal Bouregreg. It mobilises 9,425 billion Dirhams (~ 900 million euros) and includes the construction of the Grand Théâtre and other infrastructure projects. These infrastructure projects are supposed to create 12.000 jobs in Rabat and attract 4 million tourists to the region, boosting the employment market's growth by an additional 63.000 jobs.³⁴³

In 2018, Morocco's Court of Audit and Samir Kheldouni Sahraoui,³⁴⁴ former head Morocco's National Tourism Office (ONMT), diagnosed a weak implementation rate of Vision 2020. Nevertheless, the royal tourism project initiated a dynamisation of tourism promotion in Morocco and lifted the cultural sector to the forefront of Morocco's economic reforms. The festival and cultural heritage sector especially benefitted from the royal impetus, mainly as a part of business and employment promotion. However, as the strategy clearly stated, the enhancement of Morocco's national identity through cultural action also has a strong foreign policy aspect. By fostering the cultural identity, it aims to create a recognisable national label, a Moroccan brand. This idea was spelt out in even more detail in 2013 when King Mohammed VI called upon his ambassadors to think of themselves as warriors and soldiers defending the kingdom's territorial integrity. To reach the international recognition of Morocco's claim on the Western Sahara, the diplomats and all other state and non-state actors are supposed to contribute to the creation and propagation of a national brand with a strong cultural underpinning centred around the values of tolerance and moderation so brilliantly embodied by the Moroccan civilisation. Within a „framework of a proactive policy”, they should aim „at diversifying and enlarging the scope of our international cooperation.”³⁴⁵ For the Moroccan state, cultural heritage is an important factor of international tourist attractiveness. In 2019, the historic monuments managed by the Ministry of Culture were visited by 2,672 million visitors. They generated a revenue of around 200 million Dirhams (of which ~160 million Dirhams came from ticketing and the rest from fees received through filmmaking and other sources).³⁴⁶

6.2.3.2. The King and the Star System in Cultural Heritage Policy

Another important means to reconcile both – domestic human development and the promotion of a positive image abroad – lies in Morocco's material cultural heritage policies. In the 25 years of King Mohammed VI's reign, enormous sums have been invested into the renovations

³⁴³ MAP (2015c); Mounadi (2014b); Nhaili (2011).

³⁴⁴ Cour des Comptes (2018) and Walter (2018).

³⁴⁵ Mohammed VI (2013b).

³⁴⁶ Interview, Cultural policies, 3. This revenue rose significantly due to the increase in ticket prices.

of the old towns (*medinas*) of major cities like Marrakech, Fès, Meknès, Tanger and Rabat, which are among the sites inscribed on the UNESCO world heritage list (el Fasskaoui 2014a).

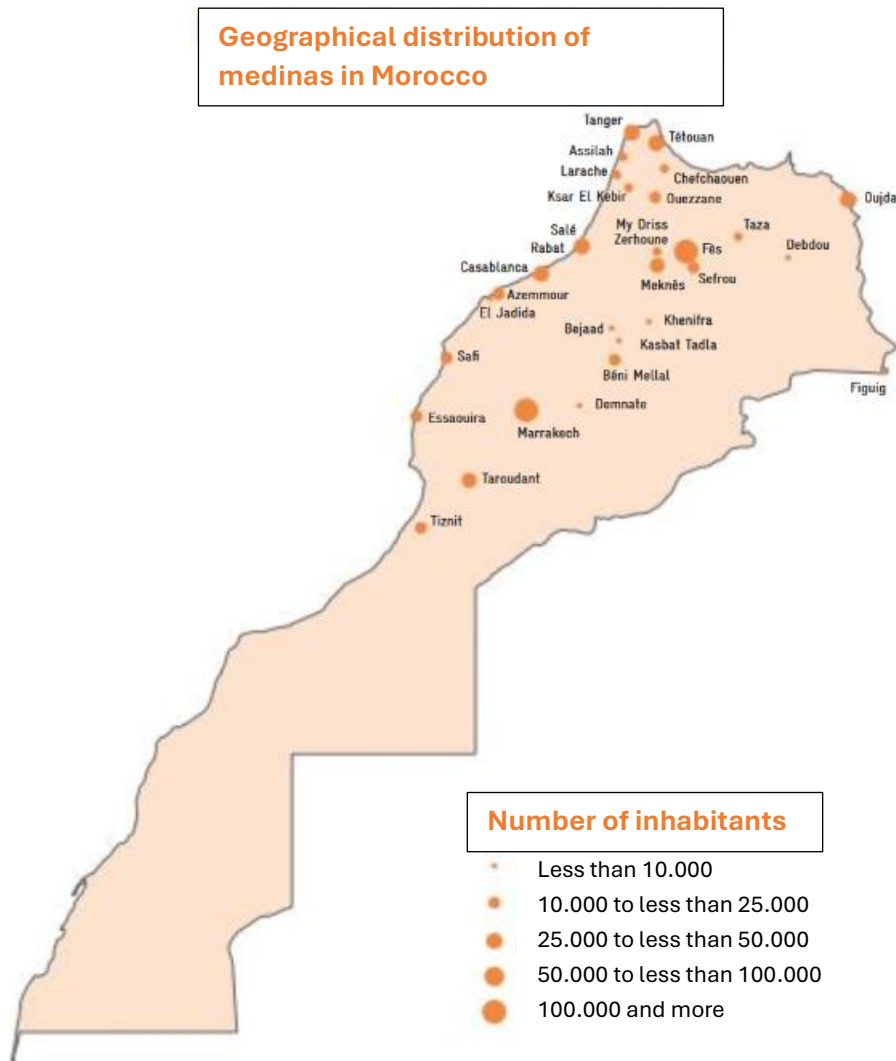


Figure 25: Geographical distribution of medinas in Morocco

However, this only represents a small proportion of the 31 medinas in the kingdom, with a total population of ca. 738.000 inhabitants (Figure 25).³⁴⁷ As Garret (2010) has shown, the late King Hassan II was well aware of urban architecture's role in identity construction. Accepting the material dilapidation of Moroccan cities would have been a sign of moral decline for him. Therefore, since the late 1970s, he called upon urbanists, engineers and architects to seize their responsibility to construct in „conformity with [Moroccan] authenticity and identity”. He strongly promoted what he considered to be representative of the Moroccan „civilisation” and what he deemed useful to instil pride in the Moroccan population and preserve their values in terms of attachment to the Moroccan nation dubbed „Moroccanness” (*marocanité*). Despite the king's directives for „authentic” maintenance of traditional Moroccan architecture, Hassan II

³⁴⁷ Numbers and map adapted from Harroud and Coopération Municipale (CoMun) (2015, 9f.).

was also intrigued by the achievements of modern times. Therefore, he left space to interpret his concept of Moroccan „authenticity” (Garret 2010). As shown in the following, this fuzziness has been maintained under his son, King Mohammed VI. According to former Culture Minister Amine Sbihi, for instance, this was even the principal goal of the *Heritage 2020* strategy, elaborated by the Ministry of Culture in 2014: „The first objective is for heritage to reinforce the values of identity and citizenship. This means taking action to raise awareness of our heritage, disseminate it, include it in school textbooks, or simply make our roots known to the widest possible audience. It’s a set of actions that make heritage a factor of identity and national pride” (H. Mekouar 2014a). While the strategy has never been fully implemented, it still elucidates how much the monarchy’s continued perception of the nation-building role of cultural heritage has transpired into the work of even one of the most marginalised ministries in the Moroccan government – and this especially in the aftermath of the opposition movements in Morocco of 2011. The renovations target the local population and tourists alike. While the former’s homes are restored and equipped with new sanitary facilities, the latter benefit from reorganised touristic circuits, freshly paved streets and neatly observed regulations that impose ‘authentic Moroccanness’ on the shopkeepers and restaurant.³⁴⁸ This urban development of the medinas has been described in terms of „gentrification” and „folklorisation” (Escher & Petermann 2013; Kurzac-Souali 2013; Roussillon 2010).

Yet, it is not only the result of voluntary and visionary investments to promote a recognisable Moroccan trademark of architectural styles. Instead, it can also be explained by the degradation of the old urban tissue and a series of tragic events in the medinas. Despite numerous renovation programmes between 1980 and 2024, Moroccan authorities mostly remained in a reaction logic, which kept them acting on urgent matters in emergencies. In parallel, however, the monarchy has learned to appropriate these urgent interventions for legitimation purposes. In this secondary logic, the past helps build a new, economically prosperous future where history serves modernity. Structurally, the successive governments have often called upon the *Fonds Hassan II pour le développement économique et social* to support their actions. This institution was created by the late King Hassan II in 1999. Yet, only since Mohammed VI came to power has it been effectively used to fund projects that did not reach unanimity within the national governments. This financial flexibility makes it a parallel institution at the palace’s disposal that decides on the allocation of the funds³⁴⁹ while avoiding accountability. The renovations of

³⁴⁸ Interview, Cultural heritage, 5.

³⁴⁹ According to an official of the Fonds Hassan II, “the decision to support a project is taken at a very, very high level. The same goes for the amount of the contribution”. Cf. Interview, Cultural heritage, 6.

the medinas of Tetouan, Fès, Meknès, Salé, Rabat, Casablanca, Marrakesh and Essaouira were hence at least partially funded by the Fonds Hassan II,³⁵⁰ which underlines these projects' prominence among royal priorities. The royal contribution is supposed to ensure the projects' lasting impact. The palace closely monitors the progress. In the case of Essaouira, for instance, royal advisor André Azoulay, himself a native of Essaouira, personally watches over the urban rehabilitation project. Yet, he leaves the final word about the new usage of renovated objects to the king, who, in turn, bases his decision on his advisors' and the ministries' proposals considering the current needs and conceptual ideas.³⁵¹ In other cases, the projects are monitored by evaluation committees that meet on local, regional and national levels under the surveillance of the Ministry of the Interior and its representatives, who are appointed by the king himself, i.e. the governors on a local level and the walis on the regional level.³⁵² While the origins of the modern renovation projects date back to the times of Hassan II, such projects have gained momentum under Mohammed VI. This development can best be observed in the medina of Fès.

6.2.3.2.1. Legitimation through Renovation Programmes in Fès

Founded in the 9th century, the old town of Fès (henceforth called medina) reached its blossom in the 14th century under the Marinides. It is famous for its many historical monuments (ca. 14.000), including the oldest university in the world, the al Qaraouiyyine. Today, the medina stretches over 300ha, has a population of almost 160.000 people and a high density of 800-1200 persons/ha (El Harrouni 2018, p. 544). During the French occupation, the city of Fès underwent considerable changes. The old town, with its labyrinthic system of narrow streets and old houses, lacked the comfort of modern Western cities. This is why the French constructed a new town with new houses with electricity, a fresh- and wastewater system, a railway station and broad roads in which modern vehicles like cars and lorries could easily navigate.³⁵³ Attracted by the new comfort, the medina of Fès was increasingly abandoned by those Moroccans wealthy enough to afford this standard of living. More and more of them sold or sublet their former domiciles to the poorer strands of the urban society. Also, the city's economic structure changed massively, with the caravansaries (fondouks) losing their utility as harbourages to

³⁵⁰ Cf. Interview, Cultural heritage, 6. According to a document provided to the author by the official, the fund's financial contributions to the project budgets ranged between 100 million Dirhams (for Fès) and 400 million Dirhams (for Salé), each between 2018/2019 and 2023.

³⁵¹ Cf. Interview, Cultural heritage, 6.

³⁵² Cf. Interview, Cultural heritage, 6. Several interview partners underlined that the effectiveness of cultural projects strongly depends on the personal engagement of the king's representatives like walis. While Essaid Zniber, wali of the Fès-Meknès region since 2015, is described as very competent and culture-friendly, others, like the wali of Marrakesh, are less enthusiastic and are unable to handle the domain properly. Cf. Interview, International culture cooperation, 1 and Interview, Cultural heritage, 4.

³⁵³ For a detailed and nuanced perspective on the dichotomy of new and old towns in Fès, see Jelidi (2012).

modern stockpiles and hostels. Many families now inhabiting the historical buildings and riyaḍs did not have the same emotional attachment to the old buildings and did not dispose of the necessary means and technological knowledge to preserve the historic architecture. Over the years, property and ownership constellations became more complicated and often unclear. Environmental pollution and the inaccessibility of the often overcrowded and overused sites further contributed to massive degradation of the structures (Cour des Comptes 2017c; World Bank 1999). Furthermore, as we have seen above, Hassan II had actively undermined the religious authority of the famous al Qaraouiyine University since the 1960s, thereby effectively curtailing the significance of the former imperial city as a prestigious site of intelligentsia (Sheline 2018, pp. 194–196). To stop the deterioration, UNESCO labelled the medina of Fès a „cultural treasure of humanity” in 1975 before calling upon international solidarity to rescue this unique urban space in 1980. In 1981, the Moroccan government succeeded in inscribing the old town on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Furthermore, in 1989, the state created the *Agence pour la Dédensification et la Réhabilitation de la Médina de Fès* (ADER-Fès) to preserve the unique urban tissue of Fès. Since then, with the help of UNESCO, the World Bank and bilateral agreements with countries like the USA, ADER has been working hard to combat the dilapidation of the old town.³⁵⁴

In September 1996, in a royal letter, King Hassan II called upon urban residents to become more active in ensuring the cleanliness of their environment. This royal letter was followed by the creation of four new associations in Fès in 1996 and another two in 1997, which engaged in demolishing abandoned buildings and ruins (World Bank 1999, p. 18). Despite emergency operations by ADER on ruinous buildings, the collapse of buildings in the medina and neighbouring areas caused over 157 human casualties between 1985 and 2004. In the wake of the last accident, in November 2004, King Mohammed VI visited Fès and called for an urgent programme to save human lives in the old town in December 2004.³⁵⁵ Since its launch, this programme has taken stock of hundreds of endangered buildings. It has enabled 476 households to be rehoused, 1.592 buildings to be upgraded, 283 buildings to be reinforced, and 13 ruins to be removed, at an estimated cost of 498,25 million Dirhams.³⁵⁶ Between 1993 and 2004, the number of buildings in danger of collapse inside the UNESCO-protected area of the medina increased from 1097 to 4207. Thanks to the programme, the number decreased to 3666 in 2012

³⁵⁴ For an overview of the different renovation and rehabilitation phases see El Harrouni (2017) and El Harrouni (2018).

³⁵⁵ On a national scale, I. Bennani (2016, p. 141) counts at least 262 casualties for the period between 1985 and 2010 alone.

³⁵⁶ ALBAYANE (2013).

and 2977 in 2015 (Cour des Comptes 2017c, p. 4). This shows how much cultural heritage preservation is dependent on royal intervention. It is the king who initiates the renovation programmes and benefits from performance legitimisation in return. As I. Bennani (2012, 2016, 68 and 149ff.) has shown, however, these interventions concern mainly the historical neighbourhoods and emblematic buildings of symbolic value, and less the irregular residential areas, where the state's rehabilitation programme is characterised by discontinuity, a lack of budget and provisory actions. With regards to historical quarters, in turn, a more detailed examination of the components of the urban development programmes reveals that, in the case of the kingdom's old medinas, this performance legitimisation is not limited to a diffuse cultural identity component alone but is supposed to yield tangible effects on all aspects of the inhabitants' living conditions. According to the ADER-Fès, since

„2010, the medina of Fès has benefited from several programmes launched on the instructions of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, may God help him. The total amount of investments made and those in progress amounts to 3.000 million dirhams, the aim of which is to implement the strategy of rehabilitating the various socio-economic components and living spaces within the medina of Fès. This strategy is based on the gradual implementation of the following operational levers

1. protecting human life and preserving the built environment;
2. upgrading the infrastructure;
3. enhancing historic sites and monuments;
4. preserving and developing traditional teaching, craft, commercial, religious and cultural activities;
5. strengthening spatial links between the medina and the new town;
6. improving the living environment and economic and social inclusion;
7. Structuring the urban development process (organisation plan and architectural charter)”.³⁵⁷

Reports of the national press agency MAP emphasise the gratitude and appreciation of the Moroccan people for the king's intervention on their behalf. In 2013, for instance, the urban development programmes were renewed and extended in a ceremony presided over by King Mohammed VI and signed by all relevant government departments. The MAP reported that the „Sovereign then went on a walking tour through the narrow streets of the old medina of Fès, to the applause and cheers of the citizens, who were keen to express their allegiance and loyalty to HM the King. The Sovereign visited several monuments earmarked for rehabilitation, including the Khrachfiyine Bridge, the Mohammadia Medersa, the Seffarine Medersa,³⁵⁸ Souk Sebbaghine and the Terrafine Bridge. The ceremony was attended by the Head of Government, HM the King's advisors, members of the government, local elected representatives and some other civilian and military figures.”³⁵⁹ Reporting on this signing ceremony, the MAP strongly

³⁵⁷ Presentation held for the author by ADER officials in Fès on 8 May 2024. Cf. Interview, Cultural heritage, 8.

³⁵⁸ For the decline of Islamic education in Moroccan medersas see Eickelman (2007).

³⁵⁹ MAP (2013a).

emphasised Mohammed VI's personal involvement in the rehabilitation projects and his leading federating role for the Moroccan government. The performance claims are symbolically underpinned by the king's subsequent bath in the cheering crowd who pledged their allegiance to their king.

Despite renewed critique issued by the Court of Audit against ADER for non-compliance and lack of execution of several projects (Cour des Comptes 2009, 2017c), ADER officials take much pride in the expertise acquired over more than 30 years in executing the royal urban development programmes. They claim that between 2010 and 2023, their interventions have led to an intensification of craft, tourism and service activities through sustained growth (Figure 26). This growth resulted in an increase in the number of certified craftspeople by 2000%, in turnover of small and medium-sized craft businesses by almost 270%, in small and medium-sized crafts business creations by 783%, in tourist transportation by 645%, in the number of travel agencies by 107% of and in the number of restaurants by 123%. Furthermore, the number of tourist arrivals has more than doubled, and the number of overnight stays increased by 81%, making the imperial city of Fès the number one cultural destination in the 2023 Trip Advisor ranking and 4th in 2024 ranking.³⁶⁰ This development may imply that Porter (2000, p. 60) was wrong to suggest about 25 years ago that „the more it is apparent that Fès's medina has been manipulated for tourist consumption, the less appealing it is for tourists. Tourists interpret signs of manipulation as signs of adulteration which compromise the site's authenticity, and which subsequently necessitate the search for other sites which are thought to be still uncorrupted and 'real'. The reason that the medina is able to attract the numbers of tourists that it does is precisely because it is perceived as not being touristic.”

Indicator for the medina of Fes	2010	2023	Variation 2010-2023
Accommodation units	60	134	123%
Beds	1056	2448	132%
Arrivals	35553	71895	102%
Stays over night	91754	166498	81%

Figure 26: Evolution of touristic indicators in Fès between 2010 and 2023

In fact, the accomplishments of ADER's programmes are well visible everywhere in the medina. With the help of the US-financed Millenium Challenge Corporation (MCC), intensely polluting craft workers have been relocated to a new workshop facility in an area situated outside the medina in the Ain Nokbi neighbourhood, reducing noise and pollution in the old town. According to an evaluation executed on behalf of the MCC, the majority of the relocated workers seemed content with their new and healthier location and the improvement of their

³⁶⁰ Tripadvisor (2024).

working conditions (Alaoui Aziz et al. 2013).³⁶¹ This measure underlined the importance the Moroccan state associates with the promotion of urban crafts businesses. They are essential for absorbing unemployment, generating revenue, and maintaining economic family solidarity. Yet, also these professions' symbolic value and capital cannot be overestimated. The craftspeople are bearers of a traditional (almost nostalgic) knowledge about Moroccan heritage. Hence, they are an important puzzle piece in preserving Morocco's cultural authenticity (Halim 2014), which the monarchy has proclaimed essential for Morocco's national identity.³⁶²

Goal of the development programme	Period	Number of sites and buildings	Allocated budget in million DH	Number of beneficiaries
A: Saving lives and preserving the built environment	2013-2024	4646 buildings	530	7960
B: Enhancing the value of sites and monuments used in traditional education, production and trade activities	2013-2019	75 buildings/monuments	923,5	8537
C: Improving accessibility and attractiveness (Medina-New City connection)	2017-2022	12 sites	400	population and visitors
D: Improving living conditions and social and economic inclusion	2018-2024	336 buildings	1053	4040
Total		5069	2906,5	20.537*
* Estimated number, not accounting of national and international visitors/tourists.				

Figure 27: Achievements of the ADER's development programmes in Fès (2010-2024)

Furthermore, the major alleys and streets in the medina are freshly paved, the entrances and shop openings along the main tourist routes are equipped with new doors and windows, and many of the emblematic buildings of the city, including ramparts, fondouks, historical medersas or mosques, have been restored and provided with information panels. Nine new parking spaces have been installed at the entrances of the old town. Furthermore, brand new parks and gardens along the city walls invite local citizens and tourists to relax from the daily hustle on benches in the shade of palm trees and bushes. ADER claims that, between 2013 and 2024, ca. 20.537 people benefited from the urban development programmes (visitors and tourists excluded), which were carried out for a total cost of over 2,9 billion Dirhams (Figure

³⁶¹ Some craftsmen, however, considered their new workshops unsuitable for their needs or criticised the interruption of the economic production chains. It was caused by the workshops' relocation into an area outside of the medina, which rendered them unable to compete with the lower prices of the workers who had remained in the old town. Cf. Alaoui Aziz et al. (2013). Among the traditional zellige and pottery workers I met in Fès in May 2024, craftspeople who moved to Ain Nokbi seemed content to have ample space capable of welcoming groups of tourists who arrive by bus. These visitors were offered pottery and zellige workshops and could buy directly from the workshop owners without an intermediary.

³⁶² According to Halim (2014), ironically, promoting tourism in this way is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it may help this traditional artwork to survive. On the other hand, it also contributes to the commercialisation and folklorisation of this Moroccan heritage, leading to cultural stagnation that only seeks to satisfy touristic expectations. Conversely, according to el Assaad (2014), in other cities like Safi, the delocalisation of craftworkers into dedicated neighbourhoods is meant to contribute to innovation.

27).³⁶³ Through renovations, resettlements and indemnifications, the programme for buildings in danger of collapse affected almost 8000 households with weak revenue.

According to ADER, most of the citizens concerned „have expressed a feeling of well-being, confidence/trust and gratefulness”. Furthermore, ADER contributed to „improving working conditions and incomes and preserving the dignity of 4000 craftspeople and traders” by rehabilitating 41 *fondouks*, seven traditional *souqs*, three *qissariats*, three tanneries and one craft complex.³⁶⁴ Also, on a procedural basis, ADER has been described as a role model given the participatory nature of its „Frontal aide” approach (Harroud & Coopération Municipale [CoMun] 2018; Raftani & CoMun 2014). In this approach, ADER allows citizens whose buildings require renovation to choose the company to carry out the work. A social unit within ADER provides logistical, technical and consultative support as well as a maximum financial contribution of up to 50% or 80.000 Dirhams. By giving the inhabitants of the buildings decisive power and financial responsibility, the ADER ensures that the beneficiaries get emotionally involved, develop an interest in the future maintenance of the historical buildings, and eventually appropriate the cultural heritage. In an interview with the author, one ADER official described his mission as urging the people to stop neglecting and fleeing the medina, inspire new dynamics, revalorise the old town and „reconcile” the people from the new town with their original space. He also perceived himself as a „federator” who mediates between individuals, traditional craftsmen, the Wilaya and the Inspection of Historic Monuments at the Ministry of Culture. He also saw it as his duty to attract tourists to discover the old town’s authenticity while respecting the sites’ „cultural identity” so as not to affect the cultural heritage itself.³⁶⁵

This strategy is particularly interesting in the case of the *fondouks*, former harbourages for travelling merchants and peasants in Marinid times. Until recently, the old houses were often neglected and densely inhabited. Moroccan authorities have begun to evacuate and restore many of these old inns. They transform them into showrooms for traditional Moroccan handicrafts. The former inhabitants are often only allowed to return to their houses if they can contribute to the folkloristic and tourist-focused image. Otherwise, they receive compensation and new housing in the modern parts of the cities. From an economic point of view, this procedure helps to refinance the renovations. Therefore, the decision on whether to restore old

³⁶³ The most recent projects (2018-23) for the renovations of the old towns of Meknès and Fès are worth 800 million Dirhams (~ 80 million Euros) and 583 million Dirhams (~ 58,3 million Euros) according to documents provided to the author by the Ministry of Culture.

³⁶⁴ Presentation held for the author by ADER officials in Fès on 8 May 2024. Interview, Cultural heritage, 8.

³⁶⁵ Interview, Cultural heritage, 9.

buildings rests upon at least two considerations: a) What is the historic value of the building? b) How much can the restored building contribute to its own restoration in terms of entrance fees or taxes?³⁶⁶ Amine Sbihi, the former Minister of Culture and creator of the *Heritage 2020* plan, puts it like this: „We want to make the most of our heritage so that it contributes to the economy because investing in heritage is not a waste of money. On the contrary, it can be a real lever for development.”³⁶⁷ The *Heritage 2020* strategy initially set out to break with the old image of Moroccan folklore as it was produced and reproduced by the French colonisers (Girard 2006; Roussillon 2010). Yet it appears that in the country’s economic interest, architectural „façadism” and folklore still trump the professed commitment to the social reality of urban life. The gentrification of the old towns is often the consequence, giving foreign investors priority over local inhabitants.³⁶⁸ Fouad Serrhini, director of the ADER-Fès, explained this in more favourable terms: „The aim is to turn these fondouks into pools of job and wealth creation, boosting tourist appeal and creating lucrative and profitable economic activities, the revenues from which will be ploughed back into operations to conserve the cultural heritage of the Fès medina [...] The Sovereign had recommended that we adopt a dynamic vision for preserving these places, aiming to integrate heritage into development projects and not just embalming it in a vision that sacralises the past”.³⁶⁹ With this formulation, Fouad Serrhini echoed the exact wording King Mohammed VI employed in his speech in front of the UNESCO heritage committee in 1999. Thereby, he reasserted the king’s prominent position in the promotion of Morocco’s cultural heritage for the sake of economic development.

This shows that renovating the medinas is not a simple matter of economic interest in tourism promotion. It is a social project that aims to improve the living conditions of the people dwelling in Fès, particularly those roaming the old town. This project is a part of the royal vision to „restore the former glory [le lustre d’antan] of the kingdom’s spiritual capital”.³⁷⁰ How much the renovation works have a regime legitimating function can easily be deduced from the launching and inspection ceremonies for the king’s renovation programmes.

On 23 May 2017, for instance, King Mohammed VI visited the kingdom’s proclaimed spiritual capital to inspect the monuments renovated by the ADER,³⁷¹ including five ancient medersas

³⁶⁶ Interview, Cultural heritage, 5 + 6. Interview, Cultural policies, 10.

³⁶⁷ H. Mekouar (2014b).

³⁶⁸ The ongoing gentrification and commercialisation of Morocco’s old towns have been the object of some insightful studies, including the collective volume by Coslado et al. (2013).

³⁶⁹ Y. S. Alami (2016).

³⁷⁰ Darouiche (2019); le Matin (2013a); Zejly and Idrissi (2022).

³⁷¹ According to the material presented by the ADER, the programme was executed between 2013-2018 and operated with a budget of 335 million Dirhams, renovating 27 historical monuments, including, among others, 2

rehabilitated for a budget of 43 million Dirhams. The king's walk through the cheering crowds in the medina of Fès and his inauguration visit to the renovated medersas was accompanied by Irina Bokova, director general of UNESCO, and Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, director-general of the ICESCO, as well as the king's advisors, members of the government and several high-ranking officials (Figure 28).³⁷² The inspection ceremony also featured a talk by Habous Minister Ahmed Toufiq, who praised the restoration of the medersas and their opening to accommodate up to 105 students and teachers of Qaraouiyyine University. He also announced a new study cycle which, approved by *amir al mouminine* himself, would allow students to pursue a training that „is ideally suited to the type of institution that Al Quaraouiyine University is, in line with the vocation that the Sovereign would like to strengthen, in order to link its past to its present, strengthen the skills required for the effort of interpretation (Ijtihad) and judiciously argue the dialogue about this religion in the most appropriate way possible“.³⁷³

The Habous Minister, thus, seized the opportunity to bolster the king's religious authority as the highest leader of the faithful and warrantor of a moderate interpretation of Islam. The inspection ceremony, furthermore, featured ADER Director General Fouad Serrhini's very technical presentation of ADER's accomplishments in saving the city's heritage. Fouad Serrhini commended the king's efforts to preserve the history of Fès by saying that

„the message addressed by HM King Mohammed VI to the participants at the 23rd session of the World Heritage Committee, held in November 1999 in Marrakech, and the one addressed by the Sovereign on the occasion of the launch of the ceremonies marking the 1200th anniversary of the founding of the city of Fès, have constituted, for many specialists, a roadmap and a plan of action for the promotion and development of the historical fabric of the city. The royal commitment towards Morocco's academic and spiritual capital and its heritage has been illustrated through the restoration programme of 27 historic monuments”.

historical bridges (3,9 million Dirhams), 2 city walls (5,4 million Dirhams), 3 fortresses (18,8 million Dirhams), 3 fondouks (34,9 million Dirhams), 3 tanneries (97,7 million Dirhams), 1 kissaria (30,5 million Dirhams), 1 souk (7,1 million Dirhams), 2 domiciles (18,6 million Dirhams), 1 ancient bank (7,8 million Dirhams), 1 library of the Qaraouiyyine (8,5 million Dirhams), 1 astronomical observatory (3,6 million Dirhams), 1 mausoleum (2,8 million Dirhams), 1 hamam (4,5 million Dirhams) and 5 exceptional medersas. The renovation of the 5 medersas cost 10,7 million Dirhams (Medersa Sahrij), 3,8 million Dirhams (Medersa Sabaaiyyine), 15 million Dirhams (Medersa Mesbahia), 5,5 million Dirhams (Medersa Mohammedia), 8 million Dirhams (Medersa Seffarine). Cf. Babas (2017); El Ouardighi (2017). Images of the renovated elements can be found in this slide show, cf. ADER-Fès (2017a).

³⁷² Morocco World News (2017a).

³⁷³ Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques (2017).



Figure 29: King Mohammed VI and UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova inspecting the achievements of the renovation programmes in Fès. Source: MAP (2017)

Fouad Serrhini, thus, presented King Mohammed VI as an internationally renowned and knowledgeable visionary committed to preserving the precious national heritage. In front of a huge Moroccan flag and next to ceremonial photographs of the late King Hassan II and his son, the latter then bestowed decorations of honour upon „personalities who participated in the achievement of the rehabilitation program of the monuments of the old medina of Fès, launched by the Sovereign on March 04th, 2013.”³⁷⁴



Figure 28: King Mohammed VI awarding Moroccan officials and mâalems for their work within the rehabilitation programme in Fès, broadcast in al Aoula (first Moroccan TV channel 2017)

Apart from state officials, King Mohammed VI also decorated ordinary people such as mâalems. These craftsmen had shown a particular mastery of their art, including woodwork and decorative elements such as ceramic zellige. What could have been a

³⁷⁴ MAP (2017c).

very technical routine visit was elevated to a highly symbolic event. The first national television channel broadcasted the whole event (Figure 29).³⁷⁵ It displayed the tight triangular relationship between the urban landscape of Fès, Mohammed VI as king of Morocco and Commander of the Faithful, and his people who strive to demonstrate their loyalty to the crown by protecting the kingdom's national heritage.³⁷⁶ It showed how the sovereign himself rewards allegiance to the monarchy and patriotic engagement for royally determined national matters. By establishing this link between heritage protection and royally bestowed honour, the monarchy creates a reservoir of popular support and legitimacy. Every person who – in the future – engages in heritage maintenance could potentially do so to receive royal recognition or at least could do so knowing that the king approves of his/her actions. This makes the 2017 inauguration ceremony an impressive occasion where the protection of national heritage served as an opportunity to publicly demonstrate the king's legitimacy and openly showcase the royal co-option of ordinary people and state officials alike. Yet, combining the inauguration event for renovated medersas with a decoration ceremony can also be interpreted as the monarchy's attempt to raise the Moroccan population's awareness of the importance of heritage protection.

The 2017 inauguration is far from being the only example where this instrumentalisation can be observed is proven by another visit to Fès one year later. This time, Mohammed VI came to inspect the progress of the renovation works. During the visit, he also launched the restoration of the al Batha-museum and the construction of a museum on Jewish culture. In a lengthy article by the state-owned news agency MAP published on 15 April 2018, the regime made sure to emphasise several times that the projects visited or launched by Mohammed VI are reified tokens of the king's preoccupation with the protection of Morocco's unique cultural legacy in Fès and his eagerness to make it a touristic asset in the kingdom's economic development strategy. The article continued that the construction of the al Batha Museum and the construction of a Jewish museum testify to Amir al-Mouminine's interest in preserving Moroccan Jews' spiritual heritage as a symbol of Morocco's rich and diverse cultural identity. Finally, the article insisted on the people's gratitude and their demonstration of loyalty to the king.³⁷⁷

The intensive emphasis on the king's efforts to protect the kingdom's cultural identity and promote socio-economic development is yet another telling example of performance and

³⁷⁵ ADER-Fès (2017b).

³⁷⁶ Most of the honoured persons even performed the very respectful, almost submissively venerating gesture of attempting to kiss the king's hand.

³⁷⁷ MAP Express (2019).

ideological legitimization. For now, such practices to improve the attractiveness of the medinas may engender a rise in revenues from tourism. Ultimately, though, they may lead to an alienation from the medinas by the local populace, who feel packed in open-air museums, and the tourists looking for authentic and truly inhabited, lively cities (Porter 2000, p. 60). This dovetails with the impression of a Moroccan heritage expert regularly called upon when preparing UNESCO applications for the Moroccan government. In an interview with the author, he explained that Moroccan authorities still consider „culture as a luxury” and assess culture only in terms of financial turnover, ignoring that culture can be a productive sector not only in economic terms but also regarding human development. Yet, heritage restoration projects are „treated like any other project” and executed under time pressure: When the king is announced to come for inauguration, the project must be ready. This results in hasty face-liftings and renovations „instead of real restorations”, running completely counter to the Venice Charter of 1964, calling for minimal interventions respecting a site’s age.³⁷⁸ This is evidence that political and economic reasons often lurk beneath Moroccan heritage projects. In fact, the historical sites’ contribution to boosting the monarchy’s image is a crucial asset to Morocco’s cultural policies. Yet, looking beneath the new shiny appearance and the alleged reaffirmation of Fès’ traditional status as spiritual capital and hub for Islamic studies is a worthwhile endeavour. It has been advanced that Mohammed VI *de facto* expanded upon the intellectual marginalisation of Fès that started under his father in the 1960s. For instance, Sheline (2018, p. 199) convincingly argued that the

„newly renovated manifestation of Al-Qarawiyyin mosque/university is as a museum, a place to observe authentic and ancient practices of religious learning, while those who wish to obtain state accreditation and employment as an imam or Friday preacher are required to do so through the state institutions in Rabat. By portraying Fès and Al-Qarawiyyin as heritage sites rather than a current source of religious authority, the regime reinforces the centrality of Rabat as the locus of political and religious power. In addition, Fès has been successfully converted into a living museum, whose message reinforces the official position that Moroccan Islam is authentic and grounded in tradition. The success of Hassan II’s efforts to move the seat of official religious accreditation away from the once powerful capital of Fès to the relatively minor city of Rabat is demonstrated in Muhammad VI’s decision to renovate these now toothless institutions.”

In this regard, Fès is not the only case where the monarchy’s renovation strategy reveals some significant downsides. Many medinas are renovated in a more or less uniform way to become „Disneyland” copies of their original appearance. In the rebranded urban context, original inhabitants become living relics – or even a nuisance if they do not accept to act as ornamental extras (G. Becker 2014; Girard 2006; Navez-Bouchanine 2010; Roussillon 2010). Local specificities are often sacrificed to what is believed to please tourists looking for an „authentic”

³⁷⁸ Interview, Cultural heritage, 3. His accounts echoed the observations of Naïmi (2016, p. 339).

Arabian experience of 1001 nights in Morocco.³⁷⁹ Here, the adaption to the tourists' orientalist imagination coincides with the impact of the king's directive about the maintenance of an „authentic” urban appearance. Adie (2021, p. 109) went as far as to argue that „the modern heritage movement in Morocco is merely recycling colonial conceptions of what is ‘Moroccan’”. Yet, according to her, Moroccan state officials do not stop there. Not „only is Morocco drawing from the colonial heritage preservation movement, but it is also, by internalising the colonial discourse around its cultural heritage, reinforcing Orientalist conceptualisations of space, particularly urban, in post-colonial Morocco” (Adie 2021, p. 109). However, there are also other reasons for this development. The most important is the lack of public and private funds to carry out the renovations according to state-of-the-art procedures, including an extensive study and archive phase. Another reason for the uniformity is the lack of trained *mâalems*, i.e., experts in renovating historical buildings of different eras. Consequently, the work is mandated by companies with no or minimal experience in the restoration business.³⁸⁰ Furthermore, there is a lack of judicial regulations on the real estate, architectural and cultural heritage side. For instance, the organisation plan (plan d'aménagement) for the medina of Fès was only realised in 2022 and covers 300 ha. It regulates all investments in renovation, restoration, and construction projects. The architectural charter, however, is still underway and shall provide information and recommendations on all details regarding materials, designs, etc., specified according to the type of building concerned by an intervention. Tight deadlines and scarce financial resources are another reason why the „identical reconstruction” often results in „façadism”. In some cases, even unauthentic materials such as armoured concrete³⁸¹ instead of clay, stone, and timber are used, and patterns that are alien to the Moroccan context are applied, such as Middle Eastern styles. Another reason could be seen in the predominant use of the Fès model in renovation. The physical appearance of the buildings in Fès is often transposed as a model to other cities. However, this reason can likely be discarded. According to ADER officials, there has thus far been only little regular exchange of experiences between the different operators in the historical renovation field. Since 2016, ADER has been responsible for the whole Fès-Meknès region, comprising the cities of Fès, Meknès and Sfrou. Yet, coordination between the renovation actors beyond

³⁷⁹ Cf. for instance G. Becker (2014); Escher and Petermann (2013). Naji (2012) confirmed this trend while stressing the example of the medina of Tiznit, which proves a certain degree of respect for local specificities.

³⁸⁰ By the end of 2015, the number of qualified enterprises whose certificate was still valid did not exceed 10, cf. Cour des Comptes (2017c, p. 6). In Interview, Cultural heritage, 14, an architect criticised Al Omrane for its lack of familiarity with the Essaouira case.

³⁸¹ Cf. for instance Interview, Cultural heritage, 14.

this region does not occur.³⁸² Even within the city programmes, the lack of data, data management and coordination between different local, regional and governmental departments like the municipality, the Wilaya, the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Culture and the Habous Ministry contribute to widespread mismanagement of urban rehabilitation (I. Bennani, 2012). As curious as it may seem, however, the panoply of these non-political reasons also contributes to the original goal of the monarchy to restore and preserve an „authentically” Moroccan appearance of the kingdom’s medinas.

6.2.3.2.2. Questions about the State’s Interest in Cultural Heritage

The king’s political and symbolical backing matters for the success of Morocco’s development projects. In the words of Koenraad Bogaert (2018, p. 79), the label „royal project” means „that a planned project cannot fail because of the ‘moral guarantee’ the monarch represents”. While the example of Fès has positively confirmed this idea, the argument’s validity can also be demonstrated *ex negativo*, i.e. by examining cases that lack royal backing or took time to attract royal attention.

The first example falls into the latter category. Outside Laarache, a city of over 125.000 inhabitants between Tangier and Rabat, the archaeological site of Lixus has attracted the government’s attention for its outstanding historical value. This ancient city comprises Phoenician traces that date back to around 500-600 BC and was later taken over by the Carthaginians and the Romans in the first century AD. European researchers carried out the first archaeological works between 1845 and 1964. Then, Moroccan research teams started their work between 1957 and 1967.³⁸³ Around 1990, the National Institute of Archaeology and Heritage Studies (INSAP) became interested in the site.³⁸⁴ In 1995, Morocco had the complex inscribed on UNESCO’s tentative World Heritage list.³⁸⁵ However, to date, only about 10% of the area, i.e. about 62 ha, has been scientifically explored, including the Roman theatre, the ancient industrial quarter with basins for salted fish production, the foundations of an early church, and even a mosque. Under Mohammed VI, in the year 2001, the site was classified as a national monument.³⁸⁶ Yet, it was not before 2009 that a significant conservation programme

³⁸² According to a background conversation with an ADER official in May 2024, the terrible consequences of the 2023 earthquake in southern Morocco, with losses in human lives and historical architecture, might turn the tides as officials from the southern provinces have joined ADER asking them for advice and help. Cf. Interview, Cultural heritage, 8. Al Omrane, in turn, claims to be in exchange with actors like ADER or the Agence Bouregreg, cf. Interview, Cultural heritage, 12.

³⁸³ Aboulfaraj (2017).

³⁸⁴ Markhouss (2019).

³⁸⁵ UNESCO (1995).

³⁸⁶ Ministère de la Jeunesse, de la Culture et de la Communication .

was started in collaboration with Italian experts from the Italian Development Agency (AICS) and the University of Sienna. Inspired by the experiences made by other countries and equipped with a budget of approximately 12 million Dirhams,³⁸⁷ the site received a protective fence. It was also provided with a compound for the conservatory administration, a documentation centre, a touristic circuit with information signs, workspaces, and a conference hall. The sheer dimension of the complex and the investments that led to its establishment mirror the high expectations the Moroccan state sets for the archaeological site. Since spring 2019, the Moroccan ministers of culture have multiplied their visits to the archaeological site, which was now prominently dubbed the presumably oldest city of the country given its early Phoenician origins and the foundational myth about Heracles stealing the golden apples from the Hesperides' Garden mythologically situated in later times' Lixus. On 20 April 2019, the new documentation centre was inaugurated in the context of the National Heritage Month. On this occasion, the Minister of Culture, Mohammed Laâraj, declared that given the site's international heritage value, „Morocco sees itself in the responsibility to preserve its authenticity for the benefit of future generations”. While the new open-air museum is expected to play a crucial role in the economic development of the region, the minister also confessed his ambition that Lixus

„will never again be synonymous with a few piles of old stones and ruins for any visitor, but a key witness to our history and a source of knowledge and pride. It will have revealed to our century the secrets of a glorious past”.³⁸⁸

Through these words transpire the Moroccan government's aspirations to make cultural heritage serve a purpose that goes beyond mere economic considerations. For the regime, cultural heritage must fulfil a social mission. It is supposed to unify the nation and instil it with pride in its civilisational achievements. A way to reach this goal is to enhance its accessibility. The minister, therefore, announced an infrastructure improvement by connecting the site with the highway. The minister furthermore shared his plans to finance further research on the spot.³⁸⁹ However, to reach a broader public, the ministry also made pupils visit the site during the month of heritage³⁹⁰ and started a media campaign. A few months after the inauguration, on 6 July 2019, the minister of culture convened the *Moroccan Federation of Newspaper Editors* to visit the new documentation centre. In this context, the minister announced a vast programme for Lixus in the period 2019-2021, worth almost 15 million Dirhams, comprising

³⁸⁷ Benabou (2019).

³⁸⁸ Le Reporter (2019).

³⁸⁹ This idea would only materialise after the COVID-19 pandemic and after the exchange of two ministers. It resulted in a partnership programme with the Spanish University of Cadix in 2022, cf. Zejly (2022).

³⁹⁰ El Moussaoui (2019); k.kh. (2019).

funds for restoration and renovation (6.750.000 Dirhams), for further research projects (2.220.000 Dirhams), for new personnel and equipment (4.600.000 Dirhams) as well as for promotion measures (1.050.000 Dirhams).³⁹¹ In the course of this study, it was impossible to find out whether the projects announced in 2019 have been carried out despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the political discontinuity with three different Culture Ministers between then and the summer of 2022. Yet, my main argument remains untouched: After this announcement, the ministry's head of the strategic planning department, Oumkeltoum Kobbité, explained to the Moroccan media why all the efforts to preserve the archaeological site and to promote it in this way have been undertaken. According to her, such and future measures aim at preparing an application to make Lixus enter the UNESCO World Heritage list.³⁹² The current Culture Minister, Mohammed Mehdi Bensaid, later reiterated this ambition to make Lixus a site of universal value for humanity. In 2022, he also underlined the socio-economic importance of the site by promising to promote the local cultural industry to attract more tourists.³⁹³ Here, an international organisation's recognition of Moroccan culture's outstanding universal value appears to be perceived as a means to familiarise and reconcile the Moroccan people with their nation by cultural and economic means. In this context, the king is constantly presented as a patron and protector by citing him as having initiated programmes to renovate and preserve the kingdom's precious national heritage.³⁹⁴

Yet, unlike the case of Lixus, sometimes the actual choice of heritage promotion is more than questionable and even runs counter to the regime's strategic preferences. Since budgets are usually allocated per region, the concentration of financial and human resources on emblematic and prominent sites may lead to the negligence of other less prestigious sites, which often lie in rural and remote areas but could equally contribute to the development of local communities. This is also the case in the Tangier region, close to the city of Laarache. While the emblematic site of Lixus drains all attention with tourist infrastructure being renovated in the environment and the touristic attractivity being enhanced, other important Roman sites in the region have been left to degradation despite their historical value. This is the case of Cotta and Zilil; both archaeological sites are situated between Tangier and Asilah. They feature pre-historic vestiges and remains of ancient settlements of Phoenician and Roman origin. Romans once set up

³⁹² Le Reporter Express (2019).

³⁹³ MAP (2022c).

³⁹⁴ El Moussaoui (2019).

centres for fish salting and produced their famous *garum* for export, a fish sauce universally used in Roman cuisine similar to the one still in Vietnam nowadays. Despite their size and historical importance, these sites are abandoned, left to the detrimental effects of human negligence/vandalism and natural decay.³⁹⁵ In Zilil, for instance, only a small part – probably about 8% – of the original area has so far been uncovered and explored archaeologically. Unlike in Lixus, however, the site of Zilil, with its Roman baths and theatre, its commercial compounds and its paleo-Christian church, has remained victim to natural decay and vandalism for years despite civilian calls for conservation and conversion into an open-air museum. In November 2018, the conservator of the sites of Cotta and Zilil appointed by the ministry, Dr Mohamed Benhaddou, explained that the government and, particularly, the Ministry of Culture are aware of the site's historical importance. However, he claimed that the ministry must define regional priorities considering the tight national budget allocated for preserving historical monuments. With its size and tremendous touristic potential, the ruins of Lixus drain all the resources, leaving hardly any means for conserving other important sites in the region. Furthermore, according to Benhaddou, property rights constitute a real problem since the area where Zilil is situated is owned by private people. These circumstances massively hinder the archaeological site's maintenance and economic *mise-en-valeur*.³⁹⁶ According to Larbi el Mesbahi, regional delegate of the Ministry of Culture, there was a plan to allocate a budget of 18 million Dirhams (~1,8 million euros) to buy and refurbish the site in 2016.³⁹⁷ Still, the site was classified as national heritage only in 2018,³⁹⁸ which underlines the lack of any serious interest in the site before 2017 when the Minister of Culture, Mohammed Laâraj, announced scientific research to be conducted on the site. Since then, the Moroccan government theoretically has the right under law 22.80 to expropriate or occupy the area in the public interest, apply conservation measures, and make it accessible for locals and tourists. As of 2018, the government allegedly negotiated with the site owners to acquire and exploit the property.³⁹⁹ By May 2019, however, the conservation project still had no green light from the Moroccan government, although Benhaddou claimed that the dossier was in its final phase.⁴⁰⁰

Another example stands out even more starkly: The Roman town of Cotta, which has an important *garum* production site, is situated on the outskirts of Tangier, only a few hundred

³⁹⁵ Faïssal (2016); La Dépêche 24H (2021b).

³⁹⁶ Rhoul (2018).

³⁹⁷ Faïssal (2016).

³⁹⁸ Ministère de la Jeunesse, de la Culture et de la Communication .

³⁹⁹ Rhoul (2018).

⁴⁰⁰ Kadry (2021).

meters south of the famous Caves of Hercules. The caves are open for visits. By contrast, the remainders of the city, which the cultural heritage inventory of the kingdom calls the most important antique architectural structures in the region with the best-preserved garum ponds in the western Mediterranean,⁴⁰¹ are not. At the margins of the archaeological site of Cotta (or even on top of it, considering that only small parts of the ancient town have been excavated so far), the Moroccan authorities authorised the construction of a huge seaside palace owned by the Saudi King Salman.⁴⁰² The new palace not only obstructs the sea view to other inhabitants of the village but has also rendered major parts of the archaeological site inaccessible for locals and tourists alike due to security concerns, even when the palace owners are absent. Since then, a special permission from the Moroccan Ministry of Culture is needed to enter the site.⁴⁰³ It is, however, more than questionable that any tourist would undertake the tedious enterprise of applying for permission from a Moroccan Ministry to enter an archaeological site without any tourist infrastructure unless he is extremely passionate about the Roman empire or has a scientific interest. Furthermore, the archaeological site itself is private property, which complicates the issue even more and has raised question marks among civil society actors as to how such historical monuments of national value and interest could come into private ownership (Observatoire pour la Protection de l'Environnement et des Monuments Historiques de Tanger 2018). In the case of Cotta, international (or rather inter-monarchical) relations and a preference for the luxury of the rich appear to have been prioritised over the otherwise proclaimed cultural sensitivity and the promise to boost local economies through cultural heritage promotion. Political programmes are thus sacrificed to please rich and influential multitis for opaque reasons, leaving the historical site to natural decay and the economic potential for the local population unused and apparently even unconsidered.

At any rate, although civil society actors have been advocating for further steps to preserve, research and open both sites to the public, the authorities and the Ministry of Culture have not (been allowed to) take action as of 2022. On the contrary – when Tangier applied to host the 2012 World Exhibition, the application featured a renovation project for the old Roman road leading from the ancient city of Tingis (today Tangier) to Lixus, passing by Zilil. Yet, after Tangier lost the competition to Yeosu in South Korea, the authorities began demolishing the ancient pavement's Roman leftovers in 2019.⁴⁰⁴ Deprived of the international stage to showcase

⁴⁰¹ Cf. http://www.idpc.ma/view/pc_archeologie/idpcm:3EEC8, last consulted on 10 January 2024.

⁴⁰² El Jerrari (2016).

⁴⁰³ Alary (2014); La Dépêche 24H (2021b).

⁴⁰⁴ Jaabouk (2021).

Morocco's civilisational accomplishments from antiquity to modernity and demonstrate its sensitivity to cultural issues, the ancient road seemed useless. Civil society and the media protested the action, calling upon the region's wali, the king's representative on the regional level, to intervene. Then, the Regional Directory of the Ministry of Culture sent a delegation of experts to analyse the spot. The analysis yielded that the age of the pavement could not be confirmed with certainty and that, therefore, the Roman origins were to be questioned. While the Moroccan public contested the competence and scientific methods of the „experts“, the works continued under the pretext of facilitating access for firefighters to the neighbouring real estate. Considering the authorities' interest in the monument demonstrated some years before, this incident casts doubt upon this official version. The road appears to obstruct the government's modernisation plans for the region, which were realised through the megalomaniac TangerMed project.⁴⁰⁵

6.2.3.3 Conflicting Goals or Calculated Risk – between Preservation and Modernisation

Towards the end of the 1990s and 2000s, like other countries in the Middle East and around the globe, Morocco followed the neoliberal globalisation trend by adopting governance that is characterised by two features: a) the reinvention of social policies which take an interest in the population's economic development while streamlining measures to comply with global market requirements; b) the execution of megaprojects which position Morocco within the global competition of states and cities (Bogaert 2018, p. 77). In fact, under Mohammed VI, Morocco has become a „trendsetter with regard to megaprojects in North Africa“ (Bogaert 2018, p. 79). To make the state more efficient in delivering social programmes and development projects, the state privatised selected domains and delegated parts of its prerogatives to new technocratic agencies which the state created all over the country (Hibou & Tozy 2020, pp. 338–353). Bogaert and Amarouche (2019) call this trend „agencification“. Bogaert (2018, 91f.) describes this mechanism as follows:

„First, important decision-making processes were moved from traditional government institutions to new – supposedly politically neutral – technocratic entities. [...] It is not a coincidence that these examples of neoliberal statecraft coincided with increasing domestic and international pressure to democratize the political system. In these times of increasing pressure to democratize, the agencies mentioned above are illustrative of the ways in which the monarchy rolled out new institutional arrangements that take authority over a significant amount of public resources and domains out of the hands of the formal – officially elected – government institutions. Second, this urbanism of projects opened up the decision-making process to new actors. Although the process itself is still tightly controlled by the monarchy, neoliberal state spatiality in Morocco turned decision-making processes into more globally connected and more privatized endeavours. New state agencies such as TMSA or the Bouregreg Agency function as strategic-relational junctions of global connection within a geography of uneven development, spatial competition, and rule by exception. [...] Morocco's urbanism of projects reflected not just an economic strategy but also political practices of domination, accumulation, and dispossession characterized by the

⁴⁰⁵ La Dépêche 24H (2021a).

privatization, fragmentation, and financialization of decision-making processes, the marketization and mobilisation of public resources and land, and, finally, the transfer of state power to ad hoc arrangements and exceptional institutions. Neoliberal projects symbolize a fundamental shift in Moroccan authoritarianism. Whereas Hassan II ruled with an iron hand during the years of lead, Mohammed VI rules via holdings, funds, and specialized state agencies. This does not necessarily mean that he is less authoritarian than his father, only different. The urbanism of projects demonstrates not only the durability of authoritarian government but also its transformation from neopatrimonial, clientelistic, and kinship-based forms of political practices toward a more globalized modality of authoritarian government.”

Building upon Bogaert’s analysis, I will show how cultural policies have become crucial to Morocco’s neoliberal reform strategy. They are crucial because they transcend the logic of purely economic projects. They endow the monarchy’s urbanism programmes with an identity-related component that enables the state to justify expenses and reforms not only by their long-term economic return on investment. It also allows the regime to proclaim the construction of a new patriotic vision of the Moroccan nation, rooted in tradition and partaking in the international concert of civilised countries. According to this vision, Morocco is pictured to become an authentic flagship of modernity securely steered by King Mohammed VI through all weathers. In this endeavour, cultural policies mirror the neoliberal transformation and adaption of Morocco’s authoritarian governance patterns, which favour and benefit the monarchy while providing an illusion of democracy and participation.

6.2.3.3.1. Autocratic Management of Cultural Mega-Projects in Casablanca

Although comparable structures existed under other legal forms before, since the adoption of a new municipal charter in 2002, it is nowadays possible to create so-called Local Development Societies (*Sociétés de Développement Local – SDL*). Inspired by the French model (among others), these entities received a special legal status by Dahir n°1-08-153 of 18 February 2009. These societies are a hybrid management form which resembles private-public-partnerships in some elements but which receive a special mandate from the municipal council to carry out and organise specific public services in a municipality, such as waste management, infrastructure, public transport or even cultural event management.⁴⁰⁶ In Casablanca, until recently, there were seven SDLs, namely Casa Prestation, Casa Transport, Casa Aménagement, Casa Développement, Casa Baia, Casa Events et Animation and Casa Patrimoine. In public discourse, this new dynamic of outsourcing public management tasks has been explained by the king’s criticism of the inefficiency of Casablanca’s administration and its elected representatives. In his widely discussed speech at the occasion of the opening of the first parliamentary session of the new legislative year in the autumn of 2013, Mohammed VI sketched his vision to make Casablanca an international financial hub. For this vision to become a reality, reliable infrastructure and good governance are required as a foundation. Yet,

⁴⁰⁶ Royaume du Maroc - Conseil Régional de Tourisme Région Guelmim Es Smara (2012).

according to the king, the bodies elected by the people on the regional and municipal levels to provide this foundation were largely dysfunctional due to an individual and collective lack of loyalty, integrity, sense of responsibility and commitment to the needs of the population as well as due to hostilities between the elected bodies' components. This is why he called upon the political parties (in the major cities) to enhance competencies and promote new regional elites who would use their new legal attributions in the context of advanced regionalisation to upgrade service delivery performance in Casablanca and other major cities.⁴⁰⁷

This speech had the effect of a thunderstorm in Morocco's decentralised organisational bodies. In response to the king's critique, the municipal council of Casablanca disempowered itself with regard to many public tasks. It created several new SDLs for services formerly controlled by elected members of the very same council. Although legitimised by democratic vote, many municipal council members did not feel entitled to govern anymore. They even indulged in self-destructive obedience to the royal authority. For example, Abdelghani Marahani, council member for the *Renaissance and Virtue Party* (PRV), said: „In short, we are incapable of fulfilling the mission for which we were elected". Another city council official confessed a lack of competence among civil servants: „It was to avoid the problems of the past that we entrusted these matters to Casa Prestations. Here, management is based on performance, efficiency and direct control". In April 2014, even Ahmed Brija, Vice-Chairman of the Casablanca City Council, made a similar remark at the opening of an ordinary session at the Wilaya headquarters. „It's simple, we're creating Local Development Societies because we've failed in our role as elected representatives. We have not done our job properly, as the King reminded us, and we are responsible for this failure."⁴⁰⁸ At the same time, mandating the SDLs has become a welcome opportunity to deflect responsibility and accountability from the notoriously blocked elected municipal councils. Although heavily criticised by some elected representatives

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. Mohammed VI (2013e). In this speech, the king explains that, from his point of view, every elected person has two mandates, one to respond to public needs and one of national importance. For him, every elected person – be it to the national parliament, regional or municipal council – should foremost contribute to the superior interest of the nation, which is the protection of the country's territorial integrity and the defence of the Moroccanness of the Sahara.

⁴⁰⁸ Cf. Mousjid and Pauline (2016). In personal conversations with members of civil society associations, the elected representatives' self-perception was confirmed: One spokesperson of Casamemoire, a non-state association working in the cultural heritage field, reported, for instance, that for projects he undertook in partnership with the municipality the administrative steps took ages. By contrast, things went much faster when he worked with the governors and walis. Since the latter report to the Ministry of the Interior and are appointed by the king on local and regional levels, the pressure to work efficiently is much higher upon them. Hence, despite some cases of corruption and nepotism and despite a management style that is close to a "total dictatorship", overall, my interlocutor was willing to call this royally sanctioned governance track a "good dictatorship" if the system worked in favour of the population. Cf. Interview, Cultural heritage, 4. Carabelli (2018, 144f.) confirms this view by showing how heritage preservation and protection of the colonial town under UNESCO rules in Casablanca became much smoother after the king's intervention.

and media for their untransparent and irresponsible use of funds and although some SDLs like Casa Patrimoine needed to be saved from bankruptcy,⁴⁰⁹ the municipal councils of cities like Casablanca continue to charge the SDLs with ever more tasks.⁴¹⁰

The example of Casablanca's new theatre elucidates the often irresponsible use of SDLs particularly well. In 2008, the Foundation of Living Arts (*Fondation des arts vivants*, FAV), presided over by journalist Nouredine Ayouch, signed an agreement with the municipality of Casablanca to conduct a study phase including a call for projects for a new city theatre building. The budget for the study phase totalled 7 million Dirhams and allowed meetings with directors of famous international theatres in Paris, Amsterdam and Montréal. Eventually, the Dutch consulting firm Theateradvies was selected to sketch an outline for the identity of the future building and the call for projects. Finally, six internationally renowned architects decided to submit proposals, including Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas, Christian de Portzamparc, the Mecanno studio and Aziz Lazrak. Chaired by businessman Moulay Hafid Elalamy and composed of, among others, filmmaker Faouzi Bensaïdi, sociologist Soumaya Nouamane Guessous, playwright Taïb El Alj and architect Salima Naji, the jury chose the design of French architect Christian de Portzamparc. Despite the preferences of the king, who had favoured Zaha Hadid's draft (which was later realised in Rabat), a new mega-project for Casablanca was born. It envisioned the construction of a theatre with an auditorium for 1800 people and a smaller one for 600 persons.⁴¹¹ The funding question was addressed in the next phase, worth another 1,8 million Dirhams.

Meanwhile, Ayouch's foundation left the project, and the SDL Casa Aménagement took over. Despite public hearings about the future use of the theatre organised by the SDL with cultural actors, including the civil society association Racines, a consulting firm was mandated to conduct a study on the matter. The mandated company Valyans Consulting eventually came up with a report with recommendations regarding future management. However, civil society involvement was over by that time, according to Aadel Essaadani, head of Racines. Conversely, King Mohammed VI „is totally involved in this project. In fact, it was he who insisted that the theatre should be built in the heart of the city and not in an outlying district”, recalled Nouredine Ayouch, former chairman of the committee responsible for launching the project. One of the main reasons for the project to be carried out is – once more – prestige. Ayouch emphasised this regarding both theatre projects (in Casablanca and Rabat) by saying: „We're

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. Challenge (2020); H24Info (2019); Jaouhari (2019).

⁴¹⁰ Cf. Berrada (2018); F. Senhaji (2019).

⁴¹¹ Oudrhiri (2016b).

talking about two grandiose theatres, which have nothing to envy to La Scala in Milan, the Paris Opera and the Moscow Theatre”.⁴¹² As shown by Bogaert (2018, p. 126) and Lahrach (2020, 201f.), also the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao served as a prominent model that fueled the monarchy’s aspirations to make cultural infrastructure designed by stararchitects a driver of Morocco’s international prestige and economic development.

In October 2014, construction works finally began with an incredible budget of about 1,4 billion Dirhams.⁴¹³ Although the construction works advanced well, Casa Aménagement, by 2018, still lacked any concrete vision for the theatre’s technical or artistic management and future use. Some former officials, the project’s initiator Nouredine Ayouch and other civil society actors deeply regretted this shortcoming.⁴¹⁴ Casa Aménagement was aware of the problems, too. The head of the SDL explained to the press that they were „still considering the most efficient model to adopt, which will be decided shortly. But you have to bear in mind that this type of building generally causes a loss in the first few years of its life and needs public support.” According to him, Casa Aménagement expected an annual operation budget of over 100 million dirhams.⁴¹⁵ This unclarity was questioned by parliamentarians, even on a national level. Neila Tazi, for instance, vice-president of Morocco’s second chamber in the national parliament and president of the *Federation of Cultural and Creative Industries*, used her parliamentary rights and submitted written questions to the responsible authorities, yet without ever obtaining an answer.⁴¹⁶ Only in October 2019, over two years after the envisioned inauguration date, were the first stage tests held by a new management board consisting of the SDL Casa Events and the French group Fimalac Entertainment, which had an approximate operating budget of approximately 30 million Dirhams.⁴¹⁷ However, the global COVID-19 pandemic added another delay during which the project did not advance.⁴¹⁸ Even after the end of the pandemic, by mid-2023, the inauguration of the new cultural facility – although ready for a long time – had still not been delivered, causing Nouredine Ayouch to call upon King Mohammed VI for intervention.⁴¹⁹ As of 2024, i.e. almost five years after the termination of the construction

⁴¹² TelQuel (2013a). As we have seen above, the mandated consulting firm Valyans is, by the way, the same agency that had already advised the Gnaoua festival in Essaouira.

⁴¹³ 480 million DH were carried by the Ministry of the Interior, 400 million Dirhams by the Hassan II Fund for the Economic and Social Development, 280 million by the general budget of the state, 180 million by the municipality of Casablanca and 100 million by the region Grand Casablanca. Cf. Oudrhiri (2019).

⁴¹⁴ Libé Culture (2018); Oudrhiri (2016b).

⁴¹⁵ Oudrhiri (2016b).

⁴¹⁶ Michbal (2018).

⁴¹⁷ Oudrhiri (2019).

⁴¹⁸ El Ouardighi (2021b); Oudrhiri (2020a).

⁴¹⁹ Hespress (2023b); Sbiti (2023).

works, the theatre is still closed. This shows that more efficient (yet non-inclusive) management during the construction phase cannot compensate a lack of political will at the state's highest echelons if its vision for building such a megalomaniac facility in the first place was limited to increasing international prestige (Figure 30).⁴²⁰

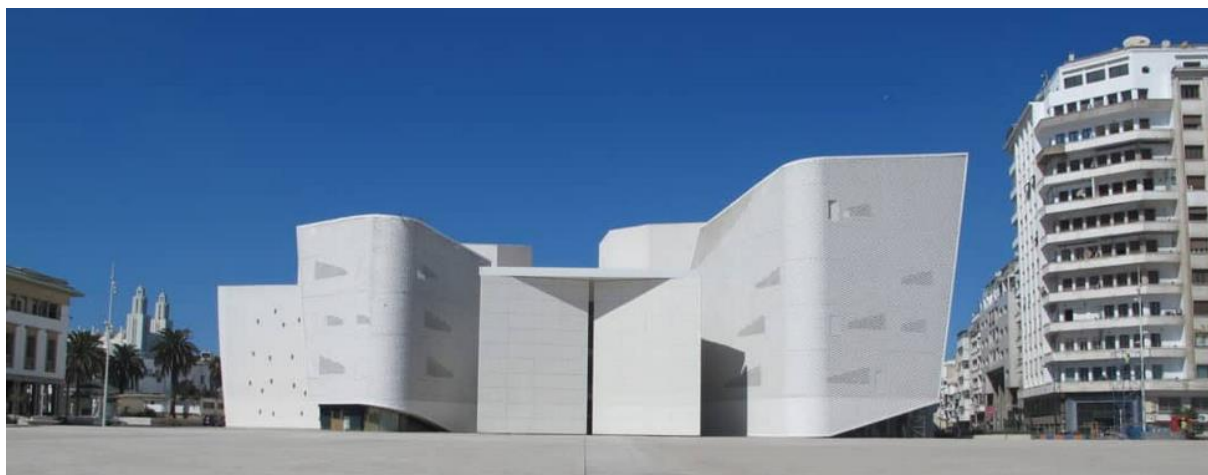


*Figure 30: New Theatre of Casablanca designed by architect Christian de Portzamparc*⁴²¹

On these grounds, it is valid to say that the formal advancements in Morocco's decentralisation process were countered through the backdoor by creating agencies partly controlled by the monarchy (or institutions close to it) that would help push these prestige projects without democratically legitimated bodies interfering. Nevertheless, considering the need for cultural infrastructure in a mega-city like Casablanca, one could argue that the original initiative for the theatre came from the civil society and that the planning process – at least at the beginning – was also supported by civil society associations.

⁴²⁰ Cf., for instance, Interview, Cultural heritage, 4 and Interview, Cultural policies, 1. My interlocutors deplored that culture and tourism are nowadays hardly distinguishable in Morocco nowadays. According to them, the state concentrates too much on seeking appreciation and approval of the international community. One of them claimed that prestige infrastructures like the new theatres in Casablanca and Rabat “have killed the development of talents in the neighbourhoods” since they distract public attention from small-scale initiatives. They argue that such elitist facilities drain resources that, in the 1970s, were still used to promote local theatres and cinemas that could be found nationwide in every city and that hosted local neighbourhood activities. His argument is backed by official Moroccan statistics, which hold that over 66% of urban and 88% of rural youth between 19 and 24 never attend music, dance, or theatre performances, cf. Royaume du Maroc - Ministère de la Culture (2016, p. 16). Independent numbers show a similar discrepancy between public policy and societal needs. According to a study conducted by the Association Racines in 2015-2016, 73,7% of the interviewed persons had never been to a theatre play, and 98,9% had never attended an opera performance in the past 12 months. Cf. Essaadani et al. (2016, 24f.). According to their critique, to sensitise the Moroccan population to theatre, the creation or (re-)activation of smaller, decentralised neighbourhood facilities would have been more useful. As of 2015, according to the Ministry of Culture, 78 theatres existed in Morocco, of which only a tiny part were functional.

⁴²¹ Portzamparc (2020).

6.2.3.3.2. Rabat between UNESCO Protection and Royal Megalomania

A different picture can be noted for the country's capital. The territory, where today the twin cities of Rabat and Salé are built along the two banks of the Bouregreg river, was inhabited since antiquity by indigenous people, Phoenicians and Romans. Later, the Almohads rose to power, and pirates used the river's opening to the Atlantic Sea as a natural harbour. After the arrival of the French, the area was completely re-organised with the installation of the port of Rabat in 1913. From the 1950s, however, the slums and poor suburbs of the two cities started to occupy more and more space on the riverbanks. In the 1980s, the riverside had completely deteriorated ecologically due to illegal waste deposits and the influx of untreated wastewater. Between the 1960s and the 1990s, several attempts to rehabilitate the area failed (Lahrach 2020, pp. 80–97). According to the former mayor of Rabat (2009-2015), Fathallah Oualalou, it was not until the arrival of King Mohammed VI on the Moroccan throne in 1999 that the situation started to change (Oualalou 2015, p. 5, 2019, p. 8). According to a former official who was actively involved in the reorganisation project of the Bouregreg valley since its beginnings, the impulse to upgrade the valley came from the king himself, who is passionate about jet ski water sports and who cruised the river with his friends in his youth seeing the great potential of the river and regretting its neglected, insalubrious situation.⁴²² For the king, it was not satisfactory and unacceptable that the kingdom's capital should remain a small „provincial capital” and not partake in globalisation (Mouloudi 2015a). In fact, at the beginning of Mohammed VI's rule, Rabat presented itself as a small administrative and political centre „[o]vershadowed by the neighbouring metropolis and economic powerhouse of Casablanca, and lacking the touristic appeal of Marrakech, Tangier or Fès” (Dines 2021, p. 734). As such, it did not correspond to the young king's aspirations for his country and could not mirror and properly represent the national state power (Dines 2021, 737f.).

In 2001, the king mandated his advisor Abdelaziz Meziane Belfquih to lead a royal committee composed of high-ranking state officials, eminent experts and civil society representatives who would reflect on the feasibility of a vast re-organisation and rehabilitation project, financed mainly by Moroccan public funds (Mouloudi 2015a). In May 2004, the projects selected by a dedicated jury were presented to the public. On 7 January 2006, after King Mohammed VI undertook two journeys to the United Arab Emirates, securing the necessary funds, he gave the green light for the project (Mouloudi 2015a). The first operations began in April of the same year. In July 2006, the first works on the marina began. For the implementation of the project,

⁴²² Interview, Cultural heritage, 13.

a development agency – the *Agency for the re-organisation of the Bouregreg Valley* (henceforth called Agence Bouregreg or the agency) – was created, depending solely on and reporting directly to the king and the royal cabinet to avoid the usual administrative deadlocks.⁴²³ Whereas the agency's decision trumps all local and national government prerogatives, the most important decisions for the project are allegedly taken at the royal palace or closely followed by the king and his advisors (Mouloudi 2015a).

According to law 16-04, which created the Agence Bouregreg, the agency exerts „exclusive authority over the project within its legally defined territorial boundaries (the six thousand hectares). Within that territory, local governmental entities such as the prefectures, the local municipalities, and the Rabat-Salé Urban Planning Agency are effectively sidelined. The Bouregreg Agency is authorized to develop zoning plans, organize public inquiries, provide public infrastructure, allocate land for construction, deliver construction permits, regulate all deeds of sale, and expropriate private land deemed necessary for the advancement of the project. All state-owned land was transferred to the agency free of charge. The agency functions as a quasi-state within a state” (Bogaert & Amarouche 2019, p. 47).

The first meeting of the administration council took place in June 2006, and a budget was allocated one month later. According to an interview given in 2016 by the agency's then-director general Lemghari Essaki, the original idea of the project was „to make Rabat a capital worthy of the name which can compete at the Mediterranean level and be considered a city of knowledge, enlightenment and culture.”⁴²⁴ According to my interview partners, from the outset, the project aimed at upgrading the valley not only with regard to environmental, social and economic aspects but also with respect to the cultural component. This cultural component imposed itself, given the river's strong role in the area's settlement history. But it also emanates from the king's mindset. Allegedly, he has always been sensitive to questions of cultural heritage and was convinced that rehabilitating and revalorising the capital's cultural heritage would positively impact the region's economy and social justice. Furthermore, the king had always wanted to leave an architectural footprint in the valley as well.⁴²⁵

During the preparation phase, the emirate of Dubai approached the kingdom, suggesting an investment elevating the concept among the mega-projects in the world. Yet, King Mohammed VI allegedly announced at the project launch, „I don't want the Dubai model here. It is not

⁴²³ For a detailed analysis of the prerogatives and management modes of the Agence Bouregreg, see Bogaert (2012), Bogaert (2018) and Mouloudi (2015a).

⁴²⁴ The Report Company (2016).

⁴²⁵ Interview, Cultural heritage, 13.

suitable to our culture.” So, the kingdom eventually declined the Emirati funds, although a small 100-hectare parcel had already been considered for investment from the Gulf.⁴²⁶ This quote from the king narrated by Essakl shows that the project’s neoliberal purposes are supposed to dematerialise behind a façade of social, economic and ecological development in full respect of the Moroccan nation’s cultural identity. For this study, retrieving evidence for the king’s refusal of Emirati funds was impossible. By contrast, Bogaert and Amarouche (2019, 47f.) showed that the Dubai investment failed due to the 2008 financial crisis. Many officials even seemed relieved when the Emiratis withdrew. Arguably, they had never been convinced of the project but had initially been seduced by the colossal sums promised by the Emiratis. This might suggest that the narrative about the king’s refusal was crafted retrospectively to make the monarchy appear more active in defending Moroccan authenticity. This dovetails with Bogaert (2018, p. 124), who stressed that the „urban megaproject draws on historical myths to present an image of the future.” He wrote that the „ideas of urban entrepreneurialism invested in these designs are about the manipulation of landscapes and cultural resources for capital accumulation, consumption, and dispossession” (Bogaert 2018, p. 126).

Seemingly in line with this paradigm, in January 2011, the Moroccan state handed in an application to have the city of Rabat inscribed on UNESCO’s representative list of humanity’s cultural heritage (Royaume du Maroc 2011b). While the initial approach to inscribe only the walled perimeters of Rabat’s kasbah had been turned down (da Silva 2012, p. 70), a second inscription project was successful in 2012, declaring „Rabat, Modern Capital and Historic City: a Shared Heritage”. According to UNESCO’s decision, the city bears „outstanding testimony to the diffusion of European ideas in the early 20th century, their adaptation to the Maghreb, and in return the influence of local, indigenous styles on architecture and decorative arts”. Furthermore, the „city constitutes an outstanding and fully realized example of modern town planning, for a 20th-century capital city, achieved by functional territorial organisation which incorporates the cultural values of the past in the modernist project. The synthesis of decorative, architectural and landscape elements, and the interplay between present and past, offer an outstanding and refined urban ensemble.”⁴²⁷ The urban ensemble praised by UNESCO comprises the historic kasbah located on a cliff at the end of the Bouregreg’s left riverbank, protecting the river mouth and the historic port towards the Atlantic Sea. The inscription also affects the old medina of Rabat, including the Jewish quarter, the souks and the historic city

⁴²⁶ The Report Company (2016). For more details on the Emirati model of investing in cultural facilities to garner international prestige, see Ajana (2015) and McClellan (2012).

⁴²⁷ UNESCO (2012).

walls. It comprises the Hassan Tower (remnants of an unfinished mosque of the Almohad times in the 12th century) and the mausoleum of the late kings Mohammed V and Hassan II. It also reaches out to the new town with its colonial alleys and monuments along Avenue Mohammed V⁴²⁸ as well as the Chellah, a fortified area from the Marinid times built at the outskirts of contemporary Rabat upon the remnants of Phoenician and Roman settlements on the left riverbank. To ensure the Outstanding Universal Value, UNESCO required the establishment of a buffer zone where new constructions and renovations are not permitted without prior consultation with UNESCO, which must approve any new project that could possibly have an impact on the physical and visual integrity and authenticity of the protected monuments. This buffer zone reaches beyond the protected monuments to include wide parts of the modern town

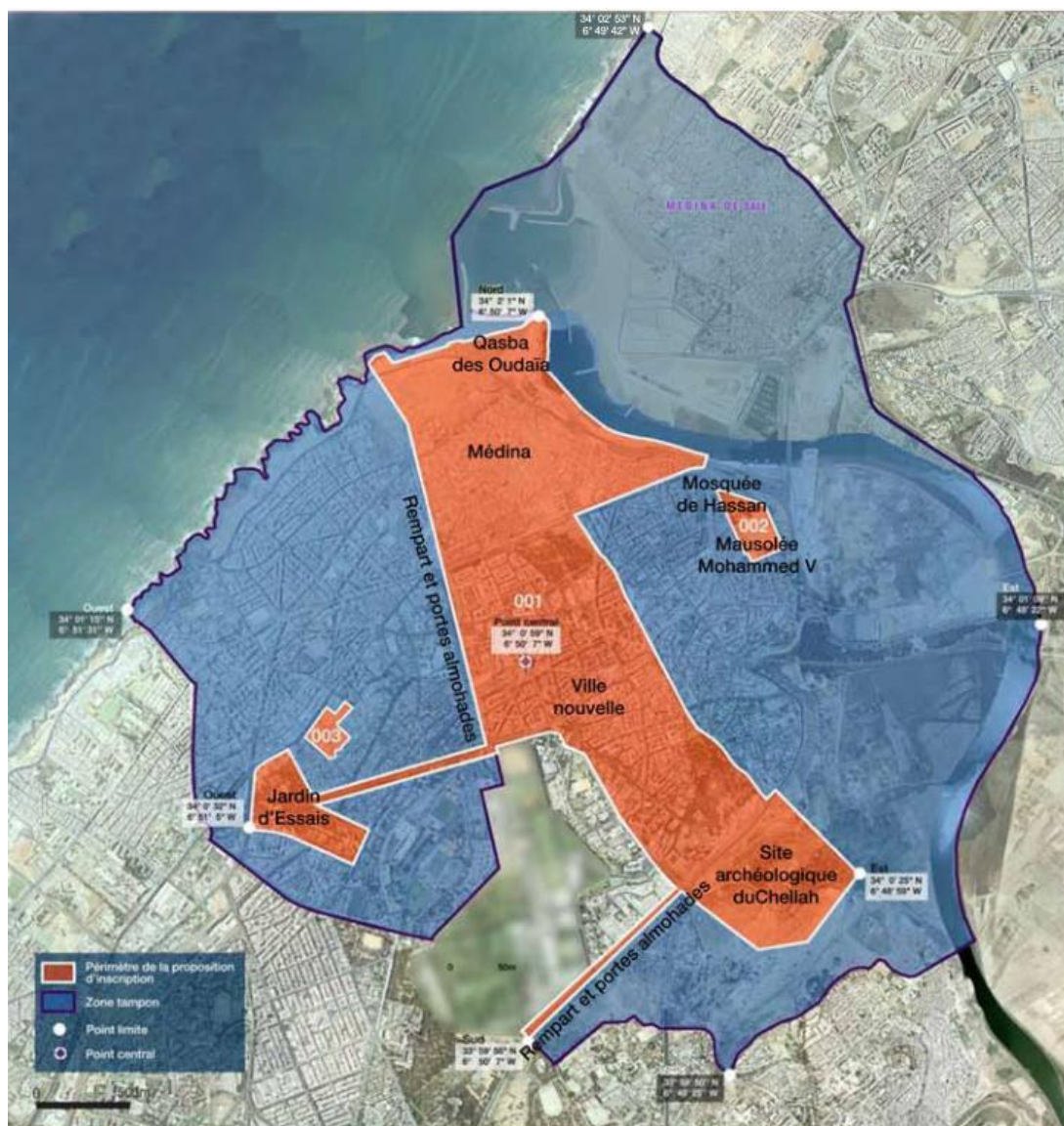


Figure 31: Territory protected by UNESCO in Rabat and Salé
Source: Royaume du Maroc (2011b, p. 12)

⁴²⁸ For more information about the outstanding value of Morocco's colonial built heritage, see Popp and Aït Hamza (2012).

in the southwest, stretched over the Bouregreg River to cover the whole surface of Salé's medina and down the river into the south of the capital (Figure 31). The management required by UNESCO to ensure the preservation and protection of the heritage sites was entrusted to the Foundation for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of Rabat, an entity headed by the king's sister, Princess Lalla Hasnaa, thus depending directly on the royal palace. According to the foundation's website, its purpose is to support the „dynamics developed by His Majesty King Mohammed VI, may God assist him, for the conservation and the development of the cultural heritage and this, throughout the Kingdom". It claims to do so by actively mobilising „experts, public and private actors in order to perpetuate and transmit the historical, architectural, artistic, landscape, material and immaterial values of the cultural heritage of the capital of the Kingdom.”⁴²⁹ This constellation is supposed to showcase the diligence and personal engagement of the king for the successful implementation of all projects upgrading the Bouregreg Valley in full respect of Morocco's authentic cultural heritage in Rabat and Salé.⁴³⁰

While the foundation, despite its vocation, remains widely in the shadows, the true champion of heritage management in Rabat remains the Agence Bouregreg. It oversees the renovation works on the historic sites, including the medina of Rabat and Salé. Despite appraisal from some authors who commend Rabat's heritage project „as a guiding best practice that pursues the long overdue preservation and development of a heritage landscape” (Radoine & Aomorali 2019, p. 423), criticism has been raised against the agency – just like against other actors in the kingdom. According to this critique, the renovation works mainly follow an economic principle violating the commitments to authenticity deposited with UNESCO when receiving the World Heritage listing. This often results in an observable architectural uniformity that fails to consider local specificities sufficiently, yielding unhistoric same-looking, ideal-typical versions of urban fabrics in medinas all over the kingdom – including Rabat and Salé. One former agency official admitted that the agency had committed errors since it lacked the technical and historical knowledge and did not always put heritage preservation (and the social grievances coming with it) on top of its priorities but rather fell into heritage „make-up”.⁴³¹ This contradicts the official narrative, which claims that the state is keen on preserving Morocco's monuments and urban fabrics by applying international norms of authenticity for historical reasons and for the sake of heritage preservation for future generations. The former agency official also explained that for

⁴²⁹ Fondation pour la sauvegarde du patrimoine culturel de Rabat (2023).

⁴³⁰ Cf. also Royaume du Maroc (2011a, 4 and 29-31)

⁴³¹ Interview, Cultural heritage, 13.

the king, it was important to upgrade the Bouregreg valley and all of the kingdom's medinas in a record time and almost all at once on a national scale. The agency official claimed that this rush must be interpreted against the huge urgency to renovate the kingdom's historic buildings after decades of negligence and that some errors have been corrected. However, the rush could also imply that for the regime, a superficially aesthetic showcasing for economic and prestige purposes primes over real interest in history, which would necessitate much more resources in time, money and scientific effort. Based on interviews Lahrach (2020, p. 195) conducted with officials and local city dwellers, he explained that mainly buildings which were part of the Kasbah des Oudayas and the Mellah and offered a great view of (and could be seen from) the ocean and the riverside have been renovated. The agency bought houses from their former owners, moved the tenants elsewhere, renovated the buildings and transformed them into hostels.⁴³² My field data confirm these accounts. For instance, a cultural heritage activist reported that some house owners in the medina and the mellah were expropriated and compensated (sometimes far below the value of their real estate). Their former houses were superficially restored and transformed into cafés or other tourist commodities.⁴³³ In total, 152 families, 55 individuals, and 52 small businesses were resettled in the context of the medina's rehabilitation (Bogaert 2018, p. 144). Even people renting and cultivating land in the valley that belonged to the Habous Ministry were taken over by the Agence Bouregreg, which consecrated the territories for new purposes (Bogaert & Amarouche 2019, p. 50).

Furthermore, just outside the non-aedificandi-zone prescribed by the UNESCO regulation, with funds from the United Arab Emirates, the Moroccan authorities authorised the construction of a luxury apartment and hotel complex on the right riverbank next to the new yacht harbour in Salé (Bogaert & Amarouche 2019, p. 45; Lahrach 2020, 111-113 and 153f. and 176–180). The Culture Ministry responsible for elaborating the UNESCO application originally did not intend to exclude Salé from the inscription perimeters but aimed at including the Moroccan capital's sister town into the inscribed zone, which would have made such luxury projects impossible. Yet, the final application did not include Salé, which seemed to disappoint even the officials responsible at the Agence Bouregreg (Lahrach 2020, p. 173). This implies that at some point in the inscription process, the original application proposed by the Culture Ministry must have been changed to exclude Salé, which later enabled the construction of the luxury apartment and

⁴³² I. Bennani (2012) also noted that, in the context of the renovations in Rabat, the administration prioritises the reconstruction of ruins adjacent to the riverside. These are part of the new prestige project of the revalorisation of the Bouregreg valley. Where such an interest is not given, buildings may sometimes remain under construction for years without visible advancement.

⁴³³ Informal conversation, Cultural heritage, 1.

Africa's highest building, the Mohammed VI Tower. Since the start of the Bouregreg project predates the UNESCO application, the already existing ideas for the rehabilitation and gentrification of the Bouregreg river banks might have been considered by the committee preparing the application (Lahrach 2020, p. 173). It was only following recommendations made by ICOMOS that the Moroccan state ultimately decided to adapt its application and extend the buffer zone to the medina of Salé in February 2012 (ICOMOS 2012, p. 91). This updated version was ultimately adopted by UNESCO. Nevertheless, the luxurious constructions on the right riverbank nowadays obstruct the view of the ancient architecture of the old medina of Salé and create a physical barrier between the Bouregreg River and the impoverished social strata living in Salé's old medina. The new buildings will also include shops that sell artisanal products, compete with the small businesses in the old medina, and deepen the social segregation between the urban elites and the local poor. The Bouregreg project „set out and defend the demarcations between those who can afford to invest, live and consume in these newly created consumption spaces and those who fall by the wayside. The project will be responsible for the creation of new spatial boundaries including a privileged few and excluding the grand majority of people living in the surrounding areas” (Bogaert 2012, p. 265).

The Bouregreg valley is hence monopolised by a powerful political and economic elite who instrumentalise the natural and historical heritage of the river for place branding purposes in which the poor and least powerful have no place and even constitute an embarrassment. This partly rebuts Schmitt (2011, p. 227), who claimed that Morocco's cultural governance administration does not primarily focus on economic considerations when preparing UNESCO applications. He holds that the question of which sites to choose for an application usually follows an assessment of the likelihood of making such applications successful. Against this, I argue that Morocco's UNESCO listings are (at least partly) used as an international seal of approval to support the monarchy's neoliberal aspirations to boost entrepreneurial dynamics and bolster existing power relations.

This is even better demonstrated by other prestigious projects currently executed by the Agence Bouregreg. These projects are mainly major infrastructure projects, including the construction of two tram lanes between Rabat and Salé, the construction of a new bridge over the Bouregreg for both tram and traffic, the creation of a marina in Salé or the renovation and extension of Rabat central train station. Apart from these infrastructure upgrades, excavations started in 2006 to implement another luxurious residential complex subdivided by small Venice-style water canals. However, when the funding institution Sama Holding, a fund belonging to the Dubai Holding, needed to be liquidated in the wake of the financial crisis, this project was soon

replaced by a new element (Bogaert 2018, 130f.). In 2010, so still before the inscription of Rabat on the World Heritage list, the director of the Agence Bouregreg, Lemghari Essaki, signed an execution agreement with the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Economy and Finance and the director of the Hassan II Fund for Economic and Social Development. He also sealed another contract with an international star architect, the Anglo-Iraqi Zaha Hadid, to design a huge new theatre in the very flooding area of the Bouregreg river. According to Bogaert (2018, p. 147), the selection of Zaha Hadid inscribes the project in a trend of „starchitecture”, which spectacularises the urban scene and „functions as an instrument within the marketing agendas of contemporary urban entrepreneurialism”. It is a statement that promotes the powerholders’ ideology of hegemony. It is, therefore, „far from apolitical or even progressive, let alone revolutionary (as it is sometimes presented). [...] Starchitecture [...] mostly reflects, reproduces, and legitimates in very aesthetic ways existing power hierarchies. Starchitecture is the ultimate aesthetic materialization of how capital is taking over the city” (Bogaert 2018, 150f.). The new *Grand Théâtre de Rabat* resembles a giant white wave and necessitated an investment of over 1,7 billion Dirhams (Figure 32).⁴³⁴



Figure 32: *Grand Theatre of Rabat* designed by star-architect Zaha Hadid⁴³⁵

Its financial structure is complex: In 2011, King Mohammed VI impulsed the creation of an investment fund to back up his *Tourism 2020* strategy. The new fund called Wessal Capital involves the Kingdom of Morocco (via the Moroccan Tourism Development Fund, FMDT) and the Gulf states of UAE (via the Aabar fund), Qatar (via Qatar’s investment authority Qatar

⁴³⁴ Cf. MAP Express (2014b); Mounadi (2014b).

⁴³⁵ Zaha Hadid Architects (2010).

Holding), Kuwait (via Al Ajial fund) and Saudi Arabia (via the Public Investment Fund, PIF) which invest a total of 3,4 billion Dollar (~2,5 billion euros). In 2014, Mohammed VI presided over the launching ceremony for the fund's second investment project (the first being Wessal Casablanca Port), i.e. Wessal Bouregreg, which mobilises 9,425 billion Dirhams (~ 900 million euros) and includes the construction of the Grand Théâtre as well as other infrastructure projects. This transnational finance structure might imply that the monarchy cedes parts of its power to other stakeholders. Yet, in reality, the „central state power has not been undermined, only reconfigured and reassembled. It does not discard the centrality of the Moroccan monarchy or the authority of the makhzan, only explains how its power is entangled, negotiated, and shared with other forces such as Gulf capital” (Bogaert 2018, p. 140). Whereas the king once prominently declared that he refused to apply the Dubai-model to Morocco, this finance structure and the project design reproduce the very same megalomaniac paradigm. The infrastructure projects are supposed to create 12.000 jobs in Rabat and attract 4 million tourists to the region, boosting the employment market's growth by an additional 63.000 jobs.⁴³⁶ Built upon a total surface of 30.000 m2, the theatre includes a great hall, which is supposed to offer space for almost 2000 people, and an amphitheatre for over 7000 people. With this new theatre, according to Essaki, „Morocco was launching one of the main projects in the continuity of the major projects which have been initiated by the Sovereign and with which His Majesty the King is keen to endow the city of Rabat in order to strengthen the capital's cultural heritage and enable it to carve out a choice place among the world's great capitals.”⁴³⁷

While the project was planned to be finished by July 2019, it had still not been inaugurated by mid-2024⁴³⁸ – some of the key problems being considerable construction deficits and delays caused by the COVID-19 crisis. More importantly, however, the theatre lacked a programme despite the long planning and construction time. This was still the case when, on 29 October 2024, King Mohammed VI's sister Lalla Hasnaa and French first lady Brigitte Macron inaugurated the theatre. This historic moment occurred in the presence of high-ranking Moroccan dignitaries during the side programme of French President Emmanuel Macron's state visit to the kingdom. After years of diplomatic tensions between Paris and Rabat, Macron's state visit followed an invitation King Mohammed VI had issued after France's announcement that „the present and future” of Western Sahara „lie within the framework of Moroccan

⁴³⁶ MAP (2015c); Mounadi (2014b).

⁴³⁷ ALBAYANE (2010a).

⁴³⁸ le Matin (2024).

sovereignty”, thereby acknowledging Morocco’s claims on Western Sahara.⁴³⁹ This inauguration ceremony and its important political context underline the place monumental cultural infrastructure like the Grand Theatre of Rabat is supposed to play as a soft power resource within Morocco’s foreign policy strategy. Celebrating the unveiling of the commemorative plaque, the kingdom’s mouthpiece MAP declared the theatre to be the „fruit of an enlightened vision” of the king, a „symbol of great modernity” and „cultural and artistic renewal of the Kingdom’s capital”. It is designed to „be a world-class facility” boasting „acoustics that meet the highest international standards of insulation” and promising „an immersive cultural experience through a rich program hosting national and international cultural events, thus further enriching the cultural scene of Rabat and Morocco as a whole. [...] Through this unique architectural and urban landmark, Rabat is elevating itself to the rank of major international cultural destinations under the visionary leadership of HM King Mohammed VI, May God Assist Him.”⁴⁴⁰ This official press statement delivers a prime example of how intrinsically the monarchy’s power legitimization is linked to the narrative of the country’s modernisation and the idea of making Morocco a renowned cultural destination in the world.

Furthermore, associating the inauguration of the Grand Theatre of Rabat with one of the biggest foreign policy success stories in recent Moroccan history is also a smart move to gloss over the harsh critique the theatre project has attracted over the last few years. Just like in the case of its sister project in Casablanca, the Grand Theatre of Rabat has been strongly fustigated. Already in 2018, for instance, Omar el Hyani, a local politician of the Federation of the Democratic Left elected to the municipal council of Rabat, regretted that instead of building and promoting neighbourhood infrastructure like cinemas, a theatre of this huge dimension was being built especially given the fact that the already existing Mohammed V Theatre in Rabat’s city centre was under-used – reason enough for him to even appeal to the Court of Audit to obtain a more responsible and transparent use of the funds.⁴⁴¹ In 2022, despite the municipality’s considerable financial obligations for the project totalling 600 million Dirhams (to be repaid over 15 years), the municipal council members had „no idea” of the project’s current status. They were left in a „total black-out”, according to el Hyani.⁴⁴² This was the case even though, since 2017, several major reshuffles have taken place at the management board of the Agence Bouregreg. In 2017,

⁴³⁹ Kasraoui (2024).

⁴⁴⁰ MAP (2024b).

⁴⁴¹ Crétois (2018). Similar criticism came from my interview partners, e.g. Interview, International culture cooperation, 1.

⁴⁴² Benargane (2022).

after 11 years at the head of the Agence Bouregreg, Lemghari Essakl left the agency – allegedly for health reasons but possibly due to major delays in important projects.⁴⁴³ The king replaced him with Said Zarrou, who had previously excelled in other functions, including as director of Marchica Med SA. In this position, he had successfully managed the conservation and development project of the Marchica Lagoon in Nador⁴⁴⁴ and was mandated by the king to administrate some South-South cooperation projects, e.g. the Canal in Madagascar and the upgrading of Cocody Bay in Ivory Coast.⁴⁴⁵ However, things did not seem to improve with him. Yet rather than blaming the Agence Bouregreg, then-prime minister Saâdeddine el Othmani, who, in his function, presides over the agency's management council, explained the project delays mainly by the non-compliance of some government departments with their financial commitments to the project. In 2018 and 2019, he repeatedly called upon his cabinet to cooperate fully with the agency, respecting the high orientations of King Mohammed VI.⁴⁴⁶

While the PJD-led national government – a vicarious yet somewhat reluctant agent of the palace – officially defended the Agence Bouregreg, the conflict regarding the project delays and the untransparent use of funds was far from being solved. Zarrou categorically rejected allegations of irresponsible use of funds. He asserted that the problems faced by the agency were issues of exploding real estate costs rather than financial mismanagement. For him, it was bold to raise such accusations given that the projects under execution had been initiated by the king himself in 2006 and had only yielded progress and public approvement by Morocco's citizens ever since.⁴⁴⁷ This excuse shows that Agence Bouregreg uses the project's royal aura to silence any critique and questioning of its management approach. Nevertheless, in 2021, the conflict between Moroccan authorities and the agency escalated again. A debate between locally elected representatives of the PJD and Said Zarrou, director general of the Agence Bouregreg, went public. While the vice-mayor of Salé blamed the agency for not delivering, Zarrou objected by saying that Salé and Rabat did not honour their financial commitments. This allegation was categorically refuted by the mayor of Rabat, PJD cadre Mohammed Sadiki, who claimed to even over-fulfil his obligations.⁴⁴⁸ It is interesting to see how this matter also made the PJD

⁴⁴³ el Yadari (2017); Mousjid (2017).

⁴⁴⁴ He had also been Essakl's assistant until 2008. Cf. Agence pour l'aménagement du site de la lagune de Marchica and BTPnews (2018).

⁴⁴⁵ Le Desk (2016b); MAP (2017a); MAP Express (2021b).

⁴⁴⁶ EcoActu (2019); Maroc Diplomatique (2018b).

⁴⁴⁷ M. C. Alaoui and Gamal (2018).

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. N.E.A. (2021). This was not the first conflict between the palace and the mayor of Rabat. Already in 2016, King Mohammed VI had excluded Sadiki from a Friday prayer he attended on 9 April 2016, allegedly for political reasons or a suspected case of corruption, cf. Mouhsine (2016b).

mayor oppose the PJD-led national government. Probably more by pragmatism than political or ideological conviction, the latter grudgingly supported the palace's prestige project. This incident may seem like a common blame game between authorities. Yet, at the same time, it reveals the desperate attempt of elected bodies like the municipal councils to avoid becoming a scapegoat for mismanagement in a state institution detached from government control and only subject to palace orders.⁴⁴⁹ Hence, it is also a telling symptom of the authoritarian way the management of mega-projects is designed in Morocco: Democratically elected bodies are reduced to mere recipients of orders from the palace's prolonged arm, the Agence Bouregreg. Municipalities and their elected officials have become the regime's scapegoat and are discredited in the Moroccan public by the palace's proxies.⁴⁵⁰ In an interview with the author, a former high-ranking wali of the Ministry of the Interior, i.e. an official appointed by the king, explained the role of the Agence Bouregreg in terms of efficiency and defended the non-inclusive approach by their mission to advance a precisely defined mission in the Bouregreg valley where a multitude of actors would only create chaos. For him, it is normal that this may leave elected officials unsatisfied, considering them an institution of minor, subordinate importance considering the overarching national priorities:

„It's certain that the agencies are dedicated to objectives with significant resources at their disposal, resources that local authorities don't have. They have a vision that goes beyond the municipality, to be the instrument of a national policy that has a broader vision. It's clear that at that point, the vision and the objectives are there. Now for the elected representatives: Sometimes, they can see that it [the agencies' mandate] casts a shadow over them, but that's a secondary reality. I remind you of what I said at the outset, that elected representatives are not an objective reality but a creation of the law in the context of decentralisation. So, it is still the central state that is the ultimate repository of all prerogatives and all competencies.”⁴⁵¹

Against this backdrop, the demission of Said Zarrou from the head of the Agence Bouregreg a few months later was a big surprise. In fact, without any reason being given, Zarrou was replaced by Housni Ghazoui, who had previously managed the construction project of the Grand Theatre of Rabat.⁴⁵² The agency's projects, in turn, remained untouched. Once more, the Moroccan public thus witnessed how the cultural policy field became an uneven battlefield between appointed authorities and elected bodies. In this battlefield, the democratic window-

⁴⁴⁹ This accusation has often been denied by the agency. Already in 2008, for instance, Lemghari Essaki stressed that the Prime Minister presided over the agency's administrative council and that eight other ministers were part of the same body just like some locally elected representatives. He claimed that their decisions were taken in full transparency and not behind closed doors. Cf. Narjis Rerhaye and Jmahri (2008).

⁴⁵⁰ A similar example of such a power struggle between the makhzen's authorities and the elected bodies has been described by Chahir (2010, pp. 344–367). He describes in detail how the organisation of the Festival of Casablanca has repeatedly opposed the members of the municipal council to local authorities. The latter enjoyed backing from the royal palace for allocating public funds and mandating a private association of expert with the management and evaluation of the festival.

⁴⁵¹ Interview, Political system, 1. For similar arguments, see Chahir (2010, pp. 264–274).

⁴⁵² M. C. Alaoui (2021).

dressings became exposed as what it is, an autocratic reality where non-elected actors have been mandated with the management of public funds and execution of major state projects, leaving locally elected bodies like the municipal council with none or little authority over the matter. They are reduced to mere rubber-stamp institutions to confirm the choices made at a higher level. Mouloudi (2015a, 2015b) showed that this marginalisation of the elected officials in the project's decision-making is not a property of the Grand Theatre project alone but inherent to the whole programme and combines with an „ultra-technocratic” management mode. He also showed that the permanent reshuffling of the agency's management board is another tool to make the agency's work more untransparent and veil the true responsibilities. According to Mouloudi, this procedure causes the agency's counterparts in civil society to get lost in an administrative labyrinth, which is particularly helpful in dragging embarrassing legal procedures and negotiations.

I go one step further. Claiming that elected officials are allegedly unable to see and pursue the bigger national picture from their limited perspective is crucial to the palace's strategy to depoliticise the allocation and management of public funds. Occasional reshufflings at the head of the palace's proxies may, therefore, serve as a rather ostentatious means to camouflage the actual responsibilities. At the same time, it bolsters the king's position as the nation's impartial arbiter who sets things right. Furthermore, as Mouloudi (2019) concluded, the very fact that the agency grants indemnities and organises public hearings for communities negatively affected by the projects constitutes real progress in terms of citizen participation, even though these procedures only present decisions already taken and only allow for pseudo-negotiations. Nevertheless, they set Mohammed VI's governance mode starkly apart from the outright repression of opposition and critique that was common under the authoritarian governance mode of Hassan II,

In the context of the Bouregreg Valley, the national vision for mega projects like the Grand Theatre of Rabat was easily identifiable – even before its inauguration. Nouredine Ayouch, the initiator behind the theatre project in Casablanca, insisted on the king's personal involvement in the theatre projects in Casablanca and Rabat. Ayouch explained that when the call for projects for the new theatre in Casablanca was launched in 2009, the jury chose Christian de Portzamparc's design for the grand theatre in Casablanca. King Mohammed VI, however, who was following the project closely, opted for another, more futuristic proposal. „When I submitted the projects to His Majesty, he liked the building designed by Zaha Hadid. I explained to him that it was too late, because the jury had chosen the Portzamparc project”,

said Nouredine Ayouch.⁴⁵³ Yet, the King was so passionate about Zaha Hadid's draft that he decided to build it in Rabat instead.⁴⁵⁴ This shows that, at the origins of the theatre project in Rabat, there was not an urgent public need for more cultural infrastructure but an aesthetic spleen of the king, who did not want to give up on a project he liked. Besides satisfying this spleen, designing a concept for the theatre's later use had thus never been a priority. On the website of the Agence Bouregreg, the project description supports the impression of the theatre being primarily an object of prestige representing the country's dynamic development into modernity under the rule of King Mohammed VI. It is designed to be a recognisable landmark for locals and internationals to complement the city's ensemble of monuments.⁴⁵⁵ This emphasizes the idea of creating a visible continuity between the visionary rule of Mohammed VI and the former rulers/civilisations that left their footprints in the Bouregreg valley throughout the centuries. In this endeavour, democratic procedures and content are of subordinate importance. At least for a former official of the Agence Bouregreg it is completely legitimate that King Mohammed VI tries to leave a visible trace of his rule in the river valley.⁴⁵⁶ From this angle, we can nuance Lahrach (2020, p. 201), who posited that the theatre inscribes itself in a deconstructivist logic that takes a deliberate cut with tradition, heritage and nature of a site. I argue instead that the new monument is supposed to be a symbol that continues the cultural innovations of the past and marks the present and the future with the current monarch's architectural seal. In an interview with the author, another high-ranking ministry official shared a similar view:

„For us, what's really important, is the image of this country and this city. And it [*scil.* the theatre] is going to become not only a cultural infrastructure site that houses the different cultural axes of a certain level but also a point of attraction for tourists and Moroccans who will see this marvel, of course. It's a real architectural jewel. And it's a theatre, of course, that's going to cost what it's going to cost, but it's an element we're proud of, and we know it's going to bring us a lot more. So, we're working hard on this image of Morocco, the image of an open country, a country whose culture is everywhere, because we're convinced of the value of this culture, and we're convinced of its roots [enracinement]. We are also convinced that culture is one of the most interesting and important means of development for our country. So, making culture a real vector for development obviously requires the efforts of everyone, and for that, we need HM the King's intervention in these major projects.“⁴⁵⁷

In the ministry official's words, the king drives soft power and development by promoting huge infrastructure projects like the Grand Theatre of Rabat. The same official then also insisted on the symbolic value of the new theatre for the country's reputation and emphasised its potential use and benefits in a not-so-far-away future. The official also defended the project against

⁴⁵³ Oudrhiri (2016b).

⁴⁵⁴ TelQuel (2013a).

⁴⁵⁵ Agence pour l'Aménagement de la Vallée du Bouregreg .

⁴⁵⁶ Interview, Cultural heritage, 13.

⁴⁵⁷ Interview, Cultural policies, 4.

public critique. He emphasised that some might claim that, for a developing country, sectors like education should be a priority. From his point of view, however, „a country that develops needs to develop in every single aspect”. According to him, the new theatre needs to be compared to the modern redesign of the Louvre in Paris. Former French president Francois Mitterand was strongly criticised for constructing the glass pyramid in front of the Louvre, but people explicitly come to see the pyramid nowadays. It can no longer be dissociated from the museum. The ministry official predicted the same fate for King Mohammed VI’s megaprojects in Morocco, such as the TGV between Casablanca and Tangier and the new theatre in Rabat, which are also currently being fustigated. But for him, these projects are „visionary” because, in the future, there might be events that necessitate massive infrastructures with even more than 2000 seats and state-of-the-art equipment like the one provided by the new theatre in Rabat. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, he argued as follows:

„I want to praise the king, [...] it’s true that it was his idea. And, for me, he was a visionary king who saw far ahead. And we are, moreover ... everyone [scil. within the Ministry of Culture] has gone in that direction. You always have to look ahead; you always have to be ahead of what’s going to happen and what needs to be done, like in the years to come, I imagine the state, just like all other states in the world, will also be ahead in the health field.”

Yet, for him, it was clear that – just like in the case of Mehdi Qotbi’s National Museum Foundation – the culture ministry will not have the capacity to manage the theatre by itself, which is why another institution will be necessary. With Belkebir (2018), we can call this cultural policy approach a „commoditization of culture”. She argued that „it has been made clear that the main objective of this theatre may not be to make this space a place of artistic flourishing — one of training, teaching and education in the name of culture — but in fact to improve the city’s image, maximize its competitive position among the Mediterranean metropolises, and ultimately to attract the interest of national and international investors. The culture of our era is clearly that of the image.” Anything that goes beyond this strife for prestige is of minor importance. As the statement made by my interlocutor from the Culture Ministry proves, Moroccan state institutions working in the cultural policy field are streamlined along this royal narrative. They have come to terms with the priority of (para-)monarchical institutions, which deprive them of their decision-making power. At least, despite being built in immediate proximity to the protected areas of the Hassan Tower and the mausoleum of the late kings Mohammed V and Hassan II, the new theatre was no reason to worry for the UNESCO Heritage Commission since it did not negatively affect the visual qualities of the old urban fabric under protection. However, the same cannot be said about another megalomaniac project that has been emerging on the Bouregreg’s riverbanks since 2016.

6.2.3.3.3. The Sky is the Limit: Problems with History in the Bouregreg Valley

In early March of 2016, rumours spread that Othman Benjelloun, head of the BMCE bank and one of the wealthiest men of Morocco with a personal fortune of over 1,9 billion US dollars, intended to build a tower in the Bouregreg valley measuring over 200 meters.⁴⁵⁸ These rumours proved true a week later when, on 9 March 2016, King Mohammed VI laid the first stone for constructing a 45-storey building 250 meters high, erected on a 3-hectare area for about 3 billion Dirhams (~ 280 million euros).⁴⁵⁹ While the project was initially planned at a minor height to become the new BMCE headquarters in Casablanca,⁴⁶⁰ it was eventually moved onto the Salé-side riverbanks of the Bouregreg River, just outside the buffer zone of the UNESCO protection site. It was conceived to become the highest tower in Africa, designed and overseen by two architects, i.e. the Moroccan Hakim Benjelloun and the Spanish Rafael De la Hoz.⁴⁶¹ The building will integrate a 350-place auditorium, host services and businesses, provide offices on the first 12 floors, 55 flats on the 13th to 26th floor, a luxury hotel and high-standard apartments on the top floors, and a panorama view terrace. It was planned to be a best practice example of

⁴⁵⁸ bladi (2016a). These rumours originated in similar announcements made in 2014 by the Saudi-Arabian investor Tarek Mohammed Bin Laden about the construction of Africa's highest skyscraper in Casablanca's finance city, close to the place where BMCE intended to found its new headquarters reaching up to 50 storeys. Bin Laden's tower, in turn, was supposed to measure 540 meters, including 114 storeys, i.e. the number of the sourates in Qur'an. The real estate promoters explained that they hoped to receive the approval of King Mohammed VI and invited him to baptise the project with his name. Cf. Majdi (2014); Rouaud (2014).

⁴⁵⁹ bladi (2016b). Given the delays in delivering the building (due to the construction pause during the COVID-19 pandemic), the total costs, by December 2023, approximated 6 billion Dirhams. Cf. Erraji (2023).

⁴⁶⁰ Already in 2014, the BMCE project was designed like a rocket ready for take-off, inspired by the Apollo 12 NASA mission, to symbolise, according to BMCE president Othman Benjelloun, the emergence of the BMCE group whose managers and staffers were supposed to be led to new horizons of unprecedented business activities, Cf. MAP (2014b); Mounadi (2014a).

⁴⁶¹ Médias24 (2016); Oudrhiri (2016a).

sustainable construction, meeting „the highest environmental standards with LEED Gold and HQE certifications”,⁴⁶² being self-sufficient in electricity provision through solar panels, using solar filters and natural ventilation, rainwater recovery and wastewater recycling. This mega-project called *Ô Tower* gained huge media attention nationally and internationally. In 2017 and 2018, the BMCE sealed contracts with the China Railway Construction Corporation International (CRCC),⁴⁶³ the Moroccan group TGCC and the Belgian construction specialist BESIX⁴⁶⁴ to execute the project. This choice of partners is not aleatory, with BESIX being one of the companies that have constructed the world’s highest building, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai. On 1 November 2018, King Mohammed VI personally attended a ceremony celebrating the construction launch for the *Ô Tower* (Figure 33). On this occasion, BMCE Bank of Africa president Othman Benjelloun held a speech in honour of the king saying:

Your Majesty, What a great honour and immense privilege it is for Your humble and devoted subject to see Your Majesty bless, by His effective presidency today, November 1st, this historic event of the launch of work on the emblematic Tower that You have initiated for the Capital of Morocco, this City of Light that is Rabat, a World Heritage Site.

[...] We have the **immense pride** and, at the same time, the great responsibility of building a Tower that must fit in with the development that Your Majesty has promoted for the Bouregreg Valley, to accommodate several symbols of the Kingdom’s rich cultural and civilisational heritage, the Grand Theatre, the House of Arts and Culture and the National Archives Library.



Figure 33: BMCE boss Othman Benjelloun showing King Mohammed VI the model for the highest tower of Africa
Source: MAP (2018)

⁴⁶² BESIX .

⁴⁶³ Maroc Diplomatique (2017).

⁴⁶⁴ Bazza (2018).

The Tower will soar into the sky like a rocket carried by its ramp to fit harmoniously **into the light-filled environment in which Rabat is bathed** because, beyond the **modernist ambition** proclaimed by the national and international media, this architectural icon must preserve its Moroccan roots while draping them in the **internationality and Africanity that Your Majesty has built** on solid foundations. These same foundations will enable this Tower to carry high momentum in the **development strategy that Your Majesty has outlined** for our Kingdom, legitimately positioning it as a privileged **gateway to Africa** and a hospitable land for investment.

Your Majesty, We are truly overwhelmed by the High Solicitude and Royal Benevolence shown towards us and by the importance attached to this project. **We, therefore, express the wish that Your Majesty will grant His Royal Blessing to this Tower by christening it with His August Name.** Conscious of the responsibility with which You have honoured us, we pray to the Most High, Your Majesty, that we may always remain **worthy of Your Sovereign trust.**⁴⁶⁵

Through this speech, the launching ceremony becomes a prime example of how Moroccan elites execute their projects by seeking proximity to the palace. The fulfilment of personal ambitions and visions of even Morocco's wealthiest personalities is tightly linked to a demonstration of elite loyalty and devotion to the king, thus legitimising the monarchy. Baptising the highest tower in Africa with the king's name assures the success of the construction works by rallying all relevant actors, including the monarchy, behind the project. Yet, at the same time, the project has become an important piece in the regime's self-representation as a warrant of the country's development, symbolically underlined by its futuristic rocket-shaped design. Like the new theatre in the Bouregreg valley, it draws a direct and visible line between Mohammed VI's (quite literal) skyrocketing modernisation of the country and the accomplishments of earlier civilisations and rulers, elevating Morocco to a point of reference for national pride and international admiration.

The regime seems ready to upset one of its dearest international partners to maintain this image. Willingly or not, UNESCO has so far been serving as a reliable pillar of Morocco's international self-marketing. By applying for and ultimately obtaining the inscription of Rabat on the list of humanity's world heritage, the regime had committed itself to preserving the material and visual authenticity and integrity of the protected monuments. Hence, it was hardly surprising that, since 2019, UNESCO has repeatedly criticised the kingdom for jeopardising the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the protected perimeters and requested a detailed report on how Morocco planned to minimise the „potentially adverse visual impacts” on the property.⁴⁶⁶ While the tower lies only just so outside the buffer zone of the protected area (Figure 34), it is understandable that criticism was issued given the absurd dimensions of the

⁴⁶⁵ Maroc Diplomatique (2018d), also see Dounia Productions (2019, 2020) on the construction works.

⁴⁶⁶ Decision 43 COM 7B.52, cf. UNESCO (2019a); decision 44 COM 7B.134, cf. UNESCO (2021) and decision 45 COM 7B.39, cf. UNESCO (2023a).

new building. This critique from UNESCO was shared in the Spanish press⁴⁶⁷ and spilt over to the Moroccan media, shocking the Moroccan public.⁴⁶⁸

Given the sudden media attention, it would have been hard for the government to ignore the critique and not respond publicly. The kingdom categorically refuted the critique in its extensive reply by proving the absence of negative impacts through various simulations and impact studies. In this regard, the state stressed that the

„tower is part of a continuous process of historical strata that make it the ultimate mark of the beginning of the 21st century. By being located outside the buffer zone, it also complies with the provisions of the Convention. As a modern visual landmark, it cannot detract from the historical and heritage value of the monuments and ensembles that bear the OUV of the property. The Rabat Medina, the Hassan Mosque and Mohammed V Mausoleum, the Qasba des Oudaïa and the Chellah archaeological site all retain their evocative power in the imaginations and representations of people on both sides of the Mediterranean. These sites and monuments are both spatial landmarks and places of remembrance, with which the people of Rabat in particular, and Moroccans in general, have forged strong and lasting links” (Royaume du Maroc 2020a, p. 39).

The kingdom, thus, asserted that the tower lies outside the buffer zone designated by UNESCO to ensure the integrity of the protected perimeters and to respect the legal commitments pledged

⁴⁶⁷ Otazu (2019a).

⁴⁶⁸ Cf. for instance Ahdani (2019c); Y. Hatim (2019); Otazu (2019b).

at the occasion of the UNESCO inscription. This declaration to UNESCO proves once more that Morocco's megaprojects are supposed to be interpreted by any observer as a logical continuation of the historical monuments as King Mohammed VI's contribution to Morocco's history.



Figure 34: Location of the Mohammed VI tower compared to the buffer zone (blue) and the inscribed UNESCO world heritage perimeters (red). Source: Royaume du Maroc (2020a, p. 37).

The kingdom even went as far as to claim a positive effect on the protected heritage, given the socio-economic dynamics expected to be initiated in the region by the construction works and the future rise of attractiveness for tourists who would want to enjoy the full beauty of the sites by looking down on the city from the planned observatory on top of the tower (Royaume du Maroc 2020a, p. 41). The regime underlined the joint efforts undertaken by the government on behalf of the royal palace to preserve the capital's protected cultural heritage. It claimed that the amount of money allocated to its preservation exceeded the 250 million Dirhams originally assigned to ensure the perimeter's maintenance: In 2014, King Mohammed VI launched the integrated urban development programme *Rabat ville lumière, capitale culturelle du Royaume*

which was supposed to run until 2018. Within this programme, 940 million Dirhams were allocated to safeguarding and valorising Rabat's cultural and civilisation heritage. This amount was supplemented by 1,5 billion Dirhams for the protection and requalification of the urban fabric, including the medina, as well as by another budgetary agreement between several ministries, adding another 400 million Dirhams (Royaume du Maroc 2020a, pp. 23–25). Within the buffer zone, between 2019 and 2023, another 900 million Dirhams were allocated to upgrade the medina of the neighbouring city of Salé. Besides emphasising such immediate benefits for the region's cultural heritage, Morocco's responses to UNESCO, published between 2020 and 2023, put an emphasis on the importance of the coordinative function of the Foundation for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of Rabat. This institution was created in the early 2010s to protect Rabat's heritage and is presided over by the king's sister, Lalla Hasnaa. Dormant for almost ten years, the foundation was resuscitated in 2020 to react to UNESCO's critique. Moderated by the king's sister, the discussion aimed at updating the management plan for the capital's heritage and was widely reported on in Moroccan media.⁴⁶⁹

In a summary issued in 2022 in response to the UNESCO critique, the kingdom emphasised that „without any doubt, the Foundation for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of Rabat has been the locomotive of these dynamics by implementing a sensibilisation and capacity building programme – between 2020 and 2021 even in spite of the constraints posed by the pandemic” (Royaume du Maroc 2022a, p. 9).⁴⁷⁰ The regime's narratives thus downplay the conflict with UNESCO by trying to dissipate the worries. To achieve this goal, the main strategy consists of emphasising the king's continued personal involvement in the protection of the protected monuments, hence positioning the monarchy as a proponent of the preservation of Morocco's (i.e. humanity's) cultural heritage and the country's omnipresent modernisation. Furthermore, to appease the critics, the regime yielded to UNESCO's requests by agreeing to dematerialise the façade with some architectural adaptations. How much the tower and the royal interests are interwoven today can also be assessed by the fact that on the occasion of King Mohammed VI's 60th birthday in August 2023, Othman Benjelloun announced the creation of a 360° observatory in the „cockpit” of the rocket-shaped tower. This observatory would allow the visitors to discover the importance of the astronomical findings of the Arabo-Andalusian civilisation, including cosmic constellations, maritime navigation techniques and instruments. While this announcement totally aligns with the monarchy's narrative about the achievement

⁴⁶⁹ 2M.ma (2022); ALBAYANE (2022); Aujourd'hui le Maroc (2020); EcoActu (2020); Sbiti (2020); UNESCO (2020b).

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. also Royaume du Maroc (2020a, 147 ff.)

of the „Moroccan” civilisations under the leadership of the local rulers, Benjelloun even dedicated this observatory to the king himself and linked the dedication to good wishes for the king, saying, „May our Kingdom continue to shine under Your glorious reign. May divine protection accompany you always“.⁴⁷¹

In conclusion, megaprojects like the Grand Theatre of Rabat or the Mohammed VI Tower could undermine the promise made by the king in 2006. During the launching ceremony of the Bouregreg Valley’s reorganisation project, he claimed that the project did not intend to duplicate the Dubai model for Morocco’s culture. However, considering the lack of plans or programmes for the new theatre, the theatre’s funding model and the employment of the very construction company that was once responsible for building the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, the main motives behind the megaprojects appear to be prestige and economic interests. They mirror the regime’s aspiration to make Rabat equal to Western metropolises such as Madrid,



Figure 35: Photo of the new Mohammed VI tower taken from a bus coming from the Rabat-Salé Airport in May 2024

Paris, Rome or Berlin in cultural terms. The result of this emulation is nothing more than the imitation of the Dubai model with fancy but soulless buildings serving no purpose but to boast a concept of modernity foreign to Morocco and to satisfy an autocratic leader’s vanity.⁴⁷² To fully grasp the dimensions of this strategy, the placement of the new theatre and the Mohammed VI tower also needs to be considered. In fact, although situated in a seismically active area additionally jeopardised by floodings of the Bouregreg River, they are strategically positioned at the central entrance to the Rabat-Salé agglomeration. One of my interlocutors from the Agence

⁴⁷¹ le Matin (2023a).

⁴⁷² This view is confirmed by a high-ranking representative of a foreign culture institution who affirms that it is difficult and even dangerous for them to question this cultural policy, mainly focusing on “representation”. According to my interlocutor, meaningful cultural activities are only possible under the protection of an ambassador or the pretext of “extremism prevention”. Cf. Interview, International culture cooperation, 1.

Bouregreg called the position on the riverbanks „visionary”, given its visibility from all angles.⁴⁷³ The buildings cannot be overlooked by any visitor, newcomer or daily commuter who uses the train route from Casablanca to Tangier, Kénitra or Fès or who needs to take a bus/taxi from the Rabat-Salé airport to the city centre (Figure 35). It is the first impression one gets when entering the Moroccan capital, an impression that boasts the modernity of the country.

Hence, although the tower project ultimately cost almost twice the amount originally allocated (six billion Dirhams by the end of 2023 against three billion Dirhams in 2016),⁴⁷⁴ the goal to obtain national and international recognition might eventually be achieved. A first indicator: In June 2023, the engineering group Bernabéu Ingenieros involved in the construction of Mohammed VI Tower received the prize for the best engineering performance awarded by the Madrid Demarcation of the College of Civil Engineers at the Caminos Madrid 2022, a distinction widely reported in Moroccan media.⁴⁷⁵

6.3. A game against the Clock: The Regime’s Reconciliation Management

According to Moroccan officials, the state’s awareness of the necessity to broaden the nationalist discourse was essentially raised by the Amazigh movement. Their constant activism for more civil rights and integration of the Amazigh component into Morocco’s social and political system pushed the regime to rethink the official narrative of a unitary Arab-Muslim identity. The ongoing radicalisation of their demands was perceived as an emblematic proof of the cultural divide that progressively alienated large parts of the Moroccan population from the state. Slowly, the ruling elite understood that the feeling of not being part of the national narrative constituted an increasing threat to the monarchy.⁴⁷⁶ This impression was confirmed when the 2003 terror attacks of Casablanca brought the growing problem of Islamist extremism within Moroccan society to the attention of the domestic and international public. The monarchy understood that the kingdom’s stability of the kingdom hinged on its capacity to integrate or rather to reactivate its integrative function as a moderator of different social currents. One reaction to the new developments was the monarchy’s reappropriation and bureaucratisation of the religious field (Wainscott 2017). As we have seen, mosques and imams were put under tight surveillance, mosque funding from abroad is narrowly controlled, imams have become state employees/civil servants, the imam training was reformed and follows state-sponsored curricula which stipulate the *ijtihad* as a principle of religious reflection and stresses

⁴⁷³ Interview, Cultural heritage, 13.

⁴⁷⁴ bladi (2016b); Erraji (2023).

⁴⁷⁵ Caminos Madrid (2023). For media reports cf. for instance H24Info with MAP (2023); Hespress (2023c).

⁴⁷⁶ Interview, Language policies, 4.

the centrality of King Mohammed VI as *amir al mouminine*; furthermore fatwas can only be issued by hand-selected, regional and national committees of religious experts, (the regional Conseils des oulémas and the Conseil supérieur des oulémas), convicted Islamists and terrorists are given opportunities to repent and convert to the official state doctrine, foreign citizens are invited to undergo the Moroccan state's religious training to become imams or spiritual guides, and the traditional school education comprises an indoctrination with the Maliki school of thought, the Ashaari rite and the Sufi tradition.

Another reaction falls into the category of history revision. The creation of the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) in 2001 and the establishment of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER) in 2004 were important steps in this direction. As we will see in another chapter of this book, the IRCAM has considerably enhanced the Imazighen's visibility in Moroccan society while remaining a critical tool to legitimise the monarchy. The IER was another instrument for appropriating public discourse on human rights while bolstering the king's position as supreme arbiter. Researchers like Susan Slyomovics, Brahim el Guabli, Frédéric Vairel, Laura Menin and Sonja Hegasy have skillfully analysed its work. The following chapter strongly draws upon their work. Still, it expands the scope of their studies to look into the details of the culture-related communitarian reparation programme initiated by the regime following the IER recommendations.

6.3.1. Controlled Dissidence: the IER and the Pre-Emption of Rebellious Potential

6.3.1.1. The Wind of Change: the Monarchy's New Responsiveness to Contestation

The so-called „Years of Lead” have heavily marked the Moroccan society. The regime of Hassan II constantly tried to bar and destroy all non-official opinion from the public sphere by criminalising and punishing „all manifestations of political activity and thought”, including „writing tracts, painting graffiti, holding meetings, and demonstrating” (Slyomovics 2021, p. 131). The regime also did not refrain from liquidating opposition leaders, as the still dubious case of socialist leader Mehdi ben Barka proves, who was kidnapped in Paris in 1965 and most likely murdered by the regime (Menin 2017, 28f.). More often, however, as meticulously described by Slyomovics (2005), contesting individuals and opposition groups were arbitrarily arrested and held in *incommunicado* detention using legal mechanisms like the *garde à vue* inherited from the French to deny (fair) trials. If they received any trial, they were convicted in mass or mock tribunals to ridiculously long prison sentences. In prison, they suffered atrocious torture and other mistreatments. There, political prisoners were treated according to their alleged crimes. Political prisoners from the Marxist-Leninist movement were forced to recite

the Muslim profession of faith, the shahada, while Islamists were forbidden to practice their ablutions and pray aloud. Prisoners who had been accused of crimes against „the security of the state” were perceived as particularly dangerous and endured enforced disappearance for an often unlimited time; they were deprived of essentials like food, light, sleep, medical treatment, sanitary facilities, and were exposed to isolation, heat, cold and even scorpions and other poisonous animals. Among these prisoners were some of the officers and soldiers of the Royal Army who had participated in the failed coup attempts against King Hassan II in 1971 and 1972. Also, Sahraoui activists who advocated for the independence of the Western Sahara fell into this group.

While some of the secret torture and detention centres were situated in urban areas like the police commissariat of Derb Moulay el Cherif (Casablanca), Dar el Mokri (Rabat) or Kenitra Central prison, others were relegated to remote areas in rural and Pre-Sahara regions. These prisons include the former colonial barracks of Kelâat M’Gouna, which were transformed into a detention centre around 1980 with an approximate number of 400 inmates until its shutdown sometime around 1992; the former palace of the caïd, the kasbah of Agdz transformed into a secret prison in 1976 mainly for Marxist-socialist and Sahraoui activists of POLISARIO; the kasbah of Tagounit, used as a secret prison between 1972 and 1976, primarily incarcerating homeless people and political prisoners; the kasbah of Skoura used as a detention centre for VIP prisoners and Sahraoui activists between at least 1980 to 1990; and the most notorious of all Tazmamart.⁴⁷⁷ In Tazmamart alone, 58 members of the military (officers and soldiers alike) were disappeared for 18 years. While the remoteness of these prisons and torture centres was ideal to keep their inmates isolated under the most inhumane conditions for many years, also the inhabitants of the regions where these prisons were located suffered from marginalisation and discrimination. For instance, their movements and professional activities were strongly constrained (Menin 2019; Vairel 2021).⁴⁷⁸ For the disappeared persons’ families, the traumatising experience of anxious waiting must be considered as an „additional violence that the pouvoir/makhzen inflicted to force them to remain inactive”; they were condemned to spend a „life suspended between past and present, in a painful condition of social and existential ‘liminality’” (Menin 2017, p. 27). However, despite their incarceration, many prisoners continued to oppose the authoritarian rule of Hassan II and could not always be silenced entirely. By networking among inmate groups in different prisons, they coordinated their

⁴⁷⁷ For more details on the secret detention centres, the fates of disappeared inmates and the human rights violations they suffered there, see Slyomovics (2005) and CNDH and Yazami (2015).

⁴⁷⁸ On the detrimental effects of the prisons in the rural territories around Tazmamart and others as well as the new dynamics within civil society in these regions, also see Vairel (2021).

protests and organised performative forms of contestation like hunger strikes. By smuggling photos with powerful motives outside the prison, they also communicated with other protesters and international human rights organisations and participated in public debates (Slyomovics 2021). Towards the end of the 1980s, human rights organisations and international media increased pressure on authoritarian regimes. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the international community put more emphasis on liberalisation and respect for human rights (El Guabli 2014). Finally, when Gilles Perrault's famous book *Notre ami le Roi* (1990) put a spotlight on the oppressive rule of Hassan II, the regime was forced to reveal the existence of the detention centres and, in 1991, released the political prisoners some of whom had endured over 19 years of incarceration under inhumane conditions. In the same year, King Hassan II created the Advisory Council for Human Rights (CCDH), which, under King Mohammed VI, in 2011, became the National Council for Human Rights (CNDH). In 1993, the king also authorised the creation of a (yet very short-lived) Ministry of Human Rights and had the Penal Procedure Code revised (Slyomovics 2001).

Encouraged by such reforms, the limits of the sayable were continuously pushed during King Hassan II's last years. With an increasingly well-organised and well-informed civil society both at home and on an international level, the pressure on the regime to change its human rights approach rose (Linn 2011). In 1999, shortly after the king's death in 1999 and the coronation of his son, Mohammed VI, the latter announced an improvement in the human rights situation and released 8.000 prisoners to underpin his seriousness (Dennerlein & Hegasy 2007, p. 95). He also dismissed the long-serving Minister of the Interior, Driss Basri. Furthermore, he activated the Independent Arbitration Commission (IAI), a commission that had been promised by his father only months before to indemnify victims of torture and forced disappearance. By the end of its mandate, on 31 December 1999, the IAI had studied 5.127 indemnity requests. Another 6.500 demands were discarded because they reached the IAI after the submission deadline.⁴⁷⁹ However, the commission took a merely financial approach. Whereas perpetrators of torture and mistreatment were granted a far-reaching amnesty, no public hearings and no mandate to unveil the truth about the Years of Lead were issued (Slyomovics 2001). If survivors and victims' families wanted to file an indemnification request, they needed to agree to keep silent about the names of their guards and torturers, who often continued to occupy powerful posts in state administration or hold elected offices (Slyomovics 2005, p. 40, 2021, p. 141). As the late King Hassan II had already announced in 1994 to „turn the page definitively”,

⁴⁷⁹ The commission compensated 5300 people for a total amount of 954.000.000 Moroccan Dirhams. Cf. El Guabli (2020, p. 98).

Mohammed VI did not publicly criticise his father. Nor did he publicly recognise the crimes under the latter's rule. Conversely, the regime appeared to attempt „transforming itself from the inside, trying to become democratic yet retaining control” (Slyomovics 2001, p. 21).

This approach was widely criticised and boycotted by human rights associations (Linn 2011, p. 6). Hence, after their release, many former prisoners and their families continued to contest the Moroccan regime (Menin 2019). To testify to the regime's crimes and strengthen the relationship among the survivors, they organised sit-ins, attended funerals of one another, produced eulogies for the dead, publicly visited their former detention centres and prison cells and held commemoration days and vigils for their late comrades. Facilitated by new media, such performative cultural acts and accounts helped to reconstruct the state's methods of human rights abuses, unravel their social and political contexts, unveil the truth about the regime's repressive nature and revise the official historical narrative and rewrite the past on a participatory, communitarian basis (Menin 2019; Slyomovics 2021).

Over the years, several former prisoners, their family members, and romanciers have discovered literary production (El Guabli 2014, 2017, 2020; Menin 2017; Slyomovics 2005, 2008) – both documentary and fictional – as a means to spread the word about the regime's infringements against human rights and make a statement about their sufferings and resistance (Hachad 2018). Their accounts were published in newly created popular science newspapers like *Zamane* or *al-Massae*, focussing on history (El Guabli 2014, 2017; Hegasy 2017a, 127f., 2017b). The most famous book, in turn, is former detainee Ahmed Marzouki's „Tazmamart – Cellule 10” (2000). Other works include „Tazmamart – Une prison de la Mort au Maroc” by Christine Daure-Serfaty (1999), „La Prisonnière » by Malika Oufkir and Michèle Fitoussi (1999), „Cette aveuglante absence de lumière” by bestseller author Tahar Ben Jelloun (2001), the „Talk of Darkness” by Fatna el Bouih (2008) and Aziz BineBine's „Tazmamort” (2009).⁴⁸⁰ As rightly underlined by Hachad (2018, p. 218), these literary testimonies have to be interpreted as „true alternatives to regulated acts of testifying”. According to Hachad, „Tazmamart narratives, whether they precede or follow these initiatives, demonstrate that the IAI and IER are also political tactics for the regime to control the history of the Years of Lead, appropriate the

⁴⁸⁰ El Guabli (2017, p. 114) distinguishes between two phases of memory production, i.e. “a period of wide dissemination (1994–2005), during which the past was both news and memory, and a reflective period (2005–present) in which the memories of the wide-dissemination period are reconfigured through dialogical investigations in the print media and in social institutions.” I would contest this view by adding that only shortly after the 2011 uprisings the state's readiness to allow uncontrolled memory production has become more ambivalent. The space for such reflections heavily depends on the area of interest. While the margins to enhance the visibility of Imazighen and Jews have mostly continued to broaden, reflections about human rights and repression decreased dramatically.

discourse of human rights, and offer a minimal justice for the victims. Indeed, liberations were followed by intimidations and threats in order to prevent former political prisoners from telling their stories” (Hachad 2018, p. 218). Authors like Marzouki, who report their sufferings in their books and name their torturers and guardians, were, once more, arrested, harassed and intimidated to discourage any future critical cultural production that would challenge the official narrative on the kingdom’s new democratic human rights regime. It shows how the concept of transitional justice is used as a window-dressing element to veil the continuity of autocratic governance and ensure the persistence of the authoritarian constants within the monarchical regime (Hachad 2018).

At the same time, according to El Guabli (2014, 200f.), by failing to tame the voice of dissidence, prison writings become a „beacon of resistance, which has illuminated the path of the Moroccan people” and embarrassed the makhzen, paving „the way for the negotiation of better political and legal conditions wherein Moroccans can enjoy some benefits of citizenship (even though not totally guaranteed) and continue to question their status as the monarch’s subjects”.⁴⁸¹ As described by Vairel (2007, 2008), many survivors of the Leaden Years from all ideological stances (nationalists, socialists, Marxist–Leninists, Islamists or Sahrawi freedom fighters, army officers of 1971 and 1972 coups) organised in the Moroccan Forum for Truth and Justice (FVJ). This new organisation struck a complicated balance between, on the one side, the leftist movement, which had transformed into a group echoing the royal narratives and entering the king’s government in 1999, and the Marxist-Socialist movement, which still refused any cooperation with the regime. The FVJ managed to keep the pressure high. It called for truth and a form of redress that is not limited to financial compensation alone but would entail an official apology and state reforms that would prevent any reproduction of what had happened under Hassan II. By adopting contestation techniques borrowed from the Latin American context, the activists organised pilgrimages to⁴⁸² and assemblies in front of the former detention centres. They also set up symposia on human rights violations, declared the year 2002

⁴⁸¹ El Guabli also advocated for taking the literary accounts of former prisoners and their relatives seriously. In the absence of or limited access to physical archives, he called for accepting their writings as precious sources of information and trustworthy and reliable testimonies of state repression. Cf. El Guabli (2022, 2023).

⁴⁸² Slyomovics (2005, 65f. and 90f.) analysed these pilgrimages in detail as performances of human rights organised by civil society organisations. Pilgrimages normally designate spiritual journeys to Muslim saints’ shrines whose blessing (baraka) and holiness can be accessed by entering the sacred place and through physical contact. Transposing this religious experience to a place of horror like Tazmamart is a strong statement. In 2000, the government authorities prohibited the pilgrims from entering the detention centre, claiming that no one was still incarcerated there. Slyomovics (2005, p. 66) asserted that by “not allowing people to penetrate inside Tazmamart, in a sense the prison has been made to disappear, one more way to make disappearance continue”. At that moment, the regime prevented the emergence of a bottom-up heritagisation and memorialisation. As we will see later, such processes will only be enabled under its own rules and conditions.

„Year of Truth”, and leaked details of their detention to the press. With this activism, they managed to attract the attention of the monarchy. They were granted appointments with royal advisors to discuss ways to bring the CCDH closer to the United Nations’ Paris Principles Relating to the Status of National Human Rights Institutions.

Following these activities, the regime agreed on a reform of the CCDH, making it an institution independent of both government departments and intelligence/security services. At the same time, the royal court carried its budget. Former Marxist activist and political prisoner Driss Benzekri was appointed secretary general of the CCDH. By co-opting former detainees like him, the regime managed to appropriate also their experience in utilising the activist milieu and their capacity to mobilise and engage with embassies and international human rights organisations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International (Vairel 2008).

Yet, their capacities remained limited to a consultative role with no decisive power, whereas their narrative was assimilated into the royal discourse. This connection depoliticised the human rights question, cast credibility on the monarchy’s reform projects and strengthened the king’s position as ultimate arbiter and decision-maker in the sense of the people’s will (Vairel 2007). Eventually, in November 2003, despite sceptical voices from his more security-focused advisors (Linn 2011, p. 6), the king approved a recommendation of the palace-sponsored CCDH. In the slipstream of the May 2003 terror attacks in Casablanca, this recommendation called for a national reconciliation process carried by a national equity and truth commission called Instance Équité et Réconciliation (IER), located outside of the government’s and parliament’s reach as an extra-judicial institution that re-establishes the link between the king and his subjects that would definitively close the dossier and repair the prejudices and wounds (Vairel 2007, p. 237). In January 2004, the king launched this commission and appointed Driss Benzekri, former political detainee and head of the CCDH, president of the institution. The IER creation has been considered the culmination of successful brokering by human rights activists in Morocco (Vairel 2008). In a remarkable speech, he gave an outline of the mission to accomplish, revealing a lot about the monarchy’s motives for undertaking such an endeavour:

„Our aim is for Moroccans **to reconcile with themselves and their history**, to unleash their energies, and to play an active part in building a **modern, democratic society** that will **prevent recidivism**. [...] In drawing up its rules of procedure, and in carrying out the noble mission entrusted to it, the Commission will be committed to **complying with** the decision establishing this body, as well as with **international human rights conventions and the Islamic ideals of tolerance and forgiveness**. This is the path we must follow to **consolidate the spirit of positive citizenship**, so that **democracy, patriotism and the dissemination of the culture of human rights and duties become the best bulwark against extremist and terrorist tendencies**, which We are determined to combat with the **firm will** of those who care **for security and stability**, within the framework of the rule of law. Indeed, we intend to unleash the energies that will enable all Moroccans to be **fully in tune with the aspirations of their homeland**, and to meet both internal and external challenges. We see this achievement as the culmination and crowning glory of

an exemplary and unprecedented process, accomplished by all, with assurance, boldness and restraint, and also thanks to the democratic support of a people who **courageously embrace their past and, instead of remaining prisoners of its negative aspects, seek to draw from it the strength and dynamism needed to build a modern democratic society, where all citizens can exercise their rights and discharge their duties, in freedom, with responsibility [sic] and dedication.**⁴⁸³

For the king, the IER's mission was to contribute to the reconciliation of the Moroccan people with itself and with its history. It is thus an auto-reconciliatory process that is initiated and results in the unilateral pardon of the victims for the perpetrators. It is not about justice in juridical terms where victims and perpetrators of crimes face one another and where the establishment of truth helps hold those perpetrators accountable (El Guabli 2020, p. 84). Instead, the IER process was designed as a cultural journey to oneself where people can come to terms with their sufferings and their nation through their public accounting of the truth, the state's acknowledgement of these sufferings and state compensations for the pain endured. As much as the IER process was about truth, it was about turning the page and not remaining hostage or prisoner to history. This alone would release the necessary energy to pursue the path the sovereign draws in splendid terms of democracy and human rights. In the eyes of the king, such a process was supposed to enable the victims to become full citizens (again), to embrace their country in refreshed patriotism and to participate in the common nation's mission. Furthermore, the IER process was perceived as a measure to counter extremist thoughts and terrorist aspirations whose consequences Morocco had so tragically experienced only months before in the Casablanca bombings. The IER was designed in the tradition of earlier commissions created by Moroccan kings on urgent societal matters, including the indemnity commission created by Mohammed VI upon his enthronisation in 1999, which the IER explicitly refers to as inspiration (Vairel 2007, 235f., 2008).

The monarchy built upon this regime-inherent experience and learnt from the critique pronounced against its earlier initiatives by the human rights movement. Also, following lessons from other truth commissions on the international level, the composition of the IER maintained the balance between notables, law professionals and human rights activists (Dennerlein & Hegasy 2007; Vairel 2008). Under their leadership, within 23 months between 2004 and 2006, the IER undertook field trips to marginalised areas and organised public hearings and meetings with victims and local communities who had suffered civil and human rights violations or systematic discrimination under the rule of Hassan II. This limitation ignores the breaches of human rights committed, e.g. in the context of the war on terror under King Mohammed VI ever since 9/11 and the 2003 terror attacks in particular – a fact for which the

⁴⁸³ Mohammed VI (2004b). Author's translation from French.

regime was also criticised by some associations (Dennerlein & Hegasy 2007, p. 101; Linn 2011, 13f.; Slyomovics 2005, pp. 193–197). Some of these hearings were even broadcast on national television, and interviews were conducted and transcribed.

Unlike in the South African case, however, the victims who testified publicly were selected by a sub-committee of the IER. They received a time limit for their testimonies, which was also reduced to the essential. Furthermore, the witnesses and survivors had to sign a document that prohibited any declaration of names of crime perpetrators to the public, thereby granting the latter a blanket amnesty, which was also called out by civil society (Dennerlein & Hegasy 2007, p. 100; El Guabli 2020; Vairel 2007). Three newspapers that dared to publish the names of perpetrators were even shut down by the state, which then sued the AMDH for their continued demand for accountability.⁴⁸⁴ In some unsolved cases, the IER also leaked false testimonies and unofficial information about presumed victims of enforced disappearance and secret killing, alleging they were still alive, suffering from amnesia or madness. Thereby, the IER worked as a communication channel of the makhzen, manipulating the victims' families' horizons of hope and prolonging their suffering of waiting in uncertainty. By refusing to disclose information, the state kept them in an imposed status of passivity and frustration vis-à-vis overwhelming forces and powers (Menin 2017, 42–48).

Still, the most impressive benefit of the IER remains that it has compiled thousands of files and records of individual tragedies (Slyomovics 2008) and issued compensations for victims of human rights abuses. Compensations could be material or financial, involve the restitution of former job positions, the provision of social welfare such as medical insurance for victims and their families, or so-called communitarian compensations (Slyomovics 2009).⁴⁸⁵ The latter aimed at rehabilitating whole communities that had suffered group punishment and systematic marginalisation by the regime or had become a victim of the destructive social reputation that came with the installation of detention camps in their region. To compensate for both the development lag and the bad reputation, the IER thus suggested infrastructural projects such as constructing roads, hospitals, schools or universities. Other recommendations for communitarian compensation were of a more cultural nature and aimed at the social rehabilitation of the victims by making their stories accessible to a larger public. The creation

⁴⁸⁴ Whereas most of the perpetrators of crimes during the Leaden Years were granted an amnesty without having to testify, a mock trials was staged to persecute some of the tortures and strip them of their positions El Guabli (2020, p. 87).

⁴⁸⁵ On the international sources of inspiration for the IER concept of communitarian compensation see Vairel (2020). He explains how the former members of the FVJ who later became commissioners at the CCDH and IER brought their activist knowledge about international academic research on transitional justice to their new work within the king's truth and reconciliation initiative.

of a national archive, a House of History, a Museum of Riffian Culture in al Hoceima, as well as the transformation of the former detention centres into memorials, museums and places of public recreation areas or youth centres fall into this category (Kingdom of Morocco -Equity and Reconciliation Commission 2009a). These recommendations were developed through public hearings and meetings with individual victims, local communities, and civil society associations advocating for symbolic justice that would result in their social rehabilitation. Therefore, adopting these recommendations and their implementations can be seen as a blend of co-option and performance legitimization of symbolic significance. Unsurprisingly, in this spirit, the final six-volume report of the IER echoes the ideas outlined by the king years before in 2004. For example, in the Summary of the Final Report, the IER emphasised the effectiveness of non-judicial instruments in the national reconciliation process (Kingdom of Morocco -Equity and Reconciliation Commission 2009c, p. 30).

It would have been easy for the commission to refer to the royal mandate to seek truth (not justice in legal terms). Instead, the commission defended its approach by stating the superiority of the non-judicial measures over any tribunal that sits and decides over the crimes perpetrated in the state's name. In Volume 1 of the Final Report, the IER explained these non-judicial instruments in more detail:

„To achieve this, it adopted a methodology of outreach work and communication in its informative dimension and its social content in partnership with different actors in order to achieve a common reading that would help to find the key to understanding the violations, irregularities and infringements that occurred, and allow the construction of a **common memory**, which is often absent in periods of repression. Constructing a common memory requires the release of the dynamic of free discussion and debate, and democratic argument, **with the purpose of strengthening once more a shared identity insofar as it is one of the constituents of the nation**. Thus, working to uncover and **affirm the truth**, and to **achieve a reading of the violations that occurred** is a deep and long-term contribution to the reordering of this memory and a manifestation of the enrootment of the elements of reconciliation in its social and cultural sense without resorting to constraint, or imposing any form of forgiveness or individual reconciliation between the victims and those presumed to be responsible for the violations. Given the **close link between reconciliation and the preservation of a collective memory**, the Commission sought to broaden the scope of those benefitting from reparation programmes, by including regions whose inhabitants had begun to feel that they were subject to marginalization and a sort of collective punishment by dint of specific historical events linked to grave violations of human rights or because of the presence of secret detention centres in them. Thus, the reparation for collective injuries programme began to be a physical expression of the **spirit of positive citizenship and social solidarity**, and a contribution to the strengthening of the presence of the human rights, democratic, and participatory approach in the ongoing economic and social development programmes (Kingdom of Morocco -Equity and Reconciliation Commission 2009b, pp. 94–95).

For the IER, its mission has been one that enhances national reconciliation through the establishment of truth and the recognition of sufferings endured by victims of state-sponsored violence and discrimination. Such recognition and the reparations resulting from it were perceived to be fundamental for the construction of a collective memory that was considered indispensable for social cohesion and constitutive of the nation. The IER mission inscribes itself

in the discourse of national identity and ascribes itself an active part in creating and preserving this identity. According to our definition, the mission itself is inherently cultural, and the policies emanating from the IER recommendations are to be categorised as cultural policies in the name of social and political stability. The main instrument of these cultural policies is heritagisation, i.e. the making of cultural heritage that preserves and communicates the memory of historical events that are framed as constitutive of a new social order under Mohammed VI. It is designed in stark contrast to the Years of Lead under his father by strongly referring to democratic virtues.

At the same time, whereas the IER explicitly relates to the experiences made, for instance, in South Africa (Linn 2011, p. 8), proving impressive skills of authoritarian learning, it still contrasts with such truth commissions. The IER's teleological conception of memory puts the state – and not the victims and survivors – at the centre of national reconciliation „as both the initiator of the process and the party that has a final say on when it ends (El Guabli 2017, p. 120). Furthermore, Linn (2011, p. 14) rightly argued that whereas „truth commissions are traditionally utilised to provide collective healing or contribute to reform, the Moroccan palace used the IER to integrate its critics into the state and strengthen the continuance of the existing system. A truth commission thus was envisioned as a tool for civic management rather than a catalyst for institutional change – a primary function quite distinct from other truth commission experiences. The Moroccan experience thus suggests the diverse contexts within which transitional justice measures are being considered and shaped.” As the example of the IER's head Benzekri shows, by assimilating critical civic actors, co-opting them under the royal banner and officially asserting his unconditional support, the king made sure that he was perceived as a frontfighter of human rights and systematic reforms. Since such reforms would also have implied significant changes to the royal prerogatives, the palace in fact had no real interest in implementing the IER's recommendations (Linn 2011, p. 12).⁴⁸⁶ The monarchy's objective rather consisted in getting rid of its autocratic image (Mohsen-Finan 2007) and building a reputation of a „legitimate state in which the rule of law applied” and which the monarchy considered to reflect the truth about the situation in Morocco (Linn 2011, p. 7). The commissioners of the IER like Driss Benzekri and Ahmed Herzenni, in turn, believed that a truth commission could actually help democratise the regime and improve the accountability

⁴⁸⁶ Dennerlein and Hegasy (2007, p. 97) contend that this was not a mere act of co-option but a serious attempt to create an internationally accepted truth commission. However, over 17 years later, considering the ultimate result with no real perceivable change, the co-option terminology best resumes the situation. Even if honest and serious intentions might have been there on the co-opted individuals' side, history proofs them to have acted as mere instruments of the regime to maintain its rule without major lasting reforms.

and efficiency of the state institutions from within through even the most limited truth process. According to Herzenni, they weighed „the comparative gains of both choices. In the end, the prospect of obtaining change in the system of governance was more important than punishing a few individuals” (Linn 2011, p. 8). In fact, within this ambivalent political context of controlled dissidence and surveilled critical discourse, some of the recommendations have been executed rather swiftly. This includes financial and other material reparations. However, the record for cultural measures within the communitarian compensation programme reads less impressively.

6.3.1.2. The Communitarian Compensation Programme of the IER

According to former CNDH president el Yazami, the purpose of the IER’s communitarian reparation programme is „to help people ‘move from fear to citizenship. At the local level we have to show [a] process of change [is taking place] in Morocco; people still fear the state, and these projects can be local, small examples of a changing relationship’” and restore the relationship between the monarchy and the people (Linn 2011, p. 11). Financed partially by the European Union, some European countries and Morocco’s Ministry of the Interior, its administration is sieged in Rabat and shared between the CCDH and the CDG Foundation, a department responsible for social and cultural patronage (*mécénat*) at the of the state-owned bank Caisse des dépôts et de gestion (CDG) which is closely associated with the royal palace (Vairel 2011, p. 5).⁴⁸⁷

To ensure future funding, from the first months of the IER’s existence, Driss el Yazami had activated his contacts to sensitise high cadres of the European Union to the „Moroccan experience in transitional justice” and considered with them various models of financing the communitarian reparation programme. The contribution of the European Union cast visibility and legitimacy upon the communitarian reparation programme. At the same time, it also posed a tremendous administrative challenge with its high funding requirements and complex demand structures, which favour development cooperation with local NGOs instead of national reconciliation. The implication of the CDG facilitated the process and helped to speed up the negotiations and transactions outside the government-driven and parliament-controlled procedures (Vairel 2011, 2020, 115f.). Vairel (2019) described how being intertwined with international donors changed the concept of communitarian reparation into a development

⁴⁸⁷ Hibou and Tozy (2020, 439ff.) described how, since the 2000s, the CDG has become a symbol of the “neoliberal doxa” in Moroccan capitalist funding policy. Within its structures, the CDG management unites proximity and allegiance to the royal palace with technocratic expertise and integrity. This impression was confirmed by Interview, Fondation CDG, 1.

programme. This seemed to be the easiest way to reconcile the nation but yielded surprising effects on the social frameworks in the affected regions.

First, in the selection process following their call for projects, the CCDH and international donors seemed to prefer (cultural) projects which did not intend to directly document the horrors of torture and enforced disappearance and preserve the memory of victims and survivors. Instead of such symbolic reparations, the CCDH gave priority to projects which aimed at promoting overall human and economic development, reaching from water management, small businesses, agriculture and apiculture to social welfare and healthcare in areas concerned by stereotypes, discrimination and marginalisation caused among other by the proximity of prison. This selection bias towards depoliticised projects approaches the programme with another royal initiative, namely the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), which the king started in 2005 to combat poverty in Morocco. Often, the money allocated for projects of the communitarian compensation programme is even more accessible for the local communities than that of the INDH programme. According to Vairel, even in the few approved cultural projects, the CCDH tried to impose contracts, enabling them to keep the upper hand regarding content and production.

On the other hand, the programme initiated a new dynamic, bringing local NGOs (often for the first time) together with the CCDH, local administrations like the governors and walis, international donors like the European Union and national funding institutions like the CDG. The NGOs become the target and instrument of the programme's implementation, substituting to some extent the role of the state's nonexistent social services. This technical yet unpolitical participation in local governance enabled NGOs to enhance their profile and eligibility for future projects. In rural areas, the distributable funds caused a run on funding and a situation of concurrence about local leadership moderated and exploited by intermediaries who offered their help and advice to smaller NGOs lacking the experience or means to apply for funds (Vairel 2019, 2020). The NGOs' involvement in implementing the IER recommendations regarding communitarian compensations provided Morocco's authoritarian regime with an opportunity to surround itself with an aura of good governance and civil society participation (Vairel 2021, p. 129). Hence, between 2007 and 2014, about 100 projects were funded, benefitting local NGOs in 11 regions worth 159,7 million Dirhams (Vairel 2020, 103f.). To carry out these projects, since 2010, the CCDH (since 2011 called CNDH) founded two new working areas which dealt with the implementation of the IER's culture-related recommendations. While the IER I working area dealt with collective compensations, the IER II working area focused on

creating archives and museums and producing academic research about the 20th century (Hegasy 2017a, p. 116). The following chapters will be dedicated to the latter programme.

6.3.1.3. Setting Up an Archive of Human Rights Violations

Before the IER process, a legal void dominated memory preservation through archives in post-colonial Morocco. According to El Guabli (2022, p. 210), this legal void was reinforced by „public servants in the authoritarian regime” that

„worked to foreclose the possibility of historical reconstruction of Morocco’s postcolonial history by actively erasing documents or leaving them to decay. In particular, Driss El Yazami, the former president of the National Council for Human Rights (NCHR), stated that archives of state wrongdoing do not exist. El Yazami’s revelation that documentation is scarcer the closer its relation to the present time indicates that, in the minds of state agents, archival evidence was tantamount to future accountability. Indeed, Moroccans witnessed a concrete example of this practice in the fire that engulfed the documents of Morocco’s political police, known as Territory Surveillance Directorate, on 29 October 1999, just three months after the passing of King Hassan II. Thirty or more years’ worth of security archives were destroyed in this still unelucidated conflagration. While this is just one example of archives of policing and political violence, other archives related to Jewish emigration, coups d’état (1971 and 1972), and Morocco’s colonial history remain inaccessible to historians.”

Coincidence or not, the beginning of King Mohammed VI’s rule was, therefore, not set under better auspices with regard to the preservation of memory. This started to change in the context of the IER process due to public pressure. One of the first real culture- and memory-related projects was the creation of the National Archives. Yet this measure took some delay. The institution was *de jure* founded by law 69-99 of 30 November 2007 under the tutelage of the Ministry of Culture. In May 2009, decree n°2.08.543 organised the administrative council of the National Archive. In November 2009, the CCDH sealed an agreement with the Ministry of Finance and the Delegation of the European Union in Morocco on financing the national archives with 8 million euros.⁴⁸⁸

However, the physical archives were not created before the pressure on the regime from the streets increased in the context of the 2011 uprisings, which reminded the governing elite of the IER’s recommendations. This is a trend that could be observed in large parts of the MENA region during the uprisings when „archives gained such prominence because activists saw them as a tool to ‘prove’ what happened and to counter any new state-sponsored efforts to produce amnesia” (Hegasy 2019, p. 254). The creation of the physical archives in Morocco was meant to symbolise the regime’s sincere struggle for accountability and transparency within the larger context of democratic reforms and human rights as statements by leading state representatives

⁴⁸⁸ Guisser (2011); Yahia and Salmi (2010).

like Driss el Yazami or the then inter-ministerial delegate for human rights emphasised unanimously.⁴⁸⁹

But even then, the establishment of a functioning national archive was only half-heartedly advanced. In January 2013, the archives moved into their own facilities, one (relatively small) wing of an old building formerly used by the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco and the archive of the French protectorate. The inauguration took place in July 2013. However, at that time, not even the CNDH employees knew where precisely the documents were stored, increasing the risk of falsifying archival material (Hegasy 2019, p. 255). The archive staff was only augmented slowly, leaving its director, Jamâa Baida, to work alone for several months. Over the following years, it has become evident that the archives' facilities and staff capacities are insufficient to fulfil the archive's mandate to host and preserve all historical documents stocked by the Moroccan administration since the independence. Consequently, by 2017, ten years after its official creation, the archives could not fill more than 2.600 linear meters, while the ministerial archives are estimated to exceed several tens of thousands of linear meters.

Whereas the slow rate of acquisition was also criticised by the Moroccan Court of Audit (*Cour des Comptes*), part of the truth is also that Baida's team faces the huge problem that only a tiny percentage of these documents are adequately archived according to the rules of the art. 33% of the Moroccan administrations (including the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture) do not possess any specialised archival structure, and 14% do not even have a depot to stock their documents despite a law issued in 2015 that obliges every ministry to set up a specialised committee to take care of its archives. This considerably slows down the transfer and the creation of an inventory. It also requires considerable efforts on behalf of Baida's team to support the administrations in establishing the necessary structures and deciding which elements will be transferred to the National Archives.⁴⁹⁰ One part of the documents already transferred to the National Archives are the accounts of the IER, which were handed over after the National Archives' physical creation. The new law 31-13 of 2018 grants every citizen and foreigner living in Morocco a right to information, including access to public archives not concerned by security or privacy restrictions.

Despite this regulation, however, both the website of the IER and the website of the state-sponsored CNDH, which has to be considered as the heir of the IER and CCDH, have not been accessible from Germany since at least 2020 until at least mid-2024, the time when the bulk of

⁴⁸⁹ Guisser (2011).

⁴⁹⁰ O.B. (2019).

my study was carried out. During this time, individuals who do not have the opportunity to travel to Rabat and check the archives themselves thus have no chance to obtain authentic information about the IER and its work online ever since the IER website has been taken offline – according to El Guabli (2022, 219, n. 49) „a breach of Moroccan law organizing archives”. Also, my own requests to the National Archives, which manages the IER’s archives, to send me a copy of the IER report have also remained futile. It was only through other researchers that I eventually received a French and English copy of the final report. Furthermore, it was only thanks to diligent colleagues’ work that I could access some parts of the old IER website through the „Wayback machine”. Given this regrettable and untransparent policy, it seems like the regime has turned the page, and the times of open information and public discourse about human rights are ultimately over. Instead of taking the reconciliation to another level by proceeding to real accountability where perpetrators of crimes are tried for their crimes and victims receive not only symbolic but also legal justice, the Moroccan state appears to be hoping for public oblivion given the fact that many of the victims are old or already dead by now and less and less people of the younger generations have actively experienced the leaden years of Hassan II.

The human rights archives (in French legal tradition) remain closed to the public unless an official request for an exception is made and approved. According to Susan Slyomovics and Fatna el Bouih, though, this is a tedious administrative endeavour that makes survivors who wish to re-read their files experience their documents’ fragmentary, incomplete nature (Slyomovics 2016). For survivors of enforced disappearance and torture, the IER process is more than metaphorical or symbolic. It is a tangible repository of documents containing their sufferings and a chance to keep memory and the hope for change alive (Slyomovics 2016, p. 30). In turn, the regime seems to believe that its duty to symbolic reconciliation is fulfilled by enduring the uncomfortable truths of the ERC process and paying reparations. Official laws confirm this impression. According to El Guabli (2023, p. 182), article 17 of the law 69.99 „stipulates that a period of one hundred years has to pass before archives containing private health and employment information can be accessed. The same law sets the limitation at sixty years for archives concerning defence, foreign affairs, and personal information. As a result, all of the ERC’s [i.e. the IER’s] official documents will remain inaccessible to historians for the foreseeable future. This, in fact, goes against the ERC’s own initial recommendation, which suggested making its archives public.”⁴⁹¹ Accordingly, it shows no genuine interest in

⁴⁹¹ Considering the lack of access to Moroccan archives, El Guabli (2022, 2023) advocated for accepting so-called “other-archives”, i.e. “as all forms of testimonial and memory-based (mnemonic) cultural production that revisits

respecting its commitments to the commemoration of its wrong-doings. Brahim El Guabli, hence, rightly emphasised the „transitional nature of these institutions [i.e. national archives] whose mandates sound great on paper, but who have to navigate a very risky distribution of power in which the institution itself, rather than its function in society, becomes the goal” (cited in Hegasy 2019, p. 255). The earlier commitments ultimately came down to mere lip service, which helped boil down the national debate as long as the public’s human rights focus was salient. The mysterious and disastrous fire in Morocco’s security archives, the delay in implementing the IER recommendations, the deactivation of the IER website as well as the *de facto* inaccessibility of critical archives for historians is evidence that, from the outset of Mohammed VI’s rule up until today, the monarchy’s genuine interest consists in protracting, fading out, sabotaging or crushing any activity that could have the potential to compromise the monarchy’s position or to reduce its control over historical narratives.⁴⁹²

6.3.1.4. Disentangling Protest and Memory Discourse: Heritage as an Elite Project?

The Moroccan regime’s archival strategy mirrors its approach to historiographical work in general. Since the early years of independence, a tacit agreement between the state and the universities saved the latter from regime propaganda, allowing for spaces of relatively free thinking. In return, the monarchy ensured that recent history was spared as an object of teaching and research, forcing historians into self-censorship (Hegasy 2017a, 118f.). Moroccan historiography appeared like a fig leaf that helped to hide the lack of real implementation of human rights and democracy. In fact, „academic historians[...] grounded their discipline in nationalist pride against colonial historiography” (El Guabli 2022, p. 217). Conversely, under Mohammed VI, during the IER process, the state sought the assistance of academic historians, which brought the latter in contact with victims and survivors of the Leaden Years, whereas they had previously always ignored any non-official document material (Dennerlein & Hegasy 2007, p. 105; El Guabli 2023, 151 and 157ff.; Hegasy 2017b). A new master’s programme was inaugurated at the Mohammed V University of Rabat, and creating an Institute for

Morocco’s postcolonial past and engages with the multilayered silencing of issues of historical significance. Other archives encompass all forms of sources that provide access to uncomfortable histories, which lie outside the purview of classical official archives.” Among other things, this concept also encompasses literary productions like the prison novels mentioned above.

⁴⁹² Hegasy (2019, p. 256) holds a slightly different view, arguing that “no matter how halfhearted a state initiative might be, circulars and missives are central to substantiating claims for social transformation, as state employees will then be officially encouraged not to annihilate documentation, but to preserve it. In cases of conflicts with superiors, they can refer to these (royal) directives.”. This argument builds upon Slyomovics (2016, p. 27), who referred to a “government circular informing all administrators about the necessity to conserve and deposit documents in the newly created national archive” in the application of the IER recommendations.

Contemporary History kick-started a new dynamic in historical research (Hegasy 2017a, p. 119). However, according to Belkziz (2018, p. 102), despite the robust syllabus of its courses, the new master's programme was a frustrating experience for many students because they were often not allowed to conduct their research freely and were censored by their supervisors if their envisaged research topics risked touching upon sensitive issues.

Also, access to royal and IER archives remained restricted. Hence, the programme was terminated only two years after it had started. Historians thus continued to abstain from writing the history of the present. For El Guabli (2022, 222f.), this is an „indication of the constraints that continue to govern their work”, considering the risks of „penning a historical narrative that involves authorial responsibility and making truth-claims”. Hence, „independent” historians' work converges with the regime's own investments in re-writing Moroccan history. This becomes particularly visible in the educational reforms under Mohammed VI. Since 2002, the new history textbooks for Moroccan schools still insist on elements of national identity like Islam, the Green March and the „return” of Western Sahara to the Moroccan homeland. However, in the books, the regime also appropriates Abd al Karim Khettabi's resistance against the Spanish as an element of Mohammed V's struggle for Morocco's independence. Furthermore, the textbooks emphasise the democratic transition of the Moroccan regime under Mohammed VI and the monarchy's investments in human rights policies in comparison to other countries in the Middle East while it still omits thorny issues, including the regime's violent response to upheavals or details on the Leaden Years and Mehdi ben Barka's disappearance (Belkziz 2018, pp. 104–108)

In addition to these pedagogic novelties, in 2010, the historian Abdelhak Lemrini was appointed Historiographe du Royaume. Two years later, the king even made him speaker of the palace. Through him, the regime used the official Éditions du Palais Royal and the quasi-palace newspaper *Le Matin du Sahara* (nowadays called *Le Matin*) to spread the glorifying portrayal of the monarchy as a modern regime promoting national development (Hegasy 2017b, p. 96).⁴⁹³ Beyond these journalistic means, the regime employs its own (pseudo-)academic channels, including state institutions like the Royal Institute for Research in Moroccan History (RIRMH), the CCDH's successor called CNDH, and the Council of the Moroccan Community Living Abroad (CCME). While these institutions have indeed brought to light some aspects of

⁴⁹³ Although, at that time, private literary testimonies and newspapers like *al Massae* and *Zamane* emerged and published critical historical accounts on the Years of Lead as described by El Guabli (2017), other critical journals like *Le Journal Hebdomadaire*, *Nichane* and *Al Jarida al Oula* which shed light on historical and on-going cases of corruption and human rights abuses were shut down by 2010 and dissident journalists like the history professor Maâti Monjib were harassed and arrested on dubious allegations. Cf. for instance Hegasy (2017b, pp. 96–101).

marginalisation, discrimination and unequal power relations between the monarchy, the opposition and cultural groups like Jews and Imazighen, they have remained silent about some elements of the authoritarian repression (El Guabli 2022, p. 228, 2023, 167ff.).

A prime example is the collective book „L’Enfermement, le Partage – Lieux et mémoire”, published by Croisée des Chemins in 2015 and edited in cooperation between the CNDH and the European Union. This „beau livre” contains texts and high-resolution photos of former detention centres. In its foreword, Driss el Yazami, former CNDH president, stressed the state’s accomplishments in the memory process and acknowledged that this book took time to be published, allegedly because the CNDH was unsure whether sites of inhumanity could be presented in beautiful images that could risk relativising the sufferings of the victims. Yazami claimed that the reaction of these former victims convinced the CNDH to publish the book as one element of the IER 2 programme financed by the European Union and other public and private partners.⁴⁹⁴ Mostafa Boaziz, history professor and former director of the Moroccan Centre of Social Sciences at the Hassan II University, added in his foreword that King Mohammed VI created the IER at a moment in time when the royal memory narrative got contested or supplemented by other memory conceptions of formerly banned or marginalised strands of society, including Imazighen, Rif people, Marxists, Islamists or Sahraouis. The beauty of the new book’s images was not to conceal the ugliness of the prisons but to demonstrate that, irrespective of whatever human cruelty was to be found in Morocco or elsewhere, Life would always come up on top. He added that the *beau livre* was there to celebrate the victory of humanity, the hope of good governance, as well as a civil, democratic, just and solidary society in order to say no to horrors and oblivion and call for a „Never again!” According to him, reading the dreadful page of history was necessary to turn it definitively. Finally, he stressed that the book is memory or the version of memory that is possible today, a way of creating conditions that enable a reconciliation of Moroccans with their past.⁴⁹⁵ By openly acknowledging that the historical picture painted in this publication was only one way to pay tribute to the victims of state arbitrariness and that other more professional versions might follow, the monarchy presented itself as having learnt its lessons from the years of despotism and power monopoly. Hence, echoing the IER narratives, the state claimed that publishing this book and promoting public remembrance was a way to national unity. However,

⁴⁹⁴ CNDH and Yazami (2015, p. 16).

⁴⁹⁵ Mostafa Bouaziz in CNDH and Yazami (2015, pp. 19–21). This can also be read as a hint to self-censorship, indicating that the accounts given in this book are the furthest the authors could dare to go in the current political context of Morocco. This would not be untypical for contemporary Morocco. El Guabli (2023, p. 157) showed that self-censorship is still common among Moroccan historians.

we need not forget that the book was co-funded by the EU, that it enjoyed only a small edition and aimed at a tiny, educated elite rather than a rural, marginalised population.

Another particularly telling example is the debate around creating a museum on Moroccan history, the *Dar Tarikh Al Maghrib* or *Maison de l'Histoire*. Between the publication of the IER report and the uprisings of 2011, nothing had happened to implement this recommendation of the reconciliation commission. Yet, in the wake of the social uprisings and constitutional reforms of 2011, the CNDH convened an international colloquium for 13-14 October 2012. Organised under the patronage of King Mohammed VI, it was intended to contribute to the development of a *Maison de l'histoire*. Still strongly under the impression of the democratic reforms a year before, then-CNDH-president Driss el Yazami formulated the project's ambition as follows:

„The construction of the Maison du Maroc is not an easy task; it is a major challenge to build history on rational foundations and contribute to the development of a prominent metropolis, Casablanca. It is also a pioneering experience that will support the ongoing cultural dynamics in Morocco and strengthen democracy. Thus, the *Maison de l'histoire du Maroc*, a national-scale project, aligns with the recommendations of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission, which have inspired the establishment of regional museums in Rif, oasis, and Sahara currently under development.”⁴⁹⁶

The project was thus planned as an urban development project for the city of Casablanca and as a means to foster the democratic reform process in the kingdom, which underlines the economic and political dimensions of cultural policy at the time. Also, we see that a clear focus of cultural policy actions at this time was on bastions of popular contestation, including the urban hotspot of Casablanca and regional hotspots of the Rif and Western Sahara. This impression is corroborated by the programme booklet of the colloquium (CNDH 2012, p. 2). It was introduced by a quote from the royal message dedicated to the inauguration of the conference on the new Rif Museum in al Hoceima a year before in July 2011.⁴⁹⁷ This cross-reference underlines the importance of this message as an ideological founding text of Morocco's post-2011 cultural policy and showcases how Moroccan authorities try to streamline other cultural measures accordingly. However, after the conference in 2012, the idea of a *Maison de l'histoire* remained dormant for almost ten years. The monarchy only resuscitated the debate in 2021, at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fifteen years after the IER report, the Académie du Royaume, in collaboration with the editor La Croisée des Chemins, published the proceedings of the conference that had taken place in 2012. The findings were presented under great media attention at a conference on 24 February 2021. Abdeljalil Lahjomri, the

⁴⁹⁶ le Matin (2012).

⁴⁹⁷ For a detailed analysis of this museum project, see chapter 6.5.2.1.2.

perpetual secretary of the Académie du Royaume, presented the idea as being in line with the IER recommendations and the 2011 constitution and explained:

„The publication of the proceedings of this conference dedicated to the building of a House of Moroccan History is intended to be a call to confront democracy in our country through a more offensive cultural dynamic which would convince everyone of the necessary and precious appeasement of a present with the past and of the past with the future of a nation whose tumultuous history is a story of greatness, nobility and generosity”.⁴⁹⁸

Abdeljalil Lahjomri thus positioned the plans to create the *Maison de l'histoire* within a cultural offensive that enables every Moroccan to perceive the nation's splendour and reconcile with his/her history. According to Lahjomri's foreword to the new book, the museum project is both „indispensable and salutary” since it responds to „an imperative and pressing social demand for an appeased knowledge [connaissance appaisée] of the past.” For him, the museum's creation was only now possible thanks to advancements in research into Moroccan history, facilitating remembrance and helping defend Morocco's diversity and democracy.⁴⁹⁹

A few weeks later, the conceptual project design of the *Maison de l'histoire* was entrusted to former CNDH secretary general and current CCME president Driss Yazami and Mohammed Kenbib, a historian specialising in Morocco's Jewish history. The latter had been the scientific coordinator of the new book publishing the conference proceedings. In July 2021, Kenbib was appointed director of the Royal Institute for Research on Moroccan History (IRRHM) by King Mohammed VI, replacing the long-time director Mohammed Qably.⁵⁰⁰ The IRRHM had been established in 2006 in reaction to an IER recommendation. It used to report directly to the Habous Ministry, whose long-time minister, Ahmed Toufiq, is himself a historian enjoying the trust of the monarchy. The institute's independence could hence be questioned, as argued by (El Guabli 2023, 170f.). The IRRHM's mission consists of „activating research into the history of Morocco” and promoting „knowledge of Morocco's near and distant past, in order to anchor Moroccan identity and strengthen collective memory, by opening up to the different actors in interaction with identity and personality across the ages.”⁵⁰¹ This mandate aims at both the

⁴⁹⁸ Youssef (2021).

⁴⁹⁹ Guisser (2021a); MAP (2021a).

⁵⁰⁰ Along his academic career, Kenbib became familiar with the presentation of knowledge about Moroccan history and culture to the national and international public. He was Senior Associate Professor at Oxford, a Fulbright Scholar in Residence in the USA, he was scientific director of the *Rendez-Vous de l'histoire* in Rabat (2004-2008), consultant at the CNDH (2011-2013) and cultural consultant at the Moroccan embassy in Paris (1997-2001). In 2015, he was the author of a study for the kingdom's state-owned think tank called *Royal Institute for Strategic Studies* (IRES), which dealt with Morocco's cultural diplomacy potential Aydoun and Kenbib (2015). He is currently scientific advisor for the *Rencontres de l'Histoire du Monde Arabe* at the *Institut du Monde arabe* in Paris which is headed by Jack Lang, former French minister of culture and an highly-esteemed personality in France's high-society. Cf. also le Matin (2021c).

⁵⁰¹ Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques (2014b).

national and the international public. It can, therefore, be perceived as a scientific lobby arm of the Moroccan kingdom dealing with issues of cultural identity.⁵⁰² In February 2021, IRRHM was moved under the roof of the Académie du Royaume⁵⁰³ and dropped the word „research” from its name to become the Royal Institute for Moroccan History.⁵⁰⁴ While El Guabli (2023, 174f.) is not sure whether this change would potentially bring the institute under the direct influence of the monarchy, the following analysis shows how much the debate about the *Maison de l’histoire* has evolved ever since nurturing much more than before nationalist narratives propagated by the monarchy.

First, this can be seen on a structural level: The Dahir n° 1-21-02 promulgating law n° 74-19 that reforms the Académie du Royaume du Maroc stipulates that the Académie du Royaume sends two personalities from among its members to represent the academy within the scientific council of the IRRHM. The latter decides upon the scientific programme, projects and activities, which its director must submit „to the Academy’s Coordinating Council for approval”.

Secondly, the monarchy’s influence can clearly be deduced from the narratives that now evolve around the project for the *Maison de l’histoire*. In December 2021, a joint communiqué was released by the IRRHM and the *Académie du Royaume*, in which the stages towards the creation of the *Maison de l’histoire* were defined. At the head of the planning team for the *Maison de l’histoire*, Kenbib and Yazami reiterated a social need to learn about Moroccan history for the sake of strengthening one’s own identity by fostering a feeling of national belonging and orientation through ancestral values. Still, at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, a conference was convened in January 2022, giving a foretaste of the IRRHM’s work under Mohamed Kenbib. There, the historian explained the social need for history by the identity crisis that stems from the people’s uncertainties about the future. These uncertainties are brought about by the pandemic and other universal troubles coming with globalisation, including economic conflicts and their consequences. For Kenbib, as much as history represents the fundament of all Moroccans’ identity, it also affects all Moroccans.⁵⁰⁵ Furthermore, adding to this domestic

⁵⁰² El Guabli (2023, pp. 170–175) argued that the IRRHM’s work – although open towards marginalised regions of Morocco – remains state-centred. They often show a nationalistic almost hagiographic tone and ignore narratives of victims of state repression. According to el Guabli, the IRRHM’s landmark volume *Histoire du Maroc* also glosses over important details e.g. regarding enforced disappearance or the relationship between the Moroccan monarchy, the USA and Jewish organisations that facilitated Jewish emigration from Morocco.

⁵⁰³ According to Dahir n° 1-21-02 promulgating law n° 74-19 that reforms the Académie du Royaume du Maroc. Cf. *Royaume du Maroc* (2021).

⁵⁰⁴ See the website of the Académie du Royaume du Maroc : <https://alacademia.org.ma/academie-du-royaume-du-maroc/linstitut-royal-de-lhistoire-du-maroc/>

⁵⁰⁵ Cf. *le Matin* (2022b). This social need to learn about national history in Morocco is also observed by Moroccan non-state actors like publishers, podcasters, youtubers and writers. They described a special interest in history relating to the imperial past of the country and the dynastical succession of the sultans and kings. Apart from an

dimension, Kenbib justified the need for a *Maison de l'histoire* with yet another demand coming from abroad. Kenbib explained that the museum project also resulted from many inquiries from international top universities such as the Sorbonne, Berkeley, and Princeton. He prides himself on contributing to the kingdom's reputation by providing history lectures at a US military base, American universities and churches within the framework of the Fulbright Visiting Specialists Program „Direct access to the Muslim world” in 2006.⁵⁰⁶ Kenbib opposes his historiographical work to the narratives produced by other (non-professional) sources like social media and tries to advocate for putting confidence into scientific research like his own.⁵⁰⁷

In a country where social media remains one of the very few platforms of exchange that are hardly controlled by the state, such considerations seem to mirror worries about social fragmentation and alienation from state institutions, which make the museum project appear like an instrument to re-instil trust into the state and maintain law and order. The question remains, though, whether these considerations and worries are genuine or represent the standard argumentation often used by employees in the notoriously underfinanced cultural field to obtain funding by justifying their work as a service in the public interest. Yet since the project already enjoys royal support, which equals a guarantee for the project to be financed, the former scenario appears more likely to be true. In fact, at the conference, the loyal scientific elite revealed how the monarchy conceives cultural key concepts that justify royal dominance. For example, Bahija Simou, Director of the Royal Archives, explained that from her point of view, studying and communicating social history

„allows us to meet human communities who have bequeathed us their genius and their societal experience. Social history is the best **guarantee of our authenticity and our values**. Above all, it teaches us respect and humility towards those who preceded us because **without the perspective we cast on their experiences, we would be uprooted, without compass, without identity markers**. Social history also teaches us to put so many things into perspective, which generates **more tolerance, understanding and acceptance of others**. It allows us to understand the nation in its depths as well as in its evolutions. [...] I believe that the knowledge of our history is a gap to be filled, and my most ardent wish is to see the efforts currently made for Moroccan memory not neglect this aspect. Moroccan youth **have every reason to be proud of the history of their country which participated in writing the history of the Arab-Muslim world, even of the entire world**. Still, this generation should be brought closer to its own history. The whole challenge today is to **bring historical knowledge closer to citizens and to be part of the democratisation of knowledge**. Things are moving quickly, very quickly in fact. We must certainly make young people aware of the importance of their history because it is a **common heritage, which carries their roots and the values of their ancestors**.”⁵⁰⁸

apparent identity crisis, these civil society actors explain this need also by the increasing confidence with which Morocco positions itself in the concert of nations. This could imply, that the more successfully the monarchy acts on the national and international stage, national pride increases along with and interest in and identification with the monarchy. Cf. for instance Hamdani (2022b).

⁵⁰⁶ *le Matin* (2021a).

⁵⁰⁷ *le Matin* (2022b).

⁵⁰⁸ Oukerzaz (2022b).

From Simou's explanations, we understand that, for the regime, studying national history and transmitting it to the Moroccan public (and youth in particular) is about upholding traditions and the values they convey. These traditions involve the continuation of valuing the constants of royal domination. For instance, Simou legitimised the bay'a, the Makhzen and the Dahir with references to Moroccan history. She presented the bay'a as a democratic state contract par excellence and as an essential governance principle that defines the rights, duties and responsibilities of the ruler and his subjects. She cited, among other things, the bay'a of the Sahraoui people, thereby drawing the picture of a historic bond between this notoriously rebellious population and the central power of the monarchy. The *makhzen*, in turn, is emptied of its negative connotation, which it often holds in the Moroccan population to describe the Moroccan deep state. Furthermore, she ignored the colonial influence on the reinvention of the bay'a ritual and its re-modelling under Hassan II within the consolidation of his autocratic power.⁵⁰⁹ Instead, she positively defined it by reference to the Almohad times as the power exercised by the state on a central and local level, which allows the state to maintain internal and external security, to collect taxes, to ensure a balance between the tribes, to make judgements and decisions and to defend the territorial integrity. Also, the dahirs (royal decrees) are explained in their historical dimension, attributing to them a time-honoured legitimacy as a complex system of evolving modes of governance by the sultans since the Almohads up to their blossom under the Alaouites.⁵¹⁰

In a similar vein, Rahal Boubrik, a history professor at the University of Rabat, claimed that, based on his archival work at the *Fondo documental de Sahara* (Luis Rodrigues de Viguri y Gil), he could prove „that Spain not only hindered the completion of the territorial unity” of Morocco in 1956 but that „it worked between 1958 and 1975 to invent a ‘Sahrawi political identity’. In the first stage, its project aimed to create a territorial entity and the notion of ‘Sahrawi people’ to move on to the next stage, creating a puppet state in the Sahara.”⁵¹¹ Such statements contradict other officials in the human rights field, like CCME president Driss Yazami, who claim that the times when Morocco's authoritarian rulers used to bend historical research to instrumentalise it for political ends were over ever since Mohammed VI came to power.⁵¹² It also contradicts the official goals of the new unit initiated at the CNDH, which aims to make history research a driver for change towards the rule of law and democracy.

⁵⁰⁹ On this aspect, also see chapter 5.2.2.4. and Hegasy (2017a).

⁵¹⁰ *le Matin* (2022a).

⁵¹¹ Oukerzaz (2022c).

⁵¹² Hamdani (2022a).

In fact, from examples like the ones collected at the conference organised by Mohammed Kenbib, we can deduce that Morocco's loyal scientific elite actively bolsters authoritarian power principles by insisting on the historicity of monarchical rule. Hibou and Tozy (2020, 217ff.) argued, for instance, that loyal historiography, including the monumental work on Moroccan history by long-time IRRHM director Mohammed Qably, acknowledged state violence but presents it as quasi-legitimate violence of the nation-state. Regime violence is hence relativised against the backdrop of the process of nation-building and modernisation when violence was presented as necessary, and the monarchy was not the only protagonist of violence. For the broader population, these definitions of scientific concepts and principles become relevant when they transpire into publicly perceivable actions, such as the planned creation of a museum on Moroccan history. It is, therefore, not surprising that Kenbib, Yazami and Lahjomri were eager not to appear elitist but inclusive and open to dialogue with the population since the academic concepts come into effect only through the people's validation.⁵¹³ Hence, while pretending to apply standards of academic rigour and follow international democratic rules, elite identity discourses must still be considered as a means of authoritarian power legitimisation as argued by El Guabli (2023, p. 168).

As of 2023, however, like the Rif museum in al Hoceima, the *Maison de l'histoire marocaine* has not yet been implemented and so far remains not much more than ink on paper, written by an elitist group of scientists with hardly any impact on the urban fabric of Casablanca or the nation as a whole. And even if the *Maison de l'histoire* happens to be created one day, it is more than questionable whether, under a robust regime which discards or discourages contesting views on history, a critical, non-hagiographical museology that does not sing the eulogy of the monarchy is at all possible.

6.3.1.5. Turning Prisons into Museums

This picture of (at best) half-hearted implementation continues with regards to the other culture-oriented recommendations, such as the transformation of the former detention centres into memorials or spaces for social activities: Although these projects draw their urgency and legitimacy from the same source as the establishment of the national library, i.e. the IER process and the demands from the civil society, they have remained not much more than ink on paper.

As an element of the IER process, public hearings were started to demonstrate the political interest in this cultural element of the communitarian reconciliation programme. Over the years,

⁵¹³ Chraïbi (2022a).

however, this dynamic faded away. According to its report, the IER commission „held a meeting with the Tazmamart Victims’ Coordination Committee on 11 March 2004. It also held a meeting about community reparation projects with the Tazmamart Development and Culture Association, which attended the proceedings of the National Reparation for Injuries Forum” (Kingdom of Morocco -Equity and Reconciliation Commission 2009a, p. 98). It thus appears that the state at least during the early IER process opted for an inclusionary approach which involved civil society actors, which were at least partly composed of survivors of the state’s former arbitrary violence and detention policy. This public dialogue yielded the local population’s wish for a clinic, a school, an improvement of the road infrastructure and new space for pastoralist activities. Also, in the case of Derb Moulay el Cherif in Casablanca, public hearings had yielded the conversion of „the centre into a museum and a socio-cultural centre” (Kingdom of Morocco -Equity and Reconciliation Commission 2009a, p. 95).

In both cases, no mention of the demolition of the former detention centre was made, neither in the public requests nor in the recommendations of the IER commission. However, already by the time when the final report of the IER was still being elaborated, forces of the Royal Army had started to dismantle parts of the detention centres of Tazmamart and Derb Moulay El Cherif where during the leaden years hundreds of political detainees had been tortured and mistreated, often after having been victim to forced disappearance. Menin (2019, p. 317) rightly pointed out that, for former detainees, „the erasure of the cells of Tazmamart reveals the political will to domesticate the memory of the past while maintaining the status quo. Unlike post-dictatorial Latin America, no regime change happened in Morocco, and this helps to explain the state’s disengagement from Tazmamart and its attempts to prevent the public emplacement of its memory. However, the erasure of Tazmamart is not only a wound on Moroccan public memory but also a trigger for the survivors’ struggle.”

Despite this initial deception of the survivors’ hopes, the regime pretended to proceed with implementing the IER recommendations in the following years. A steering committee comprised the CCDH, some ministry departments, representatives of the European Union, the CDG Foundation and the management unit of the programme (UGP), which was in charge of the community reparation programme’s technical, economic and financial aspects. On the ground, local coordination teams were responsible for enhancing the visibility and ensuring the technical management in the regions. They consisted of CCDH members, local authorities, decentralised service entities of the state, local elected officials and partner associations.⁵¹⁴ In

⁵¹⁴ Midech (2009).

July 2008, the CDG Foundation launched a first project call for local associations to engage in a „positive discrimination” and „improve the feeling of justice [équité] and contribute to the development of the regions and communities which had been victim to [human rights] violations”.⁵¹⁵ Of the 39 project applications received, about ten concerned the preservation of the memory of the horrors committed and suffered in the former prisons. To execute the projects, the programme obtained a budget of 14 million Dirhams, co-financed by the European Union and the Agency for the Development of the Oriental region. Each project had to aim at a volume between 50.000 and 500.000 Dirhams and had to comply with the three elements stated in the call for project proposals, namely:

- A) capacity building of local actors in the local governance sector, the human rights domain, citizenship promotion, and the local development area;
- B) active preservation of the memory through the restoration of the memorial sites;
- C) support for income-generating activities in local communities.

Initially, the CCDH set out to execute the recommendations of the IER in four consecutive steps:

- 1) fix the modalities of ceding the former detention centres to the CCDH;
- 2) conduct a technical study with the housing ministry;
- 3) complete the final concept for the active preservation of the memorial sites with a series of workshops which ought to finalise the original propositions while taking the perspectives of the people concerned into consideration;
- 4) execute the projects of which the applications had been received.

On 25 November 2008, Ahmed Herzenni, director of the CCDH, concluded an agreement of partnership and cooperation with Taoufiq Hejira, who headed the Ministry of Housing, Urbanism and Territorial Planning at the time. In this agreement, both signatories committed themselves to transforming the former detention centres into public memorials and places of socio-economic activity that would benefit local communities who had suffered from social and political marginalisation and discrimination resulting from the sinister proceedings on their territory. According to Ahmed Herzenni, a priori, the initiative concerned all detention centres, yet three were particularly focused on, namely Derb Moulay Cherif, Kalaât M’Gouna and Agdz. Officially, these three sites were somewhat randomly chosen since the ministry had already

⁵¹⁵ Interview, Fondation CDG, 1. Cf. also Midech (2009).

been active in the respective provinces by the time the agreement with the CCDH was reached, thus facilitating access to and operation on the territories concerned. However, critics of the agreement decry an active attempt on behalf of the makhzen to omit the „death penitentiary” Tazmamart.⁵¹⁶ According to Herzenni, though, the ultimate idea was to „transform these sites which remind of imprisonment, suffering and torture, into sites which – while preserving the memory – become spaces of hope and development”.⁵¹⁷

While the costs of renovating the Tazmamart prison were unclear by 2008,⁵¹⁸ the costs for the rehabilitation, equipment and running of the Agdz centre were set at 8 million Dirhams. This, however, only represents a small portion of the overall budget attributed to the communitarian reparation to which the European Union agreed to contribute 3 million euros, the CDG Foundation 500.000 euros and the local authorities 6 million euros.⁵¹⁹ In this joint action, the CCDH should prepare the necessary studies and data on the communitarian reparation programme, including resettlement initiatives. At the same time, the Housing Ministry was supposed to reserve parts of its budget for the renovation works on the spot. Furthermore, it was hoped that the Economy and Finance Ministry would help finance the projects if need be. In addition, the Ministry of Culture was expected to bring in its architectural know-how. A consequential agreement with the Ministry of Culture was concluded in 2010. In this process, the fact that the IER report had been presented to King Mohammed VI was used to underline the urgency and seriousness of the matter. By referring to the experiences made in South Africa, Argentina and especially Chile, where the Villa Grimaldi was established as a collective memorial, Morocco stated its ambition to be cited among those countries which succeeded in doing away with the autocratic practices of the „Years of Lead” and in engaging in a democratic transition. Unlike in Southern America, however, this transition should happen without regime change but with a shift in governance styles.

The monarchy was keen on playing the symbolic card to underline the international dimension of Morocco’s claims to transitional justice. In the wake of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, celebrated on 10 December 2008, the CCDH organised public workshops in collaboration with the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ),⁵²⁰ an international NGO operating in post-conflict contexts. These workshops treated the future of

⁵¹⁶ Aujourd'hui le Maroc (2008b).

⁵¹⁷ Aujourd'hui le Maroc (2008b).

⁵¹⁸ According to the annual report of the CNDH 2021, the budget allocated for renovating the Tazmamart prison in the agreement of November 2008 was 6 million Dirhams. Cf. CNDH (2022b, 218ff.).

⁵¹⁹ Interview, Fondation CDG, 1 and Midech (2009).

⁵²⁰ For details on the cooperation between the ICTJ and the IER/CCDH also see Vairel (2011, 2020).

the former detention centres of Tazmamart (22 December 2008) and Agdz (31 January 2009).⁵²¹ They brought together human rights NGOs, victim associations and stakeholders, including the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Housing, the Ministry of Employment, the United Nations Fund for Women's Development and representatives of the European Union. According to the CCDH, the workshop in Agdz would „constitute a main stage which will make it possible to cross the glances of the various actors, international, national and local, concerned with the memory linked to political violence. And this, with the aim of enriching the initial proposals relating to the memory of the former detention centre of Agdz”.⁵²² Hence, under the eyes and with the assistance of the international community, the Moroccan regime presented itself as a model student of transitional justice.

By then, political observers and national media, both loyal to and critical of the regime, seemed to be hoping for and believing in actual change and real democratic transition. Also, civil society actors like Ahmed Marzouki, a survivor of the Tazmamart detention centre and leader of the Victims' Association of the Tazmamart Prison (AVIBAT), and Abdenaceur Bnouhachem, head of a survivors' group of the former Agdz prison, seemed satisfied by the inclusiveness of the process. On 31st of January 2009, the latter group participated in the workshop on Agdz, organised by the CCDH and the ICTJ. Ahead of the workshop, Bnouhachem explained: „We, the members of the group who have been locked up for several years in this prison, are very satisfied. First, because the CCDH involved the former victims in the reflection. The project is based on a participatory approach. Which, in our view, gives it essential viability”. He and his former fellow inmates were confident that they would be able to contribute to transforming the site into both a museum which would „preserve the memory, sensitise the people of the region to active citizenship and respect for human dignity, and at the same time a centre of social and economic development and a space of culture”.⁵²³ Similar quotes of Bnouhachem were cited by media close to the Moroccan media, such as *le Matin*. The journal quotes the survivor of the Agdz prison as follows:

„It is very important for us, as victims, because we feel that there is a rehabilitation. We salute the initiative of the CCDH to associate us with this project,” he told us. For him, this project „will make it possible to give influence to the region, which has been isolated and marginalised, and will be able to attract national and foreign investments for the human, social and economic development of the region”.⁵²⁴

⁵²¹ MAP (2008c).

⁵²² *le Matin* (2009).

⁵²³ Narjis Rerhaye (2009).

⁵²⁴ *le Matin* (2009).

Having national human rights activists, even ones who had suffered from secret detention and torture, confirm the regime's claims to a new form of governance lends a supplement of authenticity and legitimacy to the new polished image of the monarchy. The regime also made sure to have this image confirmed by seemingly independent international voices and diffuse these voices nationwide through its mouthpiece, *le Matin*. By citing Habib Nacir, the Moroccan representative of the ICTJ, who praised Morocco as a role model and frontrunner of human rights in North Africa and the whole Mediterranean,⁵²⁵ the regime steadily created itself a halo of internationally acknowledged governance performance. Yet, not all civil society actors unanimously adopted this narrative. Some associations and individuals organised parallel hearings or published their memoirs calling for an end to impunity and opposing the king's controlled truth and reconciliation model. However, the regime's narrative seems to have prevailed, also because even the international supporters of the IER process did not dare to blame the Moroccan monarchy as one of the principal instigators, beneficiaries and sometimes even actors of the human rights violations (El Guabli 2020; Vairel 2007, 2008).

In the second half of the 2000s, public discussions about transforming the former prisons into memorial sites were a platform for open critique against the Moroccan state. Always linked to past crimes and wrapped into a discourse of local development, a clear „never again” was pronounced to warn the new king's government of repeating the horrors of his father's rule. In October 2009, for instance, the National Institute of Planning and Urbanism (*Institut national d'aménagement et d'urbanisme*, INAU) and the Bnouhachem Group organised a day of discussion on „The preservation of memory: a lever of territorial development – the example of the former detention centre of Agdz”. During this workshop, Mohamed Haddy, a professor of the INAU, expressed his opinion that collective memory should be the engine of Morocco's society and the element that constitutes Moroccans as one people. For him, the Moroccan people must get rid of the classical development concept, which has only generated frustrations since it „sets up narcissistic competition as a dogma, which praises the performance, the merits of the individual and which is at the origin of the paradox of the apparent impotence of politics to achieve any integrated and integrating development”. He criticised the Moroccan political system, which, for him, confirmed its inability to carry out actual development based on concrete democracy. Regarding space and territory, he underlined the fact that the organisation of territory has always functioned in „a logic that instrumentalises space to legitimise and hold powers and forms of domination”. As for the alternatives, he indicated that the capital of the

⁵²⁵ *le Matin* (2008); MAP (2008c).

territory must be shared in a way that „must result in an increase in individual and collective, material and immaterial capital, capital that would strengthen predispositions to action for development”. But to do this, he said, the territorial field must not be confiscated but reappropriated by its actors. To „liberate the capacities of collective action” and to be able to listen to the actor talk about „his story, his beginnings and his relationship with the place”.⁵²⁶ Other interventions of both intellectuals and the ordinary public warned that the crimes of the past still persisted to the present and that the IER had failed to persecute the perpetrators, yet opened the space to debate the painful past and preserve its memory in order to protect the people from any new state-sponsored violations of human rights.⁵²⁷

It is important to note that such openly pronounced critique was only possible during this short period when Mohammed VI, to consolidate his power, dared a significant yet controlled liberalisation of the public sphere. It was significant because it set him apart from his father’s despotic rule. It was controlled because the open spaces remained restrained by clear frontiers which are still valid today, namely the inviolable status of the monarchy, the sacrosanctity of the king as leader of the faithful, the pillars of Moroccan Islam and the priority of the Western Sahara issue. These limits are also always present in the context of the heritagisation of the former detention centres. If listened carefully, the Moroccan state raised a nuanced yet very clear warning regarding the expectations linked to the memory preservation process. At the workshop on the future of the Agdz prison, CCDH president Ahmed Herzenni explained the true purpose of the state-sponsored activities to rededicate the sites: „Preserve the memory to prepare the future, yes. Lament it, no. Before anything else, we need to defend the noble ideals for which the victims fought.”⁵²⁸ Nevertheless, the partial liberalisation of the public sphere has likely helped consolidate the monarchy’s position. The climate of change and reform probably contributed to pre-empting some potential for contestation far ahead of the 2011 uprisings in the MENA region.

6.3.2. Promises without Performances: When Only Time Heals the Wounds

While Morocco engaged in the financial reparation of survivors and victims’ families,⁵²⁹ the implementation of the culture-related IER recommendations stagnated after the first impetus of

⁵²⁶ Sakhi (2009).

⁵²⁷ Sakhi (2009).

⁵²⁸ Midech (2009).

⁵²⁹ As of 2022, the total amount of compensation is 24.507.448,50 Dirhams. By the end of 2022, 19.929 people had been enrolled in the health insurance program since the programme started. There was a total of 194 arbitrations. Cf. CNDH (2022c, 276ff.).

the early project pitches faded away. This seems to result from both a lack of political will and a lack of capacities. For sure, in many cases, the financial reparation of the victims and survivors might have been the best-suited and most straightforward way of a compensation attempt. In fact, according to Slyomovics (2009, p. 110), „80% of Moroccan claimants replied to the ERC [i.e. IER] questionnaire that money should be the first and primary method of reparation”. However, financial compensations do not require any profound change of state habits or any deep adaption of the established education and historical framing patterns but rather echo traditional mechanisms of monetary payoffs. The wounds of a wide range of individuals and survivors’ associations and their need to make their stories known remained widely unaddressed (Menin 2019). On the contrary, some of the people who had initially been optimistic about the state’s promise to preserve the victims’ memory to prevent any arbitrary state-sponsored atrocities from happening again felt betrayed.

6.3.2.1. Conceiving Graveyards as Memorials

In earlier times, it was normal for migrants within Morocco to exhume their dead to take them along to their new domicile. The Moroccan authorities changed the rules with regard to the victims of forced disappearance who had died during their incarceration. Although a concept was set up with the implication of former detainees, the final programme to commemorate these victims came with a lot of flaws, as described by Slyomovics (2021, 142ff.): After their exhumation from anonymous (mass) graves and their identification through DNA analysis, the remains of the dead did not become the property of the descendants but were subject to state-driven heritagisation within a cemetery project for deceased political detainees of the former secret detention centres. This procedure took place between 2007 and 2011 but came with multiple problems. Firstly, the burial of the dead at the place of their martyrdom is problematic because the graves have no real or symbolic meaning for the local communities that live in the surroundings. The contrary is the case. The authorities that had guarded the former detention centres had surrounded the prisons and their detainees with an aura of hostile strangeness, representing them as „criminals, terrorists, anti-monarchy, and Sahrawi separatists, all terms to enforce secrecy, fear, and silence about their whereabouts” (Slyomovics 2021, p. 146).

The materiality of the graves reinforced this alienation. Local graves in Morocco’s rural south lack headstones and epitaphs and usually are only marked by uninscribed, undifferentiated flat rocks to the feet of the dead, leaving the remains to natural decay. The burial spot is, however, orally transmitted from generation to generation, and the memory of the deceased is honoured in a neighbouring saint’s mausoleum. Conversely, the former detainees’ gravestones for Agdz, Kelaat M’Gouna and Tazmamart were fabricated in Rabat in an identical, standardised manner,

made from white marble with black inscriptions indicating the name, dates of birth and death of the disappeared prisoner, with some even featuring epitaphs. From Rabat, they were transferred to the former detention centres and erected at the places assigned for the former detainees' cemeteries. The new graveyards hence contradict local customs, and the tombstones are deemed strangers for outsiders imposed by the central state. Despite this memorialisation of the graves, no management and maintenance service of the cemeteries was established. Often, not even guards were assigned to protect the sites. Hence, the graves are often subject to dilapidation and vandalism or are used as garbage dumps or places of prostitution and assignation (Slyomovics 2021, pp. 145–148). Secondly, the remoteness of the graves and cemeteries reduces the accessibility for the families of the deceased persons who cannot easily commemorate their relatives (Slyomovics 2021, 142ff.). Furthermore, Slyomovics (2021, p. 144) described the difficulties she had as a researcher and visitor in obtaining permission to enter the site of Tazmamart. Academic research on the horrors of the leaden years as a contribution to a critical commemoration of the latter is, hence, also actively hindered by the restrictive access policies. The heritagisation of the graves mirrors the regime's aspirations to gain politically from merely symbolic human rights enactments. The opportunity for political legitimisation hence outweighed the right of the families to mourn their lost relatives in meaningful ways. Public interest, i.e. power considerations, trumped the private.

6.3.2.2. Pretexts and Excuses

Also on other levels, the implementation of the IER recommendations remained below expectations. On a conceptual level, for instance, the rehabilitation and transformation of the former detention centres advanced well. However, the execution did not follow up. This is what happened in Agdz: „Everything has been conceptualised to preserve the memory of this prison and to ensure its financial sustainability at the same time”, explained Abderrahim Chahid, a former member of the IER and the National Council for Human Rights (CNDH) which succeeded the CCDH after the constitutional reform of 2011, to Jeune Afrique in 2016.⁵³⁰ However, still by 2016, nothing had been done to renovate the former detention centre. Abdenaceur Bnouhachem regretted that local development projects have become the priority for the authorities and have pushed away the memory issue. As the head of a survivors' association, which had been included in the renovation plans in the late 2000s, he had the impression that the authorities „want to drown the memory of this prison in local development projects. We are not against it, but above all, these are places that have been the scene of great

⁵³⁰ Lamlili (2016).

human suffering and whose memory must be transmitted intact to future generations.”⁵³¹ Due to his and his fellow activists’ inflexibility regarding the preservation of the site’s and the victims’ memory, the authorities no longer included him in any communitarian reparation endeavours. According to Belkziz (2018, p. 101), the official story of IER officials is a different one, emphasising the community’s „strong preference for development projects that would generate income instead of memorial sites that stirred unwanted memories of the past”. Similar impressions prevail in Kelaât M’Gouna and Tazmamart.

Despite development projects on the ground, critical voices in the Agdz region have also pointed out the lack of benefits for the local population. Already in April 2012, the Moroccan newspaper *Libération* reported that local citizens seized the opportunity of the CNDH Secretary General Mohammed Essebar’s visit to Zagora on 31 March 2012 to complain about the misuse of the communitarian reparation funds.⁵³² For them, the programme had been emptied of its original sense, and the projects had remained without tangible effect on the population concerned. They claimed: „Community reparation programs for human rights violations in Morocco have turned into means of personal enrichment and an electoral card for certain personalities in the region”. To these allegations of corruption and political arrivisme come accusations from other citizens who criticised their systematic exclusion from the elaboration of the projects and the lack of transparency in the projects’ management amounting to cases of state officials’ corruption.⁵³³

This critique showcases that, to some extent, parts of the local communities have realised that their fates and misery have been used for economic and political purposes. For them, nothing has changed since the horrors of the late King Hassan II’s autocratic rule. They still feel the same marginalisation. From their perspective, it is manifest that the regime’s local development strategy, including promises to preserve the memory of the victims, is nothing more than window-dressing and a pretext to create opportunities for co-option of arrivists.

Their impression is not entirely wrong, as confirmed by the Tazmamart case. By demolishing major parts of the former prison, including the cell compound, the regime erased all chance of remembering the sufferings of the victims. To veil its intentions, the state engaged in a series of local development projects. This included the plantation of olive trees, the construction of a pension and a women’s workshop near the former prison. However, although co-financed by

⁵³¹ Lamlili (2016). Cf. also Vairel (2020, p. 118).

⁵³² Bentaleb (2012).

⁵³³ Bentaleb (2012).

the European Union, all of these projects had obvious flaws (Menin 2019). According to a report by Jeune Afrique, by 2016, the olive trees lacked water for irrigation and risked dying in the arid area they had been planted in; the medical station that had been opened in 2010 still lacked electricity and a name; also, the Tazmamart Association for Culture and Development – although created at the same time – still lacked reliable funds to plan for the future and a local women cooperative received support from the EU and the Moroccan state to weave tents from goat wool which no-one would ever come to buy. Furthermore, the CNDH's plans and promises to rebuild the old cells and integrate them into a memorial and an exposition with a school, cooperatives, and a cafeteria where „calm and serenity are at home” were far from being implemented.⁵³⁴ Also no genuine efforts had been undertaken to acknowledge the existence and reveal the stories of other secret detention centres like Dar el Mokri in Rabat, the Temara complex or the Villa Gueliz in Marrakech.

For most of the Moroccan population, the effects of the state's communitarian reparation programmes, therefore, remained invisible – at least with regard to the commemoration of state-sponsored terror. National media like *Libération* and international press like *Jeune Afrique* suggested that the state played a clock game, waiting for the last victims and survivors to disappear and to take any embarrassing questions and memories with them. The authorities tried to combat this impression wherever they could control the narrative. In reaction to the article in *Libération* reporting on the locals' criticism of lacking transparency and accusations of corruption against the communitarian reparation programme, the CNDH made the newspaper publish a counterstatement which contained the CNDH's version of the facts. In this supplement, the CNDH explained the selection procedures for the implemented projects and underlined that the programme cost 102 million Dirhams, financing 130 activities and providing funding for proposals of eight associations in the Zagora region (the region of the Agdz prison). According to the CNDH, the projects had yielded a very positive mid-term evaluation by the Moroccan consultant agency Baker Tilly, reaching highly satisfactory scores regarding pertinence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, coherence, added value and visibility. Furthermore, the CNDH categorically repudiated any allegations of corruption and lack of transparency, calling such accusations defamatory, and threatened anyone who would spread such contents by reserving the right to take adequate measures against him.⁵³⁵

⁵³⁴ Lamlili (2016).

⁵³⁵ Communes Du Maroc (2012); *Libération* (2012).

Even if we assume the correctness of the CNDH explanations, the fact that such precisions were necessary suggests that the authorities have not successfully communicated their efforts and activities with the local communities. A particularly telling example of this is the CNDH's reaction to one of the corruption accusations of some activists in Zagora: As a reminder, by 2016, the cemetery of the Agdz prison had finally been renovated and paid tribute to the victims of torture and enforced disappearance. However, in 2012, already four years after the announcement of the Agdz memorial project, this had not yet been the case. Therefore, a group of upset citizens in Zagora asked CNDH Secretary General Mohammed Essebar where the funds allocated for the renovation of the cemetery and the new pavement of the streets in Agdz had gone, suggesting a loss of funds through corruption. A few days later, the CNDH refuted all such allegations by arguing that no such project had ever been earmarked within the communitarian reparations programme.⁵³⁶

For this study, it was impossible to verify the existence of an agreement between the different Moroccan stakeholders. Nevertheless, it is not as easy as the CNDH claimed. In 2008, Moroccan media wrote about the content of the convention concluded between the CNDH's predecessor CCDH and the national ministries. According to these media reports, constructing cemetery walls and carrying out infrastructure improvements were indeed part of the symbolic reparation plans.⁵³⁷

While such reports are no proof of any concrete project to implement this plan, it is still circumstantial evidence of insufficient expectation management, if not deception. Even if, eventually, no concrete measures to carry out such works may have been mandated, the announcements of doing so were still out there, and the people who had so long suffered marginalisation were left waiting for improvement – in vain. It was only years later that the two cemeteries neighbouring Agdz were restored thanks to the perseverance of former CNDH member Abderrahim Chahid, who had pushed for a DNA recognition of 29 late victims of arbitrary detention and torture and advocated for a proper burial of the bones with a personalised tombstone for each of them (Figure 36). This upgrading of the cemeteries came at a global cost of 300.000 dirhams (27.500 euros).

⁵³⁶ Libération (2012).

⁵³⁷ Zyad (2008).



Figure 36: Cemetery for victims of state violence at the former detention centre of Agdz

© Cécile Treal and Jean-Michel Ruiz/ MarocImages for Jeune Afrique.⁵³⁸

This shows that the promises have been helpful to calm down the political climate for a moment and gain time by publicly demonstrating the new monarch's benevolence and willingness to embark on a new, more inclusive, and just political journey. The incident also underlines the reactivity of the state, which only becomes active if public pressure gets dangerously high. Furthermore, this discussion shows that by the first half of the 2010s, the system of cultural window dressing reached its limits and no longer managed to convince and silence the masses. The monarchy's legitimacy had already shown cracks during the 2011 uprisings, and the palace risked losing control over the legitimacy discourse. State representatives acknowledged this danger. In 2012, Mohammed Essebar, Secretary General of the CNDH, explained to the upset crowd that his institution „could not accept being pointed at by others while [they] were supposed to be a role model in transparency and good governance.”⁵³⁹ This means that, although they claimed that the corresponding project had never been earmarked in the budget, the Moroccan authorities later still renovated the cemetery, mainly due to concerns about legal legitimacy.

⁵³⁸ Lamlili (2016).

⁵³⁹ Bentaleb (2012).

Also, the reasons given by the authorities to explain their failure in implementing the projects were inherently legal, stressing the rule of law under the new reign of Mohammed VI: Of the four implementation steps proposed by the CCDH in 2008/9, the first step, i.e. the modalities of handing the former detention centres over to the CCDH, was presented to be the most difficult one. The case of the Agdz site, in particular, proved to be very complicated. Although al Omrane had carried out a technical project study following an agreement between the housing ministry and the CCDH,⁵⁴⁰ the state did not manage to obtain possession of the former prison. Legally, the kasbah is the property of the heirs of the former caid, pasha el Glaoui, who had built and occupied the fort before the state used it as a prison (since 1976). After the state abandoned it, the Glaoui family regained possession of the site. Converting the kasbah into a memorial would now involve the state recuperating it. The negotiations dragged, and up until the 2020s, nothing seemed to move ahead.

A similar fate occurred to the memorial project in Derb Moulay el Cherif in Casablanca since this former centre for interrogations and secret detention is nowadays partly occupied by squatters. According to former CNDH secretary general Mohamed Essebar, it is „also impossible to achieve whatever as long as the inhabitants who squat in the building have not been dislodged”.⁵⁴¹ Hence, apart from a small sign attached to a right side wall of the building which briefly explains the history of the compound and features the CNDH, CDG Foundation, the EU and the Association Casamémoire as funders of the programme, none of the original project ideas had been carried out by 2016.⁵⁴² Already in 2009, Ahmed Taoufik Zainabi, former manager of the communitarian reparation programme at the CCDH, explained the problem as follows: „It would be difficult at present to assess the amount of the restoration of this detention centre because there are several aspects including the relocation of the population who still occupy the premises”.⁵⁴³

However, some human rights activists do not buy into the official reasons given by the CNDH. Abdelkrim Manouzi, president of the Medical Association for the Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (AMRVT), regrets that „the state has shown its goodwill in the conception of the communitarian reparation programme but is too timid in its execution”.⁵⁴⁴ According to the Moroccan news platform LaVieÉco,⁵⁴⁵ other survivors say that they are „no longer under any

⁵⁴⁰ Midech (2009).

⁵⁴¹ Midech (2015).

⁵⁴² Lamlili (2016).

⁵⁴³ Midech (2009).

⁵⁴⁴ Lamlili (2016).

⁵⁴⁵ Midech (2015).

illusions about their bright future of memory preservation that the IER predicted for them.” Others again even speak about „premeditated protractions”. For instance, Abdenaceur Bnouhachem expressed his surprise regarding the official hindering reasons of the Agdz project, which he finds preposterous: „It’s weird. Why didn’t this family claim ownership of this building when we were locked up in it? Even assuming that it was true, the State could have expropriated it for public utility, preserving the collective memory comes before private interests, for all the good of the community.” It is indeed surprising that in other state projects promoted by the monarchy, such as the reorganisation of the Bouregreg Valley in Rabat, expropriations are very common, institutionally outsourced to dedicated agencies that only depend on the royal palace. There are two reasons for the diverging approaches. Either the monarchy is keen on upholding an image of good governance and the rule of law in a case that is particularly linked to a history of state violence, such as the implementation of the IER recommendations. This interpretation would dovetail with the regime’s official narrative. Or the regime purposefully procrastinates the implementation of projects that bear an embarrassing connotation since they only concern some remote areas and affect a few fast-ageing former opposition members. At the same time, the megaprojects in the capital are carried out at great speed due to their prestigious character. From my point of view, this interpretation appears more pertinent considering that the memorial projects even enjoy civil society support, which would theoretically allow the state to expropriate in the name of transitional justice without needing to fear public protest.

The people’s reasonable doubts about the sincerity of the state policies, hence, reveal further cracks in the regime’s legitimacy. However, given the tiny populations in remote areas like Agdz and Tazmamart, these cracks did not gain momentum due to a lack of public pressure. In turn, they became even more urgent in the context of the communitarian reparation programme in the Rif region. Unlike the marginalised populations of Agdz and Tazmamart, the Riffians have a strong tradition of openly opposing the central power and mobilising the masses to insist on their rights. Therefore, as we will see in the next chapter, the state’s delaying tactics have been relatively successful since most IER projects nowadays lack a meaningful political lobby. Nevertheless, the abovementioned cases reveal much about the monarchy’s attitude towards using culture to promote national cohesion and the king’s acceptance as a guarantor of social peace.

6.3.3. Tamed Memory or the Path to Oblivion

Where the preservation of historical sites is not perceived to be beneficial for development, the sites are neglected and left to oblivion. The monarchy’s development concept seeks to soothe

old wounds by turning its subjects' gaze away from a dolorous past towards a lucid future. Development projects are designed to make people turn the page and forget past horrors and sufferings. They are the projection vehicles for a bright vision where everyone can achieve his/her goals if only he/she follows the path paved by King Mohammed VI. In the monarchy's understanding, development projects are instrumental in creating a new citizenry united in its values and beliefs and loyal to the king and his enlightened vision for the nation. It is supposed to be conducive to a reduction of inequalities. It takes national cohesion as a starting point for outstanding national accomplishments, fostering the bond between the sovereign and his subjects.

This idea, albeit perceivable very early in the reign of King Mohammed VI, became outspoken in the king's throne speech of 2019 and inspired the New Development Model published in 2021. In the Throne Speech, King Mohammed VI laid out his concept of development which builds upon the belief that God bestowed upon Morocco „the blessings of unity, cohesion and the mutual *bey'a* between the Throne and the people, in addition to the bonds of reciprocal affection and loyalty between the King and the citizens, which have become stronger and deeper over the years.” According to the king, the modernisation of Morocco rests upon three pillars, namely a) the „national, citizen-based monarchy” which listens to the people's concerns and aspirations, b) „democracy and development-based policy” which the king claims to be implementing, and c) „the sweeping reforms” he” introduced, the reconciliations achieved and the major projects implemented”. Nevertheless, the king saw the need to enhance mutual trust further, rebuild hope and confidence and boost social and regional justice in Morocco by mobilising the whole nation to improve everyone's living conditions. He, therefore, mandated an ad-hoc commission to elaborate on a new development model for the country.⁵⁴⁶ This announcement underlined the king's concerns for the stability and social cohesion of the kingdom by fostering the bond between the monarchy and the people through human development. Hardly two years later, the commission invested by the king

„advocates a **new organizational doctrine**: that of the **complementarity between a strong State and a strong Society**. A State that champions a vision for the country and its citizens and makes sure it is implemented. A State that guarantees the security, dignity and freedoms of Moroccans, and that protects them from vulnerability in crisis situations. A State that offers the suitable framework to the deployment of all energies at the service of the country's development and in favor of the common good and the general interest. A diversified, mobilized and responsible society that promotes the autonomy of the individuals and groups composing it and helps release their energies. [...] This doctrine draws on the concept of «responsibility and development», developed by His Majesty the King in the throne speech he delivered in 2019. It reflects the **singularity of the Kingdom's development model where the monarchical institution is the keystone of the State, the symbol of the unity of the Nation, the guarantor of balance, the bearer of the vision of development** and long-term strategic projects and the

⁵⁴⁶ Mohammed VI (2019b).

monitoring of their implementation in the service of citizens.” (Commission Spéciale sur le Modèle du Développement 2021a, 62)

The report explicitly echoes the king’s narrative that Morocco’s development needs to build upon a strong state that cares for the people’s grievances thanks to the unique institution of the monarchy, which is the „keystone” of the state, the „symbol of national unity”. In the official narrative, the king guarantees the success of the new development model. In the report, culture emerges as one of the central elements of Morocco’s new development model, ensuring social cohesion, political stability and economic wealth by insisting on every individual’s cultural rights (Commission Spéciale sur le Modèle du Développement 2021a, pp. 124–126). It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the mobilising impetus of the king’s speech also revived some of the reconciliation projects within the CNDH’s communitarian reparation programme.

On 7 October 2020, Amina Bouayach, president of the CNDH, visited the Drâa-Tafilalet region „to inform [herself] on the progress of the reorganisation („réaménagement”) project of the spot [i.e. the former detention centre of Tazmamart]. The goal: transform Tazmamart from a space of grave human rights abuses into a space of Life, Culture and Memory” (sic).⁵⁴⁷ On the same day, Bouayach held a meeting in Midelt to discuss the progress of the organisation („aménagement”) of the former Tazmamart prison spot with Mustapha Nouhi, governor of Midelt province, and the regional directors of the Housing Ministry, the Health Ministry, the Habous Ministry, the Agriculture Ministry and the telecommunication giant Ittissalat Al Maghrib. By starting *life*, *culture* and *memory* with capital letters, the former post presented the state in an active role, dynamically promoting human rights and preserving the memory of the past to create a bright and lively future. At the same time, the use of two words *aménagement* and *réaménagement* in the French Twitter posts convey a slight yet notable ambivalence: while *réaménagement* suggests the re-establishment of a previous appearance, the word *aménagement* may suggest the outright new organisation of the spot, thus admitting the lack of previous substance to be refurbished after the demolition of the place in the 2000s. This dovetails with another post published by the Regional Human Rights Council of Safi (CRDH Safi) two days later: „Following-up on [#Morocco](#)’s [#TransitionalJustice](#)-related recommendations... CNDH Chairperson Ms @AminaBouayach outlined yesterday [i.e. 8 October 2020] the Council’s new strategy to preserve [#memory](#). This includes converting old and informal centres of detention into places of memory.”⁵⁴⁸ According to media reports of *le Matin*, the construction work had begun in February 2020.⁵⁴⁹ This suggests that, by 2020, the CNDH finally acknowledged the

⁵⁴⁷ Bouayach (2020).

⁵⁴⁸ CRDH Marrakech Safi (2020).

⁵⁴⁹ Oukerzaz (2023).

failure of its previous attempts to renovate the former detention centres and transform them into memorials. Moroccan media also interpreted it accordingly.⁵⁵⁰

A new strategy was elaborated with the same goal. A few days later, on 11 October 2020, Bouayach continued her journey and paid „tribute to 17 victims of enforced disappearances (who died in Prison), at Kalaat M’Gouna Cemetery, and visits former irregular detention centre... as part of CNDH-led program to preserve [#memory](#). [#Morocco](#) [#TransitionalJustice](#)”.⁵⁵¹ By constantly using the #memory and #TransitionalJustice, the state-sponsored CNDH further situates itself within the international discourse on memory preservation and transitional justice. By referencing the #Morocco, the CNDH patriotically presents the Kingdom of Morocco to the world as a frontrunner in these matters, positioning it on equal footing with other countries that have successfully managed their democratic transition, including Germany, Chile, Argentina or South Africa. Coincidence or not, the moment of this new initiative was certainly well chosen since it arrived at the peak of the COVID-19 crisis when the regime had to counter critique against its sanitary restrictions. While the human rights discourse had cooled down – to say the least – after the liberalisation phase of the post-2011 era, it now came back on the agenda again in the context of the king’s development agenda. No wonder ostensible human rights performances like the reactivation of the old IER promise to renovate and transform the former detention centres fall into this time. Showing ambition in carrying out the almost historical IER recommendations is always easier than addressing more virulent human rights concerns: firstly, the crimes concerned do not fall within the time of the current ruler, Mohammed VI, but under his father’s; secondly, acknowledging these crimes and granting compensations for them, is a performance act already positively associated with the rule of Mohammed VI. Nevertheless, openly reminding the Moroccan and international public of crimes associated with the monarchy (even though not with the current monarch) is not in the intrinsic interest of the regime.

Yet this time, the Moroccan state appeared to show more seriousness in carrying out the promise. On 25 May 2021, the CNDH launched a new working „Unit for Preserving Memory and Promoting Moroccan History in its Various Tributaries”. According to the CNDH, the new unit is supposed to be „a mechanism for studying areas and forms of memory preservation and interest in current history and proposing recommendations for their activation by the institutions concerned”. By studying contemporary Moroccan history, the unit is meant to develop a „clear

⁵⁵⁰ Jaabouk (2020b).

⁵⁵¹ CNDH (2020).

and integrated strategy that reflects the path of development in the human rights scene in Morocco and contributes to building democracy and implanting human rights in the state and society”.⁵⁵² In this concept, history research and memory preservation have a clear political vocation, i.e., promoting democratic values. By referring to „development in the human rights scene”, the CNDH contextualises its actions in the king’s national development project. The new instance’s mandate comprises „interacting with the various personal accounts of historical events, researching and debating them, rehabilitating centres of memory, preserving archives“ and „contributing, with other partners, to the creation of museums at national and regional level“. ⁵⁵³ Although coming very late, i.e. over one and a half decades after the IER process, this new working unit within the CNDH now aims to take a coordinating function in implementing the IER’s culture-related recommendations to preserve memory and promote human rights.

As of this writing, it remains unclear how the new working unit interprets this mandate, whether it will receive the necessary financial and political backing and how it differs from other institutional provisions made since the coronation of Mohammed VI (e.g. the creation of the IRRHM, the IRCAM or the National Archive). What can be said, however, is that half a year later, on 17 December 2021, Amina Bouayach posted a greeting message on Twitter thanking „different actors for their engagement to make progress in the organisation works of the Tazmamart Memorial which have been completed to 95% (against 25% in 2020). A special place dedicated to women and youth is planned within the activities of this centre.”⁵⁵⁴ According to Moroccan media, which widely reported on the matter, the costs of refurbishing the Tazmamart detention centre consumed 12 million Dirhams.⁵⁵⁵ On 22 December 2022, the CNDH held another meeting in the prefecture of Midelt. In the presence of all concerned government sectors, the CNDH claimed to have launched extensive consultations to elaborate institutional frameworks that would promote integration and enable the space of memory to become a lever of development and open new opportunities to empower women and youth.⁵⁵⁶ As of 2024, it remains to be seen whether this announcement will entail a depoliticisation of the space while prioritising economic aspects.

While acknowledging the memorial’s potential to pay tribute and to remind current and future generations of the atrocities former detainees had suffered at this spot, the author of a

⁵⁵² CNDH (2022b, p. 221). Cf. also M. C. Alaoui and Essalak (2021).

⁵⁵³ M. C. Alaoui and Essalak (2021).

⁵⁵⁴ Bouayach (2021).

⁵⁵⁵ Amourag (2021); El Hamraoui (2021); L’Economiste (2021); MAP (2021g).

⁵⁵⁶ Cf. CNDH (2022c, p. 277).

MarocHebdo article questioned whether the investment of 12 million Dirhams for the renovation was justified given the remoteness of the site and given the urgent need to improve the living conditions and fight the extreme poverty of the local population.⁵⁵⁷ The monarchy is certainly not unfamiliar with such critique, nor will it be unwelcome since it mirrors, to a certain degree, a shifting attitude in the public discourse, away from requests of historical justice towards demands for turning the page and starting over from scratch. From everything we know about the Moroccan monarchy and its neoliberal development approach, the state prefers cultural projects with an economic interest rate. However, a remotely located former detention centre is not exactly likely to produce such returns on investment. In fact, despite the notable progress praised by Amina Bouayach in 2021, by the time of this writing, with the COVID-19 crisis being long over, no sign of an inauguration of the Tazmamart Memorial could be retrieved. Another hint to the modalities of using the human rights discourse in critical moments?

Gensburger and Lefranc (2017) argued that memory policies only have a limited effect on the population's factual behaviour and change of values because they have to serve various interests, i.e. historical/memorial, political, and economic. The authors emphasise that, for instance, political trials are mostly legal affairs and, just like museums or memorials, may have a symbolic value. However, they do not change human behaviour or produce better, less violent or radical people. Instead, they affirm, promote or reactivate already existing values and convictions. Even civic education is only effective in specific social contexts. To obtain moral changes, the role model function of individuals and groups with social significance is paramount. Therefore, social relations are crucial. Suppose important people like parents, teachers, and best friends, i.e. people that one looks up to and refers to as moral capacities, speak with one voice and affirm the same ethical position. In that case, values can change and be influenced most effectively. Conversely, if sites of memory are transformed into tourist sites with the corresponding gastronomic, commercial, and logistic infrastructure, they risk being capitalised, advertised and neutralised along aesthetic categories to ultimately become destinations of what Gensburger and Lefranc called „dark tourism”. Applied to the Moroccan case, we can expect that the regime's cultural policies are only effective in terms of identity construction if they are convincingly carried and accompanied by credible societal role models from the lowest family level up to the highest echelons, including the royal palace. So far, the regime only gives little reason to believe that memory beyond the lines promoted by the palace

⁵⁵⁷ Amourag (2021).

and its proxies is a political priority in Morocco. To the contrary, the narrative that King Hassan II's repression of socialist or Islamist opposition was necessary to preserve a stable monarchy and to avoid anarchy continues to thrive in Morocco (Slyomovics 2021, p. 138). This shows that the monarchy has succeeded in monopolising the public discourse and revising history. This reading of history dovetails with the current official and widely shared narrative according to which the monarchy guaranteed Morocco's stability against the backdrop of chaos in the wake of the 2011 uprisings in the region. The economic exploitation of sites of memory seems to become yet another viable component in the regime's development agenda.

6.4. Managing Dissent: Appeasing Amazigh Protest

6.4.1. A Brief Overview of Discrimination Against Imazighen in Morocco

To understand the current political debates about Moroccan identity and its relationship with political power, it is necessary to have a brief look at the cultural situation that characterises Moroccan society. Historically, most Moroccans are of Berber origin.⁵⁵⁸ The Amazigh presence in North Africa goes back thousands of years. Over the millennia, they had countless interactions across the Sahara with various African peoples and across the Mediterranean Sea with Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Vandals, Byzantines and Arabs, who all left their marks upon the Moroccan civilisation and territory. Since the 7th century, Arab conquerors promoted the Islamisation of North Africa but were almost completely absorbed by the Amazigh population (Moha Ennaji 2014a, p. 94). Islam and Arabic as the language of the holy script, however, were preserved and became drivers for education in medieval Morocco, leading to a gradual Arabisation of the population through Qur'anic primary schools (*msid* or *jama'*), *medersas* (called *zaouia* in rural areas) and universities like the famous al Qaraouiyyine university in Fès (Sadiqi 2014a, 82f.). While most of the Imazighen living on Moroccan territory adopted Islam as their religion, some adopted the Jewish confession, which had come to Morocco in the 10th and 11th centuries (Moha Ennaji 2005, pp. 9–11, 2014a, 94f.) as well as with the Christian Reconquista of Spanish Andalusia in the 15th century.

Three dynasties that ruled Morocco over the centuries were of Amazigh descent. Yet Arabic remained the primary language of political domination and administration until the arrival of the European colonisers (Sadiqi 2014a, p. 83). However, dissident Amazigh tribes constantly threatened the central state authority (Aslan 2014, p. 91). With the Spanish occupation of the northern territories and the Sahara since 1860 and the installation of the French protectorate in

⁵⁵⁸ Henceforth called by their own denomination “Amazigh” (singular) or “Imazighen” (plural) which means “free people”.

Morocco's central territories in 1912, the political and linguistic landscape changed fundamentally. The French used language policy as a means of political control along the lines of a „divide et impera”-strategy. With the so-called Berber Dahir of 1930, they granted the Amazigh-dominated territories under their rule the right to apply communitarian law. Furthermore, the French cooperated with local Amazigh leaders like the Pasha Thami el Glaoui's clan in Marrakesh to ensure its grip over the rural areas in southern Morocco. The more Arab-dominated cities, in turn, were ruled by Sharia law (Moha Ennaji 2005, p. 14; Wyrzten 2014, p. 21). The colonial powers even went as far as to ban all use of Classical Arabic from official documents and public administration (Moha Ennaji 2005, p. 202). Within the school system, a distinction was made between schools for children from local aristocracy („Les écoles des fils de notables”), schools for urban working class („Les écoles urbaines”) and very few schools for rural people („Les écoles rurales”). The French administration also made a difference between French-Berber and French-Arab schools for either of the ethnic groups. Thereby, they aimed at integrating loyal Moroccan notables into the French administration of the protectorate. Hence, their goal was not to generalise education in the country but to instruct some local people well enough to deal with the French administration, facilitate control and recruit them for small public services and the army (Aslan 2014, p. 88; Moha Ennaji 2005, 13f. and 202f.; Sadiqi 2014a, 84f.; Wyrzten 2014, p. 21). Arabic and Islamic thought held only a secondary place, and they were taught in French, as were classes on Moroccan history. The history courses were provided in an arrogant way, conveying the image of French cultural and civilisational supremacy (Moha Ennaji 2005, pp. 202–204).

Conversely, the anti-colonial movement united under the banner of Arab-Muslim identity as a distinctive element against the French. In the 1930s to 1960s, the promotion of Arab-Muslim identity was a uniting element among indigenous populations all across the MENA region in their struggle against the colonisers (Moha Ennaji 2005, 14f. and 26f.; Wyrzten 2014, 22ff.). This maxim became an oppressive political ideology in the post-independence era. In Morocco, the monarchy aligned with the independence party Istiqlal and promoted the Arabisation of Moroccan society on all levels to implement the full decolonisation of the new state.⁵⁵⁹ Hence, it was not until the post-colonial reforms of the state and education system in the spirit of pan-Arabism that many Moroccans became more and more Arabic (Wyrzten 2014, 23ff.), while ethnically with the number of Imazighen increased with overall demographic growth. Towards

⁵⁵⁹ For a good overview on the power struggle between the monarchy and the Istiqlal that led to this alliance, and on the promotion of Arabo-Muslim identity traits with regards to nation building cf. Aslan (2014). On the Moroccan identity building during colonial times and on the brink of independence see Wyrzten (2015).

the end of the 20th century, 15 million people were at least partially Amazighophone. Amazigh populations are concentrated in rural areas and mountainous regions where, over the centuries, the penetration of Arabic had remained incomplete (Moha Ennaji 2005, p. 72).⁵⁶⁰ Over the last decades, however, poverty has led thousands of families to leave the countryside and move to major Moroccan cities like Casablanca, Agadir, Rabat, Nador, al Hoceima, Fès and Marrakesh. This urbanisation trend also affected the linguistic composition of Moroccan society. By 1999, the rural population in Morocco had dropped from 75% in 1956 to 51% (Moha Ennaji 2005, 76f.).

The long-time exclusion of Amazigh from the Moroccan education system and the uncoded character of the Amazigh language entailed a lack of Amazigh in the public space, including an almost total absence from administration, judiciary, media and the Moroccan economy. Pre-Islamic and Pre-Arab history was not mentioned in textbooks (Aslan 2014, p. 86; Slyomovics 2006, 138f.), and parents were forbidden to give their children Amazigh first names (Slyomovics 2006, 149f.). Up until today, Amazigh is predominantly used in private contexts among family and friends while, as we will see in more detail below, it is felt virtually absent from the public sphere (Idhssaine 2021; Idhssaine & El Kirat 2019). Also, Morocco's first post-independence constitutions considered Arabic as the only official language and assigned French the status of a second language. Furthermore, parts of the social and political class, which have long been dominated by the Istiqlal party and the fundamentalist Islamists, have been hostile towards Amazigh culture in general, associating it with treasonous, secessionist, antinationalist behaviour and a threat to national security. This narrative is often linked to unhistorical reproaches of collaboration with the French colonisers during the protectorate when the infamous 1930 Berber Dahir attempted to divide the Moroccan society (Moha Ennaji 2005, 174–177 and 181) or to the argument that historically Amazigh consciousness allegedly led to apostasy from Islam (Errihani 2007, p. 252).

The regime's discrimination was fuelled by resentments against the Imazighen that arose among the Arabophone urban elites in the aftermath of the already mentioned 1958-59 uprisings in the Amazigh-dominated Rif region, which were violently crushed by crown-prince Hassan and General Oufkir, himself an Amazigh.⁵⁶¹ When, in 1971 and 1972, Hassan II survived two coup

⁵⁶⁰ According to the official census of 2004, only around 8 million or about a quarter of Moroccans speak a Amazigh dialect. This variance needs to be explained by diverging definitions of what being Amazigh means and from which language level someone counts as Amazighophone.

⁵⁶¹ Aslan (2014, 94ff.) holds that these rebellions were not particularly anti-monarchy but primarily challenged the authority of the Istiqlal-party which struggled to impose its governance principles on the tribally organised Amazigh-dominated areas. The local elites, in turn, were not ready to accept any intermediary between themselves and the king, opposed the Arabisation in education and called for high-level representation in the Moroccan

attempts, which were both led by Amazigh officers (the latter one by General Oufkir himself), the Amazigh community became severely stigmatised for many years (Maddy-Weitzman 2022, p. 129). Entire Amazigh-speaking regions were marginalised as a collective punishment (El Guabli 2023, p. 28). At the same time, the royal palace enlarged its support base by gradually co-opting tribal notables in the countryside - many of whom were Imazighen - through an extensive network of patronage, through their integration into state administration, and through symbolic policies. Whereas the Istiqlal's plans for detribalisation were curtailed by the king, who turned out to be the most powerful political force in post-independence Morocco, the tribes were officially recognised, and tribal affiliation was registered among other things, on national identity cards (Aslan 2014, 97ff.; Boum 2007, 218ff.).

To ensure the support of the ethnically and tribally-divided rural leaders, the monarchy – unlike the political parties like Istiqlal and the UNFP – refrained from explicitly condemning national diversity and, more particularly, Amazigh culture. Instead, the king considered Islam the social bond between Arabs and Imazighen, benefitting the king as the supreme religious authority (Aslan 2014, 102f. and 106ff.). However, with the Istiqlal controlling the education ministry, Arab nationalists dominated the discourse on national education (Aslan 2014, p. 107). Hence, in the slipstream of the country's Arabisation policy and due to the predominantly pejorative image of Amazigh culture in Moroccan textbooks, many children of Amazigh descent lost their Amazigh language capacities, giving priority to Arabic and French, deemed more important to succeed in life (Aslan 2014, 107f.; Moha Ennaji 2005). Crawford (2005, p. 167) even went as far as to say: „Identity is born of consciousness. As Salem Chaker has noted, it is the Arab consciousness of most Moroccans that has relegated Berber language and cultural identity to ‘minority’ status”. Paradoxically, it was also only due to the independence movement that the diffusion of French spread nationwide. The leaders of the movement had themselves been trained within the French system. To communicate the cause for independence also vis-à-vis the French rulers and the whole world, the nationalist movement resorted to French and, at the same time, emphasised the necessity to revive Classic Arabic and traditional Islamic thought as an expression of the Moroccan authenticity and cultural identity (Moha Ennaji 2005, 14f.). After independence, Classic Arabic was adopted as the official language, and French was made the second language to modernise the country (Moha Ennaji 2005, 205f). The ambition to combat the high illiteracy rate inherited from the French led to a rise in the scholarisation rate.

government, economic development programmes and tax reductions. After initial successful appeasement of the rebellion by King Mohammed V, the protests ignited again in view of the Istiqlal's renewed dominance in the Moroccan cabinet, resulting in the Rif activists' call for autonomy which was then violently crushed by crown prince Hassan.

Between 1956 and 1990, the school system's gradual yet rapid Arabisation could not be met by the number of teachers adequately trained in literary Arabic (Sadiqi 2014a, p. 86).⁵⁶² Teachers, therefore, often resorted to the language they had been trained in themselves, i.e. French.

Full Arabisation, including the science classes, was only decided in the 1970s upon pressure from purists and opposition (Moha Ennaji 2005, p. 15). Yet, until today, many natural science and technology-related subjects in higher education continue to be taught predominantly in French due to inadequate teaching material and books written in Arabic (Moha Ennaji 2005, p. 211). For most students who speak Amazigh or Darija at home, French and Arabic are foreign languages, and they must learn them simultaneously with the other subjects. This multilingualism and multiculturalism is a huge challenge for many children accompanying them for their whole lives (Moha Ennaji 2005, p. 71). Bilingual and bicultural education continues to characterise the Moroccan school system. This disturbing ambivalence may lead to mental block and „schizoglossia” (Moha Ennaji 2005, p. 48). Many pupils do not master either of the three languages sufficiently. They rely on code switching and code mixing in their daily lives. Until today, the challenging language situation often generates frustration, increases the likelihood of school dropout, significantly reduces overall education standards and deepens social inequality (Boutieri 2016, 2018; Moha Ennaji 2005).⁵⁶³ Boutieri (2018, p. 103) explained that, like in Algeria and Tunisia, the Moroccan school system is ruled by double logic: on the one hand, schools are „geared towards the preservation of the officially sanctioned Arabo-Muslim culture that ensured the continuous legitimation of a religious dynasty and of pan-Arabism as a regional paradigm. On the other hand, the same schools created the expectation that the majority of the population would be part of a developing and expanding labour force that would meet the demands of the global market integration. What is particularly thorny about this double logic in Morocco is that these two goals” do „not hinge upon the same language”. While the former logic promotes modern standard Arabic, the latter favours French (and increasingly English). This inequality continues in the university sector, dominated by French as a language of instruction, favouring students from wealthier middle- and upper-class families whose parents could afford to send them to French or international private schools (Moha Ennaji 2005, 208 and 210).

Given the strong position of companies or tourists from France, the Moroccan job market is highly reliant on French, making mastery in the former colonisers' language a prerequisite

⁵⁶² By 1980, the first four years of primary education were fully arabised while, in the secondary education sector, only 25-50% of all subjects were taught in Arabic. Cf. Sadiqi (2014a, p. 86)

⁵⁶³ L'Economiste (2012, 2013).

that decides over employment or unemployment, income or poverty, career perspectives or permanent frustration (Moha Ennaji 2005, 211 and 221ff.). Since also the Moroccan economy is very much city-centred and rural areas are still dominated by agriculture, many rural families do not experience education as a lever for an improvement of living conditions and refuse (or cannot afford) to send their children to school beyond the mandatory first years (Moha Ennaji 2005, 208f. and 221f.).⁵⁶⁴

As many of Morocco's rural, economically disadvantaged regions are inhabited by Imazighen, being Amazigh is often characterised by dissatisfaction with the experience of deprivation, state violence or exploitation. Di Tolla (2016, p. 322), Ryser (2019), Maddy-Weitzman (2022, 139ff.) and Nicolai (2023 (to be published), 328ff.) described how tribal land of Amazigh families has been expropriated or acquired by the state for little money only to extract enormous wealth through farming, mining or solar plants leading to ecological degradation, food insecurity, a lack/poisoning of drinking and irrigation water. At the same time, protests against land/green grabbing, extractive policies and economic marginalisation were crushed, demonstrators intimidated, and local actors were co-opted. If at all, up to the 21st century, visible expressions of Amazigh culture are folklorised: Amazigh jewellery, pottery or art festivals are advertised as tourist attractions and Amazigh dances and music are performed in official ceremonies to showcase the exotic nature of Moroccan culture (Aslan 2014, 110f.; Boum 2007).

Over the years, frustration and deprivation have grown among many Imazighen in the countryside and the impoverished urban strata. However, the dissatisfaction has not yielded the development of a single, monolithic Amazigh movement but of many groups – from royalists over Islamists to secular democrats (Crawford 2005, 186f.). Yet, most of them share the vision of the state fully acknowledging their cultural expressions and history as a key element of a nationally shared cultural heritage. Also, they pronounce the demand for improving the socio-economic situation of the holders of this culture. Except for the rural-based *Mouvement Populaire* (Aslan 2014, 89f.), political parties timidly started to call for more visibility of Amazigh culture only in the mid-1990s. Around the beginning of the 2000s, more than 30 Amazigh cultural associations were already active in Morocco and over 130 worldwide to revive and promote Amazigh culture (Moha Ennaji 2005, 79 and 174f.).⁵⁶⁵ In his article on the

⁵⁶⁴ Aslan (2014, 100ff.) stressed the essential role of land ownership in maintaining the power relations between the royal palace and local notables. The preservation and promotion of non-capitalist land use within a clientelist system between peasants and rural notables was crucial for the monarchy to garner the latter's support. However, it also resulted in a lack of innovation, the slow development pace of the countryside, and the ongoing pauperisation of rural populations.

⁵⁶⁵ For a brief overview on the Amazigh movements in Morocco, cf. Moha Ennaji (2014a).

relationship between the Amazigh identity movement and the Moroccan state, David Crawford (2005) seeks to build a bridge between economic and cultural-political approaches to understand the Amazigh movements: „My contention is that material inequality has been underappreciated as a factor in Moroccan social and cultural life. This is not to say that class consciousness lurks beneath Amazigh consciousness but that material factors work in tandem with social and cultural forces to amplify politicized forms of identity” (Crawford 2005, p. 185)⁵⁶⁶. In his eyes, this interaction of various disintegrative factors leads to an explosive mixture (Crawford 2005, p. 187). Consequently, long before the 2011 unrest broke out, researchers like Zerhouni and Maghraoui (2004) pointed out the major issues and challenges in the MENA. In addition to issues of civil rights or the question of women’s role in society, they also enumerated urgent cultural problems for countries like Morocco, such as the rise of political Islam and the position of linguistic groups like the Amazigh people. Moha Ennaji (2005, p. 29) went as far as to argue that there is a „crisis of identity in Morocco”. According to him, various Islamist groups promote Morocco as an Arab-Muslim country. They compete with the Amazigh movements which aim at uniting societies in the Maghreb countries behind the mission of reviving the region’s Amazigh culture. Although both streams place themselves in an anti-colonial narrative, elites from both currents would prefer their children to French schools that openly promote Western values. Moha Ennaji argued that while „Moroccan rulers have always favoured modernity over tradition”, there was no clear concept of modernity. This is why, ever since independence, pragmatism has characterised policies in the fight against poverty and illiteracy (Moha Ennaji 2005, p. 31). In fact, in 1978, King Hassan II declared that if „Arabisation is a duty, bilingualism is a necessity” (Moha Ennaji 2005, p. 188), thereby invoking the maintenance of French-Standard Arabic bilingualism.

The youth, at the same time, suffers „from alienation due to the gap between modernity and tradition. Three attitudes are observed. 1) the attitude of the middle- and upper-class urban youth who advocate a total immersion in western culture, which is considered the sole model and means of progress, 2) lower middle class educated young people favour a possible marriage of Arab-Islamic and Western cultures; and 3) urban working class young people support the total embracement of Arab-Islamic culture. This is the case of young fundamentalists who consider Arab-Islamic beliefs and values as the solution to the social and economic problems of the country” (Moha Ennaji 2005, p. 30). Against these currents, two major currents within the Amazigh movement groups advocate for the cultural and political rights of the Imazighen.

⁵⁶⁶ cf. also Maddy-Weitzman (2017)

One current limits itself to a calling for officially recognising the Amazigh language and culture. The other also strives to implement a territorial autonomy of Amazigh regions and their socio-economic development (Boukous 2016, p. 268; Moha Ennaji 2016, 348f.). Against this backdrop, a crucial element in explaining Morocco's stability throughout the 2011 uprisings needs to be sought in the monarchy's management of this cultural identity crisis and its socio-economic ramifications. The following chapters will show that this management consists of incrementally recognising the identity component in the Imazighen's grievances while maintaining the complicated balance with the Islamist and nationalist movements favouring Morocco's exclusive Arabo-Muslim identity.

6.4.2. Institutionalisation and Heritagisation of Amazigh Culture

In Morocco, the Alawite dynasty managed to manoeuvre itself into a leadership position in redefining „the ethnic parameters of Moroccan identity” (Wyrzten 2014, 26.). The official recognition of the Amazigh language and culture in Morocco began long before the 2011 protests. In the late 1970s, the Ministry of the Interior asked Mohamed Chafik, then director of the Royal College, to elaborate a report on the Amazigh question. His report included a recommendation for the creation of an Institute for Berber Studies and the creation of a university chair. Although, in 1979, the Moroccan parliament voted in favour of such an institute, it was never implemented under Hassan II (Aslan 2014, p. 167). Yet, the pressure on the regime increased following the rise of the Amazigh movement in the 1980s and 1990s and its transnational organisation across the Morocco-Algerian border. Although, in Morocco, the Amazigh movement „had a much less confrontational relationship with the central government” than in Algeria (Wyrzten 2014, p. 26), the so-called *Berber spring* in Algeria in 1980 was a first warning signal to the regimes in the region that the movement was able to raise the social pressure (Maddy-Weitzman 2022, p. 129). When, in 1981 and 1984, popular grievances turned into riots in Nador and Casablanca, the regime resorted to harsh repression to silence public unrest (Aslan 2014, p. 170). In 1991, a group of Amazigh NGOs drafted the so-called *Charte D'Agadir* in which they formulated demands for the recognition of cultural rights of the Imazighen and the creation of a national institute to research Amazigh culture, to standardise the Amazigh language and to elaborate textbooks and other language teaching material as well as (Moha Ennaji 2014a, p. 99). However, after this civil society initiative, it took another few years and clashes between Amazigh activists and the authorities before, in August 1994, following huge demonstrations around May Day calling for a recognition of Amazigh language and culture, King Hassan II inclined to speak in favour of a cultural opening of Morocco's identity system (Boum 2007, p. 221; Elmedlaoui 2005). He called for promoting the Amazigh

„dialects”. However, his proposition to introduce Tamazight in primary school was not implemented before he died in 1999 (Aslan 2014, 177f.; Wyrzten 2014, p. 26). Nevertheless, he managed to use the Amazigh movement to counter the rise of Islamists and work as the supreme arbiter of societal demands (Moha Ennaji 2014a, 105.).⁵⁶⁷ Shortly after his death, the new *National Education Charter* was published and included steps to break with the established language policy in education and to integrate Amazigh into the Moroccan school system (Sadiqi 2014a, p. 88). Yet, wide parts of the Amazigh movement perceived the charter as an instrument to promote learning Arabic as the only official national language.⁵⁶⁸

Therefore, Mohamed Chafik, a member of the *Académie du Royaume du Maroc* and former director of the Royal College, where the young prince and later King Mohammed VI had been among his pupils, took the demands of the Charte D’Agadir to another level by radicalising its ideas. In March 2000, 229 Amazigh activists, including artists and intellectuals, signed his so-called *Manifeste pour la reconnaissance officielle de l’amazighité du Maroc*, also known as *Berber Manifesto* (Elmedlaoui 2005, p. 168). This prominently supported manifesto assured the regime of the Amazigh community’s commitment to its Arabic heritage and national unity. Yet, simultaneously, it called for the recognition of multilingualism (Maddy-Weitzman 2022, p. 130). The demands managed to attract the attention of the newly enthroned King Mohammed VI.⁵⁶⁹ The manifesto’s moderate tone and careful wording allowed the monarchy to present itself as a victim of opaquely defined „makhzenian circles” and forces from the radical right and left who had curtailed the monarchy’s favourable take on the Amazigh issue (Aslan 2014, p. 185).⁵⁷⁰ Hence, members of the royal cabinet, including royal advisor Mezryan Belfkih, royal cabinet director Rochdi Chraïbi, and the spokesperson of the royal palace Hassan Aourid invited signatories of the manifesto, including Mohamed Chafik, Abdelhamid Zemmouri and Ahmed Adgherni, to discuss the demands of the paper and promised that the king would personally take care of the Amazigh issue (Aslan 2014, 185f.; El Ibrahimy 2022a, p. 147). Under the impression of the Black Spring revolts in Algeria, which began after the violent death of a young Berber pupil in April 2001 around the 21st anniversary of the Berber Spring,⁵⁷¹ King

⁵⁶⁷ For a convincing account on the uneasy relationship between the regime of Hassan II and the Amazigh movement see Aslan (2014, pp. 171–178)

⁵⁶⁸ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (2001).

⁵⁶⁹ Chafik (2000).

⁵⁷⁰ Slyomovics (2006, 142f.) shows how carefully Mohammed Chafik, since 1992, framed the demands of the Amazigh movement. He claimed that the Imazighen had no complex toward Arabic but rather voluntarily and wholeheartedly embraced the language of Qur’an. Thereby, he made sure to avoid any appearance of instigation to sedition against the monarchy and its official identity discourse.

⁵⁷¹ These protests forced the authoritarian president of Algeria, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, to make Tamazight a “national language” alongside Arabic in 2002 before declaring its official character in 2016.

Mohammed VI countered the politically dangerous feeling of frustration and pronounced his famous Ajdir speech in October 2001. By choosing Ajdir, the birth town of Amazigh independence fighter Mohammed Abdul Karim Khattabi, as the location of the speech, the king conveyed a strong symbolic signal that he „recognised the ancestry of the Riffian community in the Moroccan Amazigh body politic, while at the same time, sending out a message of peace to counter the region’s troubled past within the state framework of the state” (Aixelà-Cabré 2022, p. 195). Furthermore, the king’s speech echoed tone and rhetoric of Amazigh activists by stressing that the Amazigh component is the „property of all Moroccans” and that the rehabilitation of Tamazight is „a national responsibility, because no national culture can disown its historical roots”.⁵⁷²

Hence, along with his speech, the king issued a royal decree that created the *Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe* (IRCAM). Thereby, he fulfilled a long-standing demand by Amazigh activists pronounced inter alia in the Charte d’Agadir. The king then appointed Mohamed Chafik as the first rector of the institute. The creation of the IRCAM coincides with other reconciliation initiatives launched by King Mohammed VI since 1999. Although neither the indemnity commission nor the IER explicitly evokes an Amazigh component to its programmes, researchers have argued that the same spirit of national reconciliation and human rights liberalisation ruled the creation of the IRCAM. According to Anna Maria di Tolla, like the IER, the IRCAM revives the *shūrā* principle, i.e. an Islamic tradition of sultanic or califan consultation, to reconcile the monarchy with the Imazighen after the Years of Lead (Di Tolla 2016).

Funded from the royal budget, the IRCAM opened opportunities for Amazigh activists to participate in state policies towards the Imazighen in the following years. It effectively integrated moderate strands of the Amazigh movement and institutionally accommodated demands from the community.⁵⁷³ IRCAM officials are convinced that the creation of their institution should be explained by the Moroccan civil society’s call for change since the monarchy would otherwise not have been able „to win the political game” given the strong demands for human rights and democratisation.”⁵⁷⁴ Other researchers emphasise other factors: Le Saout (2017) is convinced that the king’s speech and the new step towards institutionalisation of Amazigh culture within the Moroccan state system is not the result of any huge Amazigh protests in the kingdom at the time. Instead, it follows from the constant

⁵⁷² Cited from El Guabli (2023, p. 50).

⁵⁷³ Interview, Language policies, 1.

⁵⁷⁴ Interview, Language policies, 12.

awareness raising and progressive diffusion of the Amazigh associations' claims among state actors (Le Saout 2017).⁵⁷⁵ According to Silverstein, in turn, the creation of the IRCAM should be read against the backdrop of international human rights reporting in the mid-1990s: „six members of the southeastern association Tilelli [were] arrested as late as 1994 for displaying signs written in Tamazight during a May Day parade in Errachidia. Responding to the international outcry against these arrests, the government promised a series of reforms that subsequently led to the 2001 establishment of a Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) and the introduction of Tamazight into the media and primary school classrooms” (Silverstein 2011, p. 73).

Either way, by creating the IRCAM and rendering Amazigh culture a national heritage, the monarchy showed responsiveness to public pressure from inside and outside Morocco. Although other options had been on the table, such as attaching the IRCAM to the Education Ministry, the Ministry of Culture or the Prime Minister's office, the king even decided to make it an autonomous institution which reports to himself alone. Thereby, he underlined the high priority the monarchy assigns to resolving the Amazigh question while ensuring control over the now institutionalised movement (Chaker 2016, p. 137).

During my numerous visits to IRCAM, I have repeatedly experienced to what extent the IRCAM researchers are grateful to King Mohammed VI and are proud to provide him with advice on Amazigh issues. They often expressed their pride and attachment to their physical facilities. They also never missed an opportunity to express gratitude for the king and their worries about losing their building when integrated into the new Council for Moroccan Languages and Culture (CNLCM) announced by the 2011 constitution.⁵⁷⁶ The symbolic

⁵⁷⁵ In a similar vein, El Guabli (2023, 34ff.) asserted that Morocco's Amazigh Cultural Movement has resisted “post-independence Morocco's master commemorative narrative”, which excludes “other components of the country's identity, namely blackness, Amazighity, and Judaism”. According to el Guabli, the movement “has sustained and revived excluded identities through commemorative acts that (re)invented Amazigh traditions, creating symbols that unsettle official canons and reopen space for Morocco's Amazigh histories. Creating a subversive memory undergirded by (re)invented traditions has allowed” the Amazigh movement “to repurpose the pre-existing or revived Amazigh heritage to put an end to the marginalization of Tamazight and its culture”.

⁵⁷⁶ For instance, during my group visit to IRCAM for Interview, Language policies, 8 and Interview, Language policies, 12, the IRCAM officials screened a promotion video expressing IRCAM's pride in the building and the king's support. The building was financed by the Fonds Hassan II pour le développement économique et social. This funding institution was created by the late King Hassan II in 1999 but has been used only since Mohammed VI to finance projects that did not necessarily reach unanimity within the national government. This financial flexibility makes it a parallel institution at the palace's disposal that decides on the allocation of the funds while avoiding accountability. The construction of the IRCAM was one of the first projects funded by the Fonds Hassan II, which underlines its prominence among royal priorities. Cf. also Interview, Cultural heritage, 6 and Interview, National Library, 1.

dimension (Figure 37) of the IRCAM facilities has perfectly been described by Aslan (2014, 164f.) who argued that at

„the beginning of 2007, the monarchy’s support of the Amazigh movement took a magnificent visual shape. A massive, hyper-modern building in hay Ryad, a relatively new neighborhood of Rabat and the city’s commercial and business center, became the permanent location of IRCAM. This building of concrete and glass is owned by the royal family and attracts the immediate attention of passers-by with its monumental size, unusual architecture, and triangular design. Its luxurious, marble interior contains individual offices for IRCAM researchers who are charged with doing research on Berber language and culture, along with several conference rooms and a library. In the large entrance hall, King Mohammed VI’s photograph in traditional Berber outfit welcomes the visitors. The building’s massive size gives the impression that it can accommodate every single Amazigh activist in the country.”⁵⁷⁷



Figure 37: Building of the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture with a permanent exhibition showing King Mohammed VI's engagement for the institute

Because many IRCAM employees are activists in favour of a democratic regime, their integration into a state institution must be considered an example of authoritarian learning, as conceptualised by Heydemann (2024). Some more radical Amazigh groups have always criticised the IRCAM as mere regime propaganda and an attempt by the monarchy to co-opt and water down their movement (Aslan 2014, pp. 187–190; Crawford 2005, p. 188; Errihani

⁵⁷⁷ For similar accounts, see Boutieri (2016, p. 162).

2013, p. 60). For them, the IRCAM continued the state's lip service and treated Amazigh culture as mere folklore while not ending the socio-economic marginalisation and discrimination of the Imazighen (Silverstein 2018, p. 83). Errihani (2013, p. 61) is convinced that the IRCAM's creation „was clearly a political decision in response to several events that might have led to a worse outcome had the state not concocted such a well-timed decision”. Larger parts of the Amazigh community indeed welcomed the new institute because they are primarily concerned with the recognition of Berber culture within a multicultural, democratic project (Moha Ennaji 2014a, p. 103). For them, working with and within the IRCAM is a way to achieve political change from inside the system. In this endeavour, they prefer an alliance with the king, who institutionally channels his support through the IRCAM (Aslan 2014, 189f.).⁵⁷⁸ To this purpose, some IRCAM officials tempered their accusations against the Moroccan state. For instance, in a group discussion conducted by the author at IRCAM in late February 2020, one IRCAM official interrupted one of her colleagues when he explained the Moroccan society's need to re-appropriate Amazigh culture by the marginalisation of Amazigh culture and the adoption of the Arabo-Muslim identity after independence. With an argument unusual for Amazigh activists, she told me that, for her, the Arabisation in the context of Moroccan independence was understandable because „it was necessary to unite around one language and stand united [faire bloc] against the protectorate.” According to her, rather than associating the creation of IRCAM with buy-offs of the Amazigh movement, it needs to be understood within the international dynamics around the late 1990s and early 2000s when Morocco – just like any other country in the world – agreed to align with the international conventions on cultural diversity and multiple identities.⁵⁷⁹ This shows that there is an effort within the IRCAM to participate in the construction of a new shared identity narrative that avoids the pitfalls of outright polarisation both domestically and internationally.

As a royal institution, the IRCAM formally enjoys the king's backing (Boum 2007, 224f.) and has used it over the last 21 years to enhance Imazighen's visibility in Moroccan society and beyond significantly, revising the traditional identity discourse. Along with the Amazigh movement, the IRCAM has pushed for the officialisation of the Amazigh language within the

⁵⁷⁸ This also echoes the argumentation of Bensadoun (2007, 18f.), who claims that for “the Amazigh movement, the Moroccan monarchy cannot claim to be a democracy as long as it does not give full recognition to the ‘Amazighness’ of the nation. Conversely, in this view, the monarchy needs the Amazigh movement, one of the leading democratic forces of the country, to create a civic nation of free citizens in order to rebuff the Islamist challenge”. According to this logic, at the beginning of the 2000s, with the enthronisation of Mohammed VI, the creation of the IRCAM needs to be seen as a first step in joining forces with the Amazigh movement in an ongoing democratisation endeavour.

⁵⁷⁹ Interview, Language policies, 7.

legal framework of the country, has offered training and stipends for emerging Amazigh artists and authors, created literature awards for Amazigh writers and art prizes for Amazigh artists, promotes research into Amazigh culture, inventories and secures immaterial cultural heritage e.g. by transcribing oral traditions and poetry, edits official Amazigh dictionaries, and advises private companies as well as public administration on how to integrate Amazigh language in their communication strategies.⁵⁸⁰

As argued by Bensadoun (2007, 26f.), the IRCAM also invests in Amazigh-centred historical research, which opposes the traditional narratives in official historiography that assert the alliance of Islam and monarchy to be essential for the unification and cohesion of the Moroccan nation. By emphasising the historical role of Amazigh rulers like Masinissa, Jugurtha, Juba I and Juba II in the resistance against foreign invasions like the Romans and by describing them as precursors of the Alawite sultans' struggle against foreign domination, the loyal Amazigh intellectuals forge a new narrative about a time-honoured alliance of Amazigh identity and the protection of national union. Drawing a direct line between ancient Amazigh kings and Mohammed VI, they provide „the monarchy with a historic and national legitimacy

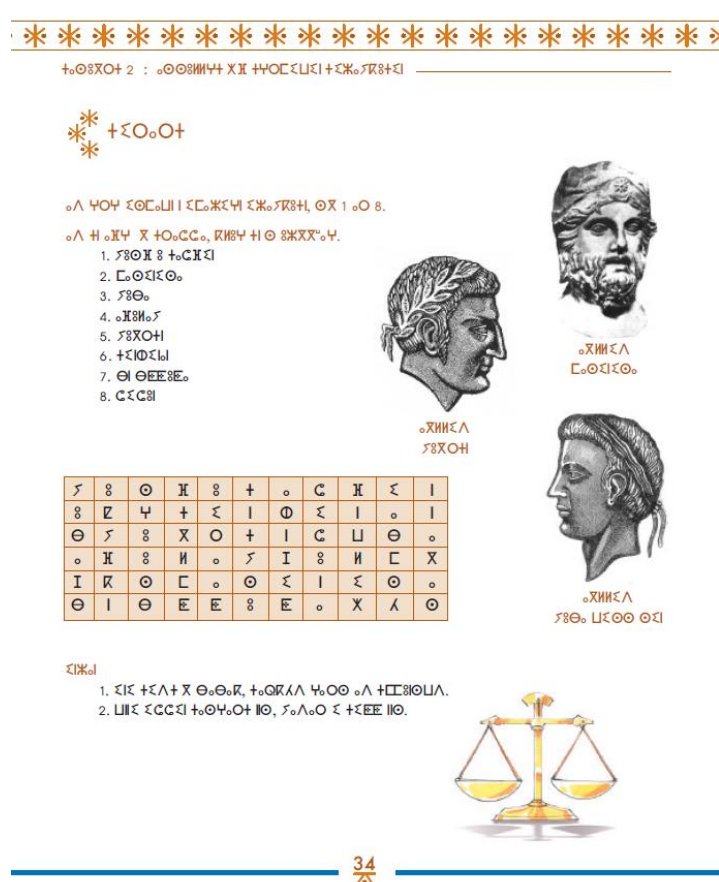


Figure 38: Amazigh leaders in E5 Tamazight primary school textbook

independent from its religious legitimacy. Together with the monarchy, the Imazighen are presented as the main opponents to foreign invasions in Morocco's history" (Bensadoun 2007, p. 27). During fieldwork, I was able to consult new textbooks for primary school elaborated by the IRCAM that pedagogically reproduce this new narrative by speaking about Amazigh leaders in antiquity (Figure 38) as well as King Mohammed VI's speech in Ajdir while omitting the Years of Lead of Hassan II. As one of the books' editors told me, they „don't want to speak about bad, negative

⁵⁸⁰ Cf. Interview, Language policies, 6 and Interview, Language policies, 11. For a quantified analysis of the IRCAM's work between 2003 and 2019, see Idhssaine (2021, 218ff.).

things in the past.” They „want to speak about positive things because the learner is a child”, and they „want the children to think about positive things in the past, in the future and now”.⁵⁸¹ Hence, although well-meaning pedagogic reasoning is behind this textbook concept, these schoolbooks still make the monarchy’s new legitimacy claim vis-à-vis Amazigh culture accessible for even the youngest in Moroccan society.⁵⁸²

In a similar vein, the IRCAM has promoted theatre groups like the Théâtre Tafoukt in Casablanca. Unlike critical and secularist groups like ARTA from al Hoceima, which performs its plays with French support, the state-funded Théâtre Tafoukt remains within the official nationalist culture discourse. Its plays also refer to pre-Islamic antiquity to preserve the memory of famous Amazigh leaders like Massinissa, Jugurtha and Juba but do so to showcase the multicultural roots of Morocco’s identity rather than emphasising seditious or separatist ideas.

The group has even succeeded in receiving state grants, being broadcasted on national television, and obtaining authorisation to perform in Rabat’s Mohammed V Theatre (Jay 2016).

IRCAM’s biggest achievement, however, consists in its linguistic work. Since its early beginnings, it has analysed the different main varieties of Amazigh in the country, namely Tarifit (mainly spoken in the north, northeast and northwest of Morocco), Tachelhit (mainly spoken in the south of Morocco) and Tamazight (mainly spoken in the Middle Atlas of central Morocco).⁵⁸³ Instead of acknowledging all Amazigh dialects on an equal footing as national languages, as was the case in Algeria (Chaker 2016, p. 138) or choosing one of these varieties to generalise it on the national level, the IRCAM’s linguists identified the common elements of these dialects. Using these common traits, they developed a standardised Amazigh language based upon the Tamazight variety. The idea was to create a common communication tool to help unite speakers of all varieties while avoiding the impression of preferring one of the Amazigh-speaking regions.⁵⁸⁴ This process ought to be a more democratic and equitable approach that should explicitly deviate from the French example, where the Parisian dialect had been chosen as a national linguistic standard.⁵⁸⁵ This procedure shows both cultural awareness

⁵⁸¹ Interview, Language policies, 10.

⁵⁸² For a close analysis of Moroccan history books and their identity-related chapters, see Maye-Saidi (2018). She shows that beyond the integration of the Amazigh component, the African, Jewish or Christian elements of Moroccan history are widely neglected or left ambiguous.

⁵⁸³ According to the last official census of 2014, among the Moroccan population of 33,8 million, about 26% speak an Amazigh variety: 14,1% speak Tachelhit, 7,9% Tamazight, and 4,0% Tarifit. Cf. Haut-Commissariat du Plan (2014). These numbers are contested by other studies which posit much higher shares, cf., for instance, Slyomovics (2006, p. 136), who speaks of up to 45%. Upon completion of this section, the updated numbers from the 2024 census, had not yet been published.

⁵⁸⁴ Interview, Language policies, 9 and Interview, Language policies, 7.

⁵⁸⁵ Cf. Interview, Language policies, 13 and Interview, Language policies, 7.

and eagerness on behalf of the monarchy to avoid culture-induced stress in the country. Despite a harsh societal debate on the status and writing system of the new Amazigh standard language, the researchers' work was eventually put to vote at the IRCAM's administrative council, which submitted a recommendation to the king to opt for the Phoenician alphabet Tifinagh as the official script for Amazigh.⁵⁸⁶

When the king confirmed this choice in 2003, almost all political parties aligned themselves with the royal decision and (at least officially) began to call for the officialisation of Amazigh in Morocco. Abouzaid (2011, 127f.) argued that the choice of the Tifinagh was considered both a political concession and the smaller evil within the IRCAM's administrative council. Hence, it passed the council under external pressure to avoid clashes between the defenders of the Arabic script and those supporting the Latin alphabet. While Abouzaid avoided details on the origins of the external pressure, my own research at the IRCAM hints at royal preferences,⁵⁸⁷ which were ultimately confirmed by the king's decision to follow the IRCAM's recommendation to adopt the Tifinagh, composed of 33 letters. According to IRCAM officials, the debate on the Tifinagh arose along ideological lines,⁵⁸⁸ with the conservatives arguing that the Arabic characters are the oldest ones used to transcribe longer Amazigh texts ever since medieval times. They also stress that the Arabic script is the most commonly employed in Morocco and represents the sacred language of the Holy Qur'an. For them, the Latin characters are associated with the former colonisers and a symbol of enslavement. The ones in favour of the Latin script, in turn, argue that it is the most widely used in the world, including academic research, literature and international exchange. For them, the Latin characters are a beacon of modernity. At the same time, they consider Arabic as an exogenous language and writing that was imposed upon the indigenous Amazigh communities by the Arab conquerors. Since large parts of today's Amazigh movement claim secularism as an important element to its long tradition of political self-organisation, they also reject the Arabic script because of its sacred connotation and its association with Islamic orthodoxy and supremacy.⁵⁸⁹

Given these antidotes, the 'rediscovery' of the Phoenician alphabet Tifinagh, which is still in use among the Tuareg of the Sahel, represented a neutral ground. Hence, it was a logical and highly symbolic choice that allowed the king to impose himself as supreme arbiter in a heated

⁵⁸⁶ On technical issues regarding the standardisation of Amazigh and the codification of the Tifinagh see Boukous (2011, 211ff.).

⁵⁸⁷ Interview, Language policies, 13.

⁵⁸⁸ Interview, Language policies, 9 and Interview, Language policies, 7.

⁵⁸⁹ Interview, Language policies, 5.

societal debate. Building upon the IRCAM's work, he posited that the Tifinagh is autochthonous, authentic and pre-Islamic, which also has the pragmatic advantage of depicting all phonetic properties of the Amazigh language, unlike the Arabic and Latin script.⁵⁹⁰ Ultimately, adopting the Tifinagh must be considered a huge success since its easily recognisable characters are subversive depositories of Morocco's long-oppressed diversity and testimonies of historical injustice (El Guabli 2023). For IRCAM officials, choosing the Tifinagh with its clear characters meant „turning towards the future, „ knowing that older people would tend to be reluctant to learn the unfamiliar script.⁵⁹¹ Over the years, the new-old script contributed to Imazighen's visibility in public space and allowed for re-inventing Amazigh heritage in public space by normalising its presence: For El Guabli (2023, p. 31), „the Tifinagh alphabet [...] has become a manifestation of the silenced history and nonexistent archives of Morocco's Amazigh identity, as well as a marker of Morocco's re-Amazighization". So notwithstanding the initial dissent and the „war of alphabet", the Tifinagh script nowadays adorns public buildings like schools, ministries, public administration and traffic signs and has hence become a symbolic marker of the kingdom's diversity. It is easily presented to international visitors by Moroccan officials to emphasise the tolerance and openness of the Moroccan state, whereas, by 1994, Amazigh activists had still endured harassment from the authorities for writing their banners in Tifinagh (El Guabli 2023, 52ff.).

As soon as the king settled the debate, the IRCAM accepted the request of the education minister to contribute to the introduction of Amazigh into the school system by developing school manuals for Amazigh lessons. According to IRCAM officials, the education minister's request demonstrated a strong political will and an opportunity they quickly had to seize („il fallait sauter"). It appeared that the government made the political decision to introduce Amazigh into the school system contingent on the technical question of whether the IRCAM was ready and capable of providing the necessary material by the start of the new school year 2003/2004. After intensive work by the researchers of the pedagogy centre of the IRCAM and for the first time in contemporary Moroccan history, Amazigh was taught in about 350 Moroccan pilot schools from September 2003.⁵⁹² This step needs to be read within the context of the ongoing reform of Morocco's education system, which, since the publication of the education charter in 1999, has struggled to upgrade national education and fight the rampant illiteracy rate in the country (Chtatou 2015). Despite these promising first steps, the following

⁵⁹⁰ For a detailed account of the debate and the historical background also see Pouessel (2008).

⁵⁹¹ Interview, Language policies, 5.

⁵⁹² Interview, Language policies, 7 and Interview, Language policies, 9.

years yielded a significant gap between symbolic policies and substantial reforms. Although the IRCAM provided intensive training for teachers and instructors and prepared textbooks for children and adults, the rollout of Amazigh in Moroccan schools was slower than expected. Whether Amazigh is taught is still highly contingent on the goodwill of local authorities, school headmasters, and individual teachers. If Amazigh is taught, it is for only two to three hours per week as a primary school subject without being a language of instruction and without expanding into secondary school.⁵⁹³ According to the IRCAM's rector Ahmed Boukous, there was decent and acceptable progress on the educational front between 2003 and 2007 with the socialist Habib el Malki as Minister of National Education. In 2006, the IRCAM even presented its opinion „at a high level”, asking for the officialisation of the Amazigh language. However, the change at the head of the Ministry of Education in September 2007 yielded the PAM politician Ahmed Akhchichine as the new minister. Things became more complicated with him, and the generalisation of Amazigh in Moroccan schools and universities got stuck for ideological reasons.⁵⁹⁴

This behaviour is telling, given the proximity between the PAM and the royal palace. Sadiqi (2014a, p. 88) aptly underlined that it „is interesting to note that Berber was excluded from the school system in the post-colonial decades in the name of unity, and it is in the same name that it is introduced in this system.“ Thus, in his speech at the signing of the dahir stipulating the introduction of Amazigh into the school system, the king declared that the Moroccan identity is inseparable from the unity of the nation, based on the tolerant and generous values of the Muslim faith, the defence of the unity and integrity of the homeland and loyalty to the throne and king as well as to the constitutional, democratic and social monarchy.⁵⁹⁵ This underlines the pragmatic significance of introducing Tamazight into the Moroccan school system to ensure the country's stability and maintain social cohesion. These considerations were seemingly more important than the will to implement the decision thoroughly. According to Maddy-Weitzman (2022, 130f.) the hasty introduction of Tamazight into school curricula needs to be considered a symbolic piece within the „monarchy's time-honored strategy of balancing competing interests within the kingdom while maintaining royal dominance” in the aftermath of the Islamist terror attacks in Casablanca on 16 May 2003. For Maddy-Weitzman, „the promotion

⁵⁹³ Interview, Language policies, 10 and Interview, Language policies, 5.

⁵⁹⁴ MEDI1 TV (2019d) and 2MTV (2019).

⁵⁹⁵ Mohammed VI (2001a): “The plurality of the tributaries that have forged our history and shaped our identity cannot be dissociated from the unity of our Nation grouped around its sacred values and its intangible foundations, which are the tolerant and generous Muslim religion, the defence of the homeland in its unity and integrity, allegiance to the Throne and the King, and attachment to the constitutional, democratic and social Monarchy” (own translation).

of women's rights and the Amazigh current served as a counterweight to Islamist parties and movements". Following Errihani (2007, p. 248), this view can be dubbed Trojan-horse-theory. It can be supported by the fact that Arabisation policies have failed to root out bilingualism, which made new action necessary in the educational field.

So, after some progress in the early 2000s, the Amazigh question experienced considerable stagnation towards the second half of the decade. Some activists and researchers, even from within the IRCAM, explain the slow advancements by the fact that radical change is not easy to implement „even with the most honest political will in the world" and that „the injustice of centuries and millennia cannot be repaired within a decade only."⁵⁹⁶ By contrast, most of my interlocutors blame precisely the „lack of political will" to make serious progress in the officialisation of the Amazigh language and culture. For them, it is especially the quasi-Jacobinist tradition of pan-Arabism and Islamic supremacy represented by political parties like the nationalist conservatives and Islamists of Istiqlal and PJD that has prevented more progressive decision-makers from pushing for further liberalisation. This cautious approach allowed them to avoid upsetting these currents, which have marked the Moroccan society and culture since independence.⁵⁹⁷ For IRCAM director Ahmed Boukous, the royal speeches and the dahir for the creation of his institute were useful to cast legitimacy upon the revitalisation of the Amazigh language and culture and contribute to its *de jure* and *de facto* recognition from state and society (Boukous 2011, p. 142). However, the achieved changes were „a necessary, but not sufficient condition to initiate a reversal in the process of the revitalization of Amazigh within the framework of public policies. Indeed, other levers must be set off in this perspective. The officialization of Amazigh within the Moroccan Constitution is undeniably the ultimate lever of the revitalization process" (Boukous 2011, p. 137). This call for a constitutionalisation of Tamazight to promote it to a national or official language was widely shared (Errihani 2007). The implicit critique also points to a lack of democratic legitimation for the Amazigh issue. Boutieri (2016, p. 167) rightly underlined that by „institutionalizing multilingualism as an indicator of multiculturalism and taking its control away from the regulatory powers of parliament, the Moroccan state – in this instance, the Palace and its authority over the government – has sundered the democratizing potential of multiculturalism at the very moment it adopted the most visible insignia of a burgeoning democracy." This authoritarian bias travelled beyond the immanent cultural sphere and has ramifications in other areas, too. In fact,

⁵⁹⁶ Interview, Language policies, 1.

⁵⁹⁷ Interview, Language policies, 13; Interview, Language policies, 11; Interview, Language policies, 4.

Amazigh associations continued to be denied legal status, several events and demonstrations of Amazigh organisations were still not authorised to take place, and the Democratic Amazigh Party was dissolved by the Administration Court on demand of the Ministry of the Interior in 2008 (El Ibrahimy 2022a, p. 151). Since research has shown that linguistic minorities are more likely to obtain full recognition if represented by a political party (Liu et al. 2018), this step needs to be considered significant in effectively curtailing the Imazighen's aspirations to make their demands sustainably respected. Furthermore, to a certain degree, IRCAM's and INDH's subventions contributed to an atomisation of the civil society sector, yielding a disintegration of Amazigh coordination on the national level (El Ibrahimy 2022a, 151f.). Also, many Imazighen living in rural areas continued to suffer from economic and social marginalisation. For example, in the winter of 2007, about 30 children lost their lives to illness within only a few days in the village of Anfgou due to a great cold and missing access to medical facilities as well as a lack of basic infrastructure that would have allowed their parents to call help. While Amazigh activists managed to scandalise such events as acts of deliberate marginalisation by the Arabo-Islamic regime elites, no systematic change was achieved despite personal intervention from the king to improve the lives of the villagers (Maddy-Weitzman 2017). The perceived stagnation and lack of democratic advancement resulted in outright frustration among parts of the Amazigh activists' community, who had initially been coopted into the IRCAM at the institution's beginning. Disappointed by the lack of „tangible effects in the day-to-day reality of the Amazigh cause, which finds itself in the same position as before 2001“, seven IRCAM officials left the IRCAM's administrative council in February 2005.⁵⁹⁸

At the same time, inspired by the Black Spring in Algeria, new forms of protest and new, more radical, locally organised, yet nationally established organisations emerged. While they based their demands on a call for improvements in the socio-economic situation of young Imazighen, they also started to express the request for a constitutional recognition of the Amazigh language, history and culture (El Ibrahimy 2022a, 150–161). Reinforced by events like the fatal earthquake in al Hoceima in 2004, fed by arbitrary state violence and nourished by the economic misery of the Rif and rural areas of the south, a peripheral protest culture developed and paved the ground for the outbreak of social unrest in 2011 (El Ibrahimy 2022a, 183ff.). Consequentially, elements of the Amazigh community, especially in the major cities and the Rif, became very active in the 2011 uprisings, calling for real change in the way their culture should be treated in the country. From their perspective, the timid nationalisation of the Amazigh language and culture

⁵⁹⁸ Cf. the press release concerning the withdrawal of seven members from the IRCAM administration board, published in TAMAZGHA (2007, 28f.).

needed to be completed by its officialisation and a full embrace by the state and society. This would involve measures to improve the socio-economic situation of the individuals raised in this culture.

6.4.3. A Ride on the Razor Blade – Conservatism and the Amazigh Movements

When the protests in the MENA region broke out in late 2010 and spring 2011, also Morocco was shaken by what came to be known as the 20 February Movement. In other countries in the region, demonstrators called for toppling the respective regimes. By contrast, the 20 February Movement called for a reform of the regime (*islah al-nizam*), mobilising 200.000 protestors from leftist to Islamist groups in 53 cities and towns. Amazigh activists also openly displayed the Amazigh flag and the flag of Adb al Karim's short-lived Rif Republic, calling for an end to discrimination and the full recognition of their language and culture. Especially in the Rif city al Hoceima, the confrontation escalated into a bloody massacre, leaving five protestors dead. The circumstances of their death were so suspicious and further fuelled the demonstrations (Maddy-Weitzman 2022, 125 and 131).⁵⁹⁹ In the slipstream of Ben Ali's fall in Tunisia, King Mohammed VI broke his silence on 9 March 2011. On television, he spoke to the Moroccan people, announcing the elaboration of a new constitution which would be adopted by a popular referendum in July 2011 (Maddy-Weitzman 2022, 132f.):

“The sacredness of our constants which are the subject of national unanimity, namely Islam as the religion of the State, guarantor of freedom of worship, as well as the commandery of believers, the monarchical regime, the national unity, territorial integrity and democratic choice, brings us a pledge and a solid base to build a historic compromise having the force of a new pact between the Throne and the people. From these immutable referential premises, We have decided to undertake a comprehensive constitutional reform, based on seven major foundations:

Firstly: the constitutional consecration of the plurality of the Moroccan identity, united and rich in the diversity of its tributaries, and at the heart of which is Amazighity, the common heritage of all Moroccans, without exception.”⁶⁰⁰

Like no other moment in the history of Morocco's cultural policies, this event marks the beginning of a series of actions which reveal the monarchy's efforts to use legal means to legitimise its rule. Clearly, King Mohammed VI, beyond defining the constituents of the Moroccan state and society, consecrated a crucial – if not the highest – importance to resolving the identity question and reforming the national identity framework. He also gave order to the political elites that, whatever the outcome of the constitution writing process, it should result in significant progress in the constitutional recognition of the Amazigh component in the Moroccan state. To underline this royal priority, he and his princely brother personally attended

⁵⁹⁹ On the history and subversive political meaning of the blue, green, yellow-striped flag with the red-Tifinagh letter Yaz (“z” in Tamazight), see El Guabli (2023, 38ff.).

⁶⁰⁰ Mohammed VI (2011a). Author's translation

the inauguration session of the commission charged with elaborating this constitution that would define a new national identity framework. He also mandated one of his personal advisors, Abdelatif Menouni, with the commission's presidency to coordinate and potentially control the debate. Furthermore, upon public pressure, the king also installed an accompanying mechanism that „functioned as liaison between the drafters of the constitution and political parties, labour unions, businessmen associations, human rights organizations, and other groups or even individuals interested in having an input in the new constitution”.⁶⁰¹ He appointed another of his advisors, Mohamed Moatassim, to head the mechanism. According to Lahcen Oulhaj, an academic expert on Amazigh culture and dean of the Faculty of Juridical, Economic, and Social Sciences at Mohammed V University in Rabat, whom the king appointed to become a member of the drafting commission, the royal speech of 9 March 2011 then set the tone for the subsequent writing process.⁶⁰² Therefore, we can say that important political action in favour of the Amazigh cause emanates from and is predetermined by these royal directives. It is the execution of the royal will. At the same time, Oulhaj conditioned his own participation in the commission on opening the official identity spectre by integrating the Amazigh component. This is only one example of how the king composed the commission with people who would ultimately favour the officialisation of Amazigh, knowing that the members would not necessarily represent the more conservative majority opinion in the population.

Yet, cultural conservatives were still allowed to have a say through political mechanisms. This is evidence of the reactivity and inclusiveness of the monarchical regime vis-à-vis societal demands from the conservative mainstream and the protesting people in the streets, including the already coopted intellectual Amazigh elites. Yet, it also proves that, in matters deemed important by the king, the monarchy ensures that the royal perspective prevails in the public debate. However, one major Amazigh organisation, namely the Tamaynut, refused to participate in the commission's consultations on the new constitution to avoid being mistaken for an instrument of the king's cultural policies (Le Saout 2017). Le Saout (2017) explained that the Amazigh associations included in the discussion circle have indeed been elevated to the rank of players in the royal cultural policy and recognised as privileged interlocutors of the government and the commission revising the constitution. This cooption of societal actors thus enhances the legitimacy of the king's constitution project and its new cultural identity

⁶⁰¹ Ottaway (2011).

⁶⁰² Interview, Constitution, 1. According to Oulhaj, Mohammed VI knew him and his work since he and some other royal princes had studied at the very same law institute in Rabat where Oulhaj had been the dean. Already in 2000/2001, Oulhaj had been a member of the commission which had elaborated the Amazigh Manifesto, and King Mohammed VI had appointed Oulhaj to the administration council of the IRCAM in 2002.

programme. Already in its preamble, the new supreme law enumerates various components contributing to Morocco's national identity. This also includes Islam, which remains the state religion, and Amazigh elements, which are a cultural heritage of all Moroccans. According to the preamble, Morocco's

„unity, is forged by the convergence of its Arab-Islamist, **Berber [amazighe]** and Saharan-Hassanic [saharo-hassanie] components, nourished and enriched by its African, Andalusian, Hebraic and Mediterranean influences [affluents].”⁶⁰³

Furthermore, Article 5 stipulates the official character of Tamazight, which becomes AN official language alongside Arabic, which remains THE official language. This strange formulation with obvious confusion potential goes back to modifications by the king's cronies and conservative political actors. The French journal *Le monde diplomatique* examined unpublished notes which prove that the political mechanism strongly modified the original version proposed by Menouni's constitution writing commission. One anonymous source declared: „The draft constitution [...] was touched up at the last minute by King Mohammed's advisor Moatassim, with the complicity of the conservative Al-Istiqlal party and the Islamists of the Justice and Development Party.”⁶⁰⁴ These touch-ups yielded the reformulation of some crucial identity-related paragraphs. For instance, while the original draft declared that Morocco was „a Muslim country”, the corrections made it „a Muslim state”, thereby defining an ideological guideline for all government action. The unconditional equality of men and women was also put under the condition of the constitutional Islamic nature of the state.

Finally, the equal footing of Arabic and Amazigh was transformed into a strange formulation that vaguely distinguishes between an and the official language. According to Lahcen Oulhaj, this opaque formulation was indeed a way to satisfy both societal streams – the liberals and the conservatives. While, within the constitution writing commission, the defenders of an exclusively Arabo-Muslim identity were not very numerous, the political mechanism, with its strong voices from the conservatives like the PJD and parts of Istiqlal, managed to make a strong call for not going too far with liberal diversity discourses. Between 10 and 17 June 2011,⁶⁰⁵ lobbying on the king's invitation, they managed to impose amendments to the constitution draft, which relegated Amazigh to an official language of secondary rank.⁶⁰⁶ By

⁶⁰³ Kingdom of Morocco (2011). El Guabli (2023, 30f. and 48) emphasised the continuity between the IRCAM's founding decree and the 2011 constitution, which adopts verbatims about the plurality of Moroccan identity that the Amazigh movement has long promoted.

⁶⁰⁴ Chibani (2011). Cf. also the findings of Maddy-Weitzman (2016, p. 249) and Maddy-Weitzman (2022, p. 132) who confirmed this finding in an interview with Lahcen Oulhaj.

⁶⁰⁵ with AFP (2011); MAP (2011a).

⁶⁰⁶ Chibani (2011).

reserving the rhetorical caveat of the articles „a” vs „the” official language, the monarchy can now – whenever necessary – reassure the Amazigh community with the king’s acknowledgement. At the same time, it allows the king to curry favour with the conservatives, who are still able to claim to be the predominant bearers of national identity. This ambiguity functions like a predetermined breaking point in Morocco’s supreme law, which enables the Moroccan leadership to react flexibly to acute political needs brought up by either the Amazigh camp or Arabo-Muslim conservatives. At any rate, it probably also represents the maximum compromise possible in a society as ideologically heterogeneous as the Moroccan one. However, the practical implications of this opaque formulation remain an issue of public and political dissent.

Besides the officialisation of Tamazight as a national language, Article 5 of the 2011 constitution stipulates the creation of a National Council of Moroccan Languages and Culture (CNLCM). The idea goes back to Driss Yazami. Only a few days before his appointment to the constitution writing commission, Yazami had been invested as president of the National Human Rights Council (CNDH), the institution succeeding the CCDH. Yazami suggested creating an institution to coordinate and assure the consistency of policies regarding Morocco’s languages and cultures (note the plural). By contrast, Lahcen Oulhaj, as rapporteur of the sub-commission in charge of the preamble, along with other specialists, insisted on the diverse character of a single and unique Moroccan culture (note the singular), a proposition which finally was retained in the constitution.⁶⁰⁷

Some Amazigh associations seized the chance to raise their long-standing demands within a setting which appeared favourable to meet support from the state, and they participated in the public hearings of the constitution writing commission. In turn, other associations decided to boycott the auditions, considering that the commission should have resulted from an electoral process (El Ibrahimi 2022a, pp. 175–178). At any rate, although the new constitution did not manage to convince all societal actors, especially within the Amazigh camp, some influential Amazigh associations still called for its adoption during the referendum despite the constitution’s apparent flaws. They were convinced that the text represented a significant leap in the right direction. We, therefore, observe a certain atomisation of the Amazigh movement following the constitutional project of the king, contributing to a partial and temporary demobilisation and deradicalisation of parts of the movement (El Ibrahimi 2022a, pp. 177–180). For Chaker (2016), the royal decision to revise the Moroccan constitution and make it more

⁶⁰⁷ Interview, Constitution, 1 and Ahdani (2020a).

inclusive proves the monarchy's remarkable capacity to anticipate large-scale protests from the Imazighen who, at the beginning of the 20 February Movement, only sporadically and without backing from rural strands of Amazigh movements participated in the uprisings. Other researchers like Aslan (2014) emphasise the historical continuity of the monarchy's efforts to seek an alliance with the Imazighen. For Boutieri (2018, 95f.), the new constitution is a merely rhetorical endorsement that „partakes in a broader neoliberal state strategy” which aims at shielding „highly stratified and unequal economic interests by placing the heavy burden of global adaptability on individual speakers as students, laborers, and citizens” and which „disguises the difficulty of managing languages, and absolves the state of its responsibility to rectify structural inequalities”. For Boutieri, this strategy consists of the „twin gestures of institutionalization and de-politicization: namely, the state bureaucratizes diversity in ways that do not alleviate but in fact perpetuate the structural inequality of minorities (classed, linguistic, regional, gendered, and so on) and through measures that leave the elusive shape of Moroccan authoritarianism unscathed” (Boutieri 2018, p. 99).

After all, the Moroccan king managed to stay in power and preserve the monarchy by sacrificing the government and proposing a new constitution, which was ultimately adopted by referendum on 1 July 2011. Whether one interprets this approach to the Imazighen as an act of co-optation or liberalization (Crawford 2005, p. 189; Moha Ennaji 2014a, p. 105), it is important to understand that by „taking control of the multicultural initiatives in Morocco, the monarchy has [...] attempted, with a high degree of success, to diffuse the political potential of the movement” (Wyrzten 2014, p. 27) and bolster the king's position as supreme societal arbiter. As a symbol of this appeasement, one of my interlocutors at IRCAM reframed this stability argument in her own words that underline the loyalist gratitude and pride. She emphasised that the 2011 constitution equals a supreme legal recognition of Morocco's diversity. For her, this recognition was not an easy decision taken only by political calculation but in full awareness of the huge „societal project” this would entail. For her, the recognition proves that Morocco has come to a new understanding. According to this rationale, diversity can replace a unitary identity without jeopardising national „cohesion and social peace” by „reconciling” the society with its own culture and heritage and rendering the people its „dignity”.⁶⁰⁸

However, both constitutional elements – implementing the official character of Tamazight as an official language and creating the CNLCM – required elaborating an organic law in the parliament. Leaving the future management of Morocco's multilingual identity to the

⁶⁰⁸ Interview, Language policies, 7.

government and its capacity to forge the necessary majorities in parliament, at first glance, may seem like a break from Morocco's autocratic policy tradition. However, this first impression proves erroneous if the policy-making process is analysed in more detail. The analysis shows that the monarchy still managed to keep its prerogatives by using the curtailed decision-making capacities of the parliament. In the context of the aftermath of the 2011 protests, Hibou and Tozy (2020, p. 159) speak of a constitutionalisation of Moroccan co-option. This certainly applies to the Amazigh movements. Yet, at the same time, Hibou and Tozy also talk of a „rationalisation of co-option” through the new constitutionally sanctioned election mode, which obliges the king to select the prime minister from the party winning the parliamentary election. Building upon Hibous and Tozy, I argue that, in the Moroccan post-2011 context, these two modes – constitutionalisation and rationalisation – yielded a stalemate. This stalemate ultimately only benefits the monarchy since it is the only Moroccan actor who can credibly present itself as the servant of a double logic: one is democratic and respects the rationale of elections; one is anchored in history yielding to the king's traditional role as protector of the minorities. In the Moroccan context, these logics compete but are moderated by the king to attenuate the detrimental effects of either of them for the regime's stability. The recent history of managing the Amazigh issue is a telling example of this paradigm.

The elections to the first post-uprising parliament were won by the Islamic conservatives of Abdelilah Benkirane's Party of Justice and Development (PJD). He then was appointed prime minister following the provisions of the new constitutions. During the electoral campaign in 2011, Benkirane had already demonstrated a low opinion of Amazigh when he classified the Amazigh alphabet Tifinagh as „Chinese” characters.⁶⁰⁹ After he became Morocco's first prime minister under the new constitution, he implicitly repeated his view in a conference on the significance of the Arab language and „a national strategy on the promotion of the arab language”, which took place in Rabat in September 2013. Despite the above-cited stipulations in the preamble of the new constitution approved by the King and voted by the Moroccan people hardly two and a half years before, he referred to another definition of Moroccan identity. This identity contradicts the new constitutional one but goes back to King Hassan II. From his point of view, „late King Hassan II stated five components of the Moroccan identity, namely Islam, the constitutional monarchy, the national unity, the Maliki rite and the Arabic language. [...] The Moroccans identify with these foundations that preserve the nation's role and place”.⁶¹⁰ By referring to royal authority, he attempted to diminish the operation margins for other

⁶⁰⁹ el Bouzdaini (2016).

⁶¹⁰ MAP (2013e).

participants in the national discourse. Unlike the malleable interpretation of the new constitution, the reference to the late king hardly leaves any space for other cultural components of the Moroccan nation, such as the Imazighen, Jews, Christians or Shiites. The Benkirane administration then also behaved as if it had royal backing by slowing down the rehabilitation of Amazigh culture. As we have seen, there had been progress on various aspects of promoting and revitalising Amazigh culture between 2004-2009 following fruitful agreements between the IRCAM and the respective Culture Ministers like Mohamed Achaari (1998-2007) and Touria Jabrane Kraytif (2007-2009) as well as with the minister of communication Mohamed Nabil Benabdallah (2002-2007).

By contrast, under the new government of Benkirane, there was hardly any room for cooperation, established contacts were unilaterally aborted, and joint working groups, which had resulted, among other things, in the creation of the first Amazigh broadcaster in Morocco, were stopped.⁶¹¹ Since 2011, the Ministry of Culture has begun to promote the Amazigh language, for example, by creating awards for Amazigh literature or participating in international literature fairs. Still, according to staffers of the Ministry of Culture and IRCAM specialists, this is only window dressing („poudre aux yeux”), among other things, to make the international community believe in Morocco’s commitment to human rights.⁶¹² While a Moroccan government cannot openly deny the implementation of the king’s will, it has the power to delay it.⁶¹³ This happened during the elaboration of the organic laws formalising the official status of Tamazight and the creation of the CNLCM, which was delayed massively. In fact, the debate about these two laws took eight and ten years respectively, although the constitution required the parliament to vote on the organic laws within one legislative period. In the meantime, the different parties within the governing coalition accused each other of slowing down the process. The Benkirane administration then brought the laws into the parliamentary process only barely before the end of its mandate in 2016. Critics in the media and interviews conducted by the author accuse the PJD of intentionally hindering the legislative process, knowing that the officialisation of Amazigh would potentially affect the status of Arabic as the dominant marker of the Moroccan identity.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹¹ Interview, Language policies, 6.

⁶¹² Cf. Interview, Cultural policies, 7 and Interview, Language policies, 13.

⁶¹³ Interview, Language policies, 3.

⁶¹⁴ Interview, Language policies, 13 and Interview, Language policies, 4 and Interview, Amazigh media, 1. Cf. also 2MTV (2019)

Unlike the Benkirane government, the civil society and the parliamentary opposition took the new constitutionally enshrined political agenda more seriously. In 2012, together with other activists, Ahmed Assid, a member of the IRCAM and president of the *Observatoire amazigh pour les droits et libertés*, managed to create a more extensive national debate⁶¹⁵ about the concrete formulation of the organic law on the officialisation of Amazigh. They even succeeded in convincing the second chamber of the Moroccan parliament to organise a study day. The majority parties, in turn, suddenly started to slow down and ultimately stop the political process around the organic law.⁶¹⁶ In 2013, two representatives of the parliament's Centre Alliance (consisting of PRE, MDS and Al Ahd) handed in a first rough draft of the organic law. Although this draft had even been discussed in the commission, further examination of the text was adjourned to a later date to involve the civil society during a study day. In January 2014, the draft was shifted indefinitely, and the examination never took place. Meanwhile, by 2013, the RNI faction in the Moroccan parliament had also prepared a draft law. Yet, the party preferred to withdraw its proposition five days after entering the governing coalition in October 2013 to allow the government to elaborate its own draft. In December 2015, royalist PAM representatives of the second chamber reconsidered the RNI's initiative and introduced it as their own motion.

However, since the second chamber lacks the right to initiate organic law projects, the draft was transferred to the Chamber of Representatives. There, Prime Minister Benkirane asked the government's Secretariat General to submit the draft to the parliament's *Commission de l'Enseignement, de la Culture et de la Communication* on 21 January 2016.⁶¹⁷ This last motion shows that it was not before late 2015 that the issue regained momentum. As is often the case in Morocco, international pressure and royal intervention probably launched this new dynamic: From 30 September to 1 October 2015, the United Nations' Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights discussed Morocco's fourth periodic report on the state of human rights. It adopted a list of recommendations for the kingdom on 8 October 2015. Regarding the Amazigh issue, the Committee called upon Morocco to

„adopt the draft organic law on the recognition of the Amazigh language as one of the official State languages as soon as possible and redouble its efforts to provide primary, secondary and university education in Amazigh, increase the use of Amazigh on television and lay down definite regulations on the question of Amazigh first names. The Committee further recommends that the State party take measures to guarantee Amazighs and Sahraouis full and unrestricted enjoyment of their right to take part in cultural life. It also recommends additional measures to protect cultural diversity and permit Amazighs

⁶¹⁵ Jaabouk (2016b).

⁶¹⁶ Mouhsine (2016a).

⁶¹⁷ Jaabouk (2016a).

and Sahraouis to preserve, develop, express and disseminate their identity, history, culture, language, traditions and customs.”⁶¹⁸

This international call appears to have been taken very seriously by the Moroccan monarchy.⁶¹⁹

At least it seems too much of a coincidence that already a day later, on 9 October 2015, King Mohammed VI, in his opening speech for the beginning of the parliamentary season, called upon the government and parliament to speed up the adoption of the organic laws. He also emphasised the new constitutional provisions, which stipulate that draft organic laws must, at the latest, be submitted to parliament for adoption by the end of the fifth legislative year of the ninth legislature (which had begun in 2012). Evoking the risks of rising popular discontent and credibility loss for the political elites, he reminded all the political forces that „the major national issues require of the ruling parties as well as the opposition, the Government as well as Parliament to make the spirit of constructive consensus prevail and to avoid political bickering”. With regards to the officialisation of the Amazigh language, the sovereign stressed that „Arabic and the Amazigh language have always fostered unity. They will never be the cause of dissension and division”. He also underlined that, with the creation of the National Council for Moroccan Culture and Languages (CNLCM), the kingdom aimed „to set up a body that brings together all institutions concerned by those issues, not to create a general framework for independent organisations.”⁶²⁰ With this speech, King Mohammed VI put the national identity debate back on the political agenda and made it of utmost importance. From his perspective, the adoption of the organic law on the adoption of the Amazigh language as an official language and the adoption of the organic law on the CNLCM are essential for maintaining social peace and societal cohesion. By appropriating the topic and reminding the parties and the government of their role in implementing the constitutional provisions and the royal orientations, the king gave a telling example of what to expect from Morocco’s political model in a post-2011 context. It is an executive monarchy that uses parliament and government as instruments to carry out royal visions that claim to echo the people’s (hence democratic) will. With this model, the monarchy creates the illusion of democratic, i.e. procedural, legitimacy. At the same time, it aims for performance legitimization through the monopolisation of policy outputs.

According to an IRCAM member and Amazigh activist, this leads to a constant low ratio of popular trust in the political parties, which are weakened by the monarchy since the king would

⁶¹⁸ Economic and Social Council - Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2015, p. 10).

⁶¹⁹ Azmi (2015).

⁶²⁰ Mohammed VI (2015a, 2015b).

never accept any political actor outshining him⁶²¹ as the sovereign and advocate of the people's will. Paradoxically, this system may have even protected the PJD-led government during their first mandate since the monarchy had taken the actual decisions, and no real political choice could have been made without the green light of the king.⁶²² This might, in fact, have contributed to the PJD's re-election at the head of the parliamentary elections of 2016. They may have benefitted from the halo effect around the monarchy and even won a few more votes in constituencies traditionally dominated by an Amazigh electorate. Nevertheless, the system may also backfire on the government. The king can drop it at any moment and blame all political problems on its former shield and sword. This happened during the second mandate of the PJD, resulting in their devastating defeat in the 2021 elections while keeping the monarchy alive. At any rate, the king's intervention at the beginning of the legislative season in 2015/2016 re-launched the dynamics around elaborating and adopting the two organic laws in question.

6.4.4. When Everything Remains the Same: the Debate on „Organic Law 26-16 on the Implementation Process of the Official Character of Amazigh and the Modalities for its Integration into Education and the Priority Domains of Public Life”

According to a representative study conducted by Abdellah Idhssaine (2021, 180ff.) in predominantly Amazigh areas, 77,5% of all respondents agreed that Amazigh should be used in public administration, 73,3% advocated for its introduction in the judiciary system and 64,8% called for the use of Amazigh in the Moroccan parliament. As of the publication of Idhssaine's study in 2021, still a huge majority of the interviewed people claimed Amazigh was never (28,5%), rarely (23,3%) or only sometimes (28,4%) used in administrations, never (48,1%), rarely (25,2%) or only sometimes (18,0%) used in courts, and never (55,7%), rarely (24,8%) or only sometimes (12,9%) used in parliament (Idhssaine 2021, pp. 210–216). This result comes as no surprise. As we have seen, the government delayed the work on the necessary organic laws that would constitute the basis for integrating Amazigh into the public sphere for a long time. According to Lahcen Oulhaj, the idea to link the officialisation of Amazigh to an organic law was born from the consideration that it would be impossible to make a language functional for state services immediately after it had so long been marginalised. First, it had to be given time to be researched and developed linguistically, and the necessary staff had to be trained. Therefore, an organic law was supposed to specify the steps towards gradually completing its introduction into the Moroccan state and the society. Furthermore, given the need to manage

⁶²¹ Interview, Language policies, 4.

⁶²² Le Desk (2016a); Mouhsine (2016a).

Morocco's linguistic diversity and coordinate cultural (particularly linguistic) policies, another organic law would need to specify the details for creating an institution mandated with such a task, i.e. the CNLCM.⁶²³ It was purportedly in response to the pressure of the associative fabric in Morocco and as well as the explicit call to action by the royal palace that the government, by mid-January 2016, finally published a simple mail address (tamazight@cg.gov.ma) and diffused it via the MAP with the invitation to the civil society to send in propositions for the organic law within one month between 15 January 2016 and 15 February 2016. According to the invitation, the „launch of the reception of proposals from civil society on this subject is part of the concern to develop this organic law according to a participatory approach and within the constitutional deadlines”.⁶²⁴

For many civil society actors, however, reality defied the official claims. Only a few days before, during the party council of the PJD on 9/10 January 2016, Benkirane had mocked and insulted the Amazigh inhabitants of the Souss region, entailing a wave of protest against the head of government's insolence vis-à-vis the legitimate demands of the Imazighen.⁶²⁵ Hoping for an excuse and a more inclusive, public, in-depth debate about the new law project, the Amazigh movements now felt that their right to contribute was reduced to mere and urgently formulated notes, which would have an uncertain impact on the actual legislative process. Many Amazigh activists criticised that unlike other organic laws, including the organic law on the CNLCM the state did not create an ad-hoc commission to channel the debate into a draft law. From their point of view, the government made exceptions when the political decision-making reached the „implementation of the official character of the Amazigh language. There, the head of government was content to create an e-mail address and to invite the interested associative actors and the actors concerned to deposit their proposals disrespect for this organic law.” For them, the government took „lightly a file as important as it is strategic. Because it is indeed one of the strategic choices of the State and society. A simple e-mail instead of launching a real serious and participative national debate is also a disdain for the associations, experts and other actors who are interested in this subject. Already the fact of having left it for the end remains inexplicable.” This protest finally resulted in a boycott of the government process by essential parts of the Amazigh movements.⁶²⁶ According to a political observer close to the file, the king

⁶²³ Interview, Constitution, 1.

⁶²⁴ MAP (2016).

⁶²⁵ el Bouzdaini (2016).

⁶²⁶ Abou El Farah (2016); el Bouzdaini (2016).

– even though critical about the procedure himself – could not refuse to accept it since this would have been an outright violation of the constitution.⁶²⁷

Also, parliamentarians of both chambers, including the RNI and MP of the governing coalition, were unhappy with the prime minister's approach to the Amazigh question. They disapproved that the legislative process on the CNLCM had been initiated before the question of the steps towards the implementation of the official character of Amazigh had been settled. Furthermore, when, on 20 January 2016, a study day concerning the organic law took place in the second chamber of the parliament, Benkirane stayed away, not even sending a welcome message to the participants. The members of parliament and the civil society perceived all this as another expression of its „Arabo-Islamist ideology” and a perpetuation of the very same racist attitude Benkirane had already shown in 2011 during the electoral campaign when he had classified the Amazigh alphabet Tifinagh as „Chinese” characters.⁶²⁸ Yet, the critique and public anger was limited to the government led by the PJD. At the same time, the king does not seem to have been blamed for these political failures. He was rather commended for enabling the implication of civil society actors in the consultative process (Le Saout 2017).

While the king won the competition over procedural legitimacy, the political parties also struggled for recognition. Abdelali Hamieddine, high-ranking PJD member and former chairman of the Education, Cultural, and Social Affairs Committee at the House of Councillors, defended the pace of the parliamentary debate, stressing that consultations with civil society, academia and among the parties take their time, especially given the fact that organising study days with experts in the parliament require some organisational effort. For him, what appeared like a blockage in the public and the media, in reality, was a „positive blockage” since it gave space for fruitful exchange.⁶²⁹ On 30 September 2016, a draft law was finally transmitted to the office of the House of Representatives. From there it was submitted to the parliament's Education, Culture and Communication Commission. There, it got stuck for almost three years. At first, the complicated process of constituting a new government following the parliamentary elections of September 2016 slowed down the discussion process before the law got blocked due to the complicated parliamentary discussions about the Framework Law on the reform of the education, training and scientific research system.⁶³⁰ This law, in turn, occupied the

⁶²⁷ Interview, Constitution, 1.

⁶²⁸ el Bouzdaini (2016).

⁶²⁹ Interview, Parliament, 1.

⁶³⁰ As we will see in more detail below, large parts of the PJD and the Istiqlal parliamentary groups refused the adoption of Articles 2 and 31 of the draft of framework law, which stipulated the use of foreign language (notably French) to teach natural science classes, considering French the “language of the colonisers” and its use in the

Education, Culture and Communication Commission because many representatives wanted to pass the organic law on the steps for the officialisation of Amazigh first. While procedurally, the order of discussion and adoption was controversial, debates also arose about content details of the organic law on the officialisation of Amazigh.

On 5 July 2017, the Minister of Culture presented the draft law to the commission for the first time. PJD representatives refused to accept the Phoenician Tifinagh script as the alphabet to transcribe the Tamazight language, although the Tifinagh had been in use in primary schools and on public signs ever since King Mohammed VI had approved the recommendation of the IRCAM in 2003. Like in the early 2000s, the debate about which script to use was a very ideological one: The conservatives of the PJD argued that the Arabic script was the more commonly used in Morocco and represented the sacred language of the Qur'an. The modernists, in turn, favoured the Latin script, which is the most widely used in the world. The huge controversy made the parliamentarians mandate a smaller sub-commission with further elaboration to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the parliamentary debate.⁶³¹

However, even with this technique, the adoption process remained rather tedious given the strong opposition of the PJD, which was blamed for blocking the sub-committee from discussing the draft, causing frustration among other parliamentarians. For instance, Istiqlal representative Houcine Azougaghe told *LaVieÉco* : „In any case, this bill cannot suffer any further delay [...] the delay in the adoption of this text is to be attributed to the majority party of the government coalition, known for its positions on the Amazigh question. This was clearly reflected during the debates of this bill in committee when certain marginal voices of this party decided to counter everyone”.⁶³² Other political observers also blamed civil society's weakness in sufficiently pushing the political decision-makers to reach a consensus and pave the way for a fruitful implementation. For instance, Abdellah Hitous, activist and specialist in Amazigh questions, declared:

„If these two texts are late, it is by political calculations. There is, in fact, no political will to accelerate their adoption. There is also no pressure from civil society. The Amazigh Movement is not strong enough to impose itself and impose change or at least the acceleration of the adoption of this law. [...] Whatever the content and scope of this text, it will not, by itself, change anything in the situation. If there is no social dynamic, there will be no progress. It is often said that democracy cannot be decreed; the same can be said for Amazigh. We need a social dynamic carried by the associative movement. Only this will give substance to the text whatever its scope and nature.”⁶³³

education system a “treason” of both, the national identity and the principles of their parties. Also, given the non-official character of French, they deemed its introduction to the school system “unconstitutional”. Cf. AFP (2019).

⁶³¹ Abou El Farah (2018).

⁶³² Abou El Farah (2018).

⁶³³ Abou El Farah (2018).

At any rate, considering the chosen parliamentary procedure a waste of time, the Istiqlal and the PAM left the sub-committee. Unlike the majority parties, they had already handed in their amendments in due time before 22 May 2018.⁶³⁴ Eventually, some PJD representatives gave up their opposition: According to my interlocutors at IRCAM, some members of the education committee within the PJD visited the IRCAM to ask for information and clarification, which helped to persuade them to change their minds.⁶³⁵ Hence, by the end of the first lecture after a year of stalemate, the royal compromise from 2003 also prevailed in 2019, and the Tifinagh was unanimously adopted by the House of Representatives on 10 June 2019,⁶³⁶ along with the organic law on the CNLCM. The text was then transmitted to the House of Councillors. From this moment on, the adoption process was smooth and fast.

Yet, at that stage, the draft law was harshly criticised by various Amazigh activist groups and individuals since the draft did not explicitly commit to Amazigh being an official language on equal footing with Arabic. In Article 1, the law rather speaks about „linguistic expressions commonly used in the different regions of the kingdom”, thereby avoiding mentioning the official and standardised version of Tamazight. Even the final text of the adopted law reads ambiguously: „By Amazigh language [this law] means the diverse linguistic expressions of Amazigh commonly used in the different regions of the kingdom as well as the linguistic and lexicographical product coming from the competent institutions and organisms”. Although the text alludes to the IRCAM’s standardisation efforts, standardised Tamazight is still treated more like a dialect similar to one of many variants in the kingdom rather than „a real” language like Arabic. Overall, the law was criticised for being too vague and for leaving too much space for interpretation regarding the implementation steps to be followed by the state for the officialisation of Amazigh in the public sphere, including education, public administration, and the judiciary.⁶³⁷

At any rate, the organic law on the officialisation of Amazigh was voted in the plenary of the House of Councillors on 23 July 2019. It then moved back to the lower chamber on 24 July 2019.⁶³⁸ There, it was adopted on 25 July 2019 by the Education, Culture and Communication Commission in a second lecture and eventually voted in the plenary session on 26 July 2019.⁶³⁹ After the summer break, in early September 2019, it was validated by the constitutional court

⁶³⁴ Asmlal (2019a); Saoury (2019).

⁶³⁵ Interview, Language policies, 7.

⁶³⁶ Chambre des Représentants (2019a).

⁶³⁷ Abou El Farah (2019); Ahdani (2019a)‘.

⁶³⁸ Chambre des Représentants (2019a).

⁶³⁹ Chambre des Représentants (2019b); le Matin (2019c).

and published in the Official Gazette on 26 September 2019. Yet, while approving the law in general, the constitutional court had the same critique as the Amazigh activists. It, therefore, clarified the law's vague formulations by stating that by Amazigh, the legislator meant the officially and constitutionally recognised and standardised Tamazight, written in the Tifinagh script and representing a cultural heritage to all Moroccans.⁶⁴⁰

The new law also stipulates several deadlines, before which the official character of Amazigh needs to be implemented in various sectors of public life.

The law stipulates that, until 2026, significant steps need to be taken in coordination with the CNLCM and the Education Council to allow for the generalisation of Tamazight in the whole education system from primary to secondary and university. Furthermore, parliament needs to provide a simultaneous translation service for parliamentary work and for broadcasting the parliamentary debates in Amazigh via television and radio. Also, national and subnational public administrations need to provide a welcome and information service and a call centre in Amazigh.

By 2031, the national justice system needs to provide witnesses and defendants with free translations and opportunities to communicate in Amazigh during the investigation and proceedings. Also, the generalisation of Amazigh education in secondary schools needs to be completed by then, and specialised research and training programmes must be offered at the university level. Furthermore, the *Official Gazette* must be available in Amazigh translation for parliamentary decisions, and official documents must carry a denomination in Amazigh alongside Arabic, including identity cards, passports, marriage acts, driver's licences, and official certificates. Official webpages of public administration and institutions are required to be available in Amazigh, too.

By 2036, laws, relevant regulations, decisions, and considerations (also concerning the subnational level) need to be published in Amazigh in the *Official Gazette* and public administrations are held to provide all forms and outlets in Amazigh.⁶⁴¹

While the king had pressured the government majority to advance the organic law to prevent his orientations from being completely submerged by diverging ideological convictions, the compromise resulting from the parliamentary process and the state of implementation defied the Amazigh movement's expectations. Some Amazigh activists, including IRCAM director Ahmed Boukous, blame the Istiqlal and the former PJD government for having played for time,

⁶⁴⁰ Asmlal (2019c).

⁶⁴¹ Oukerzaz (2022a).

knowing that more and more Amazigh families choose to speak Arabic at home instead of Amazigh.⁶⁴² This has to do with the change in the social fabric, with many rural families moving to the big cities where Amazigh is even less present in the public than in the countryside. It is hardly used in media; it is barely used at school (except for primary school), and, most of the time, it is not spoken at workplaces or in public administration.⁶⁴³ In most situations and regions in Morocco, the Amazigh language is not a social elevator that guarantees success in life. It, therefore, loses significance every day and is already considered an endangered language.⁶⁴⁴ This is the reason why Amazigh activists so urgently want the political decision-makers in parliament and government to advance faster in the application of the laws, visions and implementation plans regarding the official character of Amazigh and fully integrate it into the public sphere to prevent the language from losing even more societal significance. The official census indicated that, between 2004 and 2014, the number of Amazighophone people dropped from 28% to 26,7%. The decrease is even more alarming when compared to the numbers of the 1960 census when still about 50% of all Moroccans spoke Amazigh.⁶⁴⁵ It remains to be seen whether the legal provisions and action plans remain ink on paper or whether the current government proceeds to action and starts the implementation of the law. By the completion of this study, the most recent data from the 2024 census have not yet been available to the author.

6.4.5. *Rien ne va plus* Without the King: The Complicated Adoption of Framework Law 51-17 on the Education, Training and Scientific Research System

On 20 August 2013, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Revolution of King and People, King Mohammed presented a sobering analysis of the Moroccan school system.⁶⁴⁶ He explained the incapacity of many young people to „fulfil their legitimate professional, material and social aspirations” with a multitude of problems. According to him, these problems „are mostly due to the adoption of some syllabi and curricula that do not tally with the requirements of the job market. Another reason has to do with the disruptions caused by changing the language of instruction from Arabic, at the primary and secondary levels, to some foreign languages for the teaching of scientific and technical subjects in higher education. Accordingly, students must be provided with the necessary linguistic skills so that they may fully benefit

⁶⁴² MEDI1 TV (2019d) and 2MTV (2019) and Interview, Language policies, 4 and Interview, Language policies, 13.

⁶⁴³ Cf. also Idhssaine and El Kirat (2019) and Idhssaine (2021).

⁶⁴⁴ Collas (2023).

⁶⁴⁵ Mouhir (2015).

⁶⁴⁶ For a summary of the output deficits of the Moroccan school system measured by international standards, see Ben Haman (2021).

from training courses”. The king hence acknowledged the mismatch between the educational offer of Moroccan public schools and the demand from the work market. He also identified language alternation between modern standard Arabic and French as a crucial problem. To confront this issue, he encouraged the Moroccan youth to „learn and master foreign languages, in addition to the official languages specified in the Constitution”. His recommendation, hence, consisted of counting on the personal commitment of Moroccan pupils to acquire knowledge beyond the regular school offer. At the same time, Mohammed VI showed awareness that many families have to pay huge school fees to finance foreign schools and private tutors for their children to avoid the pitfalls of the public school system. On an institutional level, he therefore issued the wish to conduct „to pause, assess achievements and pinpoint shortcomings and inadequacies”. In his analysis, he blamed successive Moroccan governments for ignoring the accomplishments of their predecessors in implementing the National Charter for Education and Training, and dropping the plans adopted by the previous government without giving them the time and chance to thrive. The king, therefore, made a strong claim by saying that the „education sector should, therefore, not be included in the sphere of purely political matters, nor should its management be subjected to outbidding tactics or party politics.” The king then addressed the Moroccan public on a personal level and used the sentimental tone of a loving father caring and worrying for the future of his children. As such, he advocated for „a broad-based, constructive debate” to tackle the urgent education issue. He announced the activation of Higher Council of Education, Training and Research to „carry out an evaluation of the achievements of the National Charter for Education and Training ten years after its launch”. In the emotional finale of his speech, the king stressed his own role in this national debate. While setting himself once more apart from any political power game of the Moroccan party system, he emphasized his role of supreme impartial arbiter:

I am being frank with you on this issue, dear citizens, because of the responsibility I bear as your leader. I belong to no political party and take part in no election. The only party I proudly belong to, thank God, is Morocco.

To me, all Moroccans are equal. I make no distinction, be it on the basis of social status or affiliation. As far as I am concerned, there is no difference between a bank manager and a person who is unemployed, between a pilot, a farmer and a minister. They all are citizens with the same rights and the same obligations.

Therefore, we need a broad-based, constructive debate on all the major issues of concern to the nation, in order to achieve the tangible results Moroccans are looking forward to. What we do not need are sterile, disgraceful disputes that lead nowhere except to settling scores, defamation, and calumny. Such disputes only make problems more complex instead of solving them.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁷ Mohammed VI (2013d).

As underlined by Boutieri (2018, p. 112), Mohammed VI „assumed patronage of the domain of education” with this speech.

The following section will show that the king interpreted this arbiter role in a very active manner. Curiously, he did so by allowing for and using the very „outbidding tactics” of party politics he claimed to avoid. Ultimately, within a political system that, through the 2011 constitutional reforms, prevents stable parliamentary majorities, the king benefits from the „disgraceful disputes” he fustigates so much. They enable him to step in as a last resort and bolster his position as a supreme arbiter who provides orientation in political impasse and takes decisions when the elected officials fail to do so. Furthermore, the section will demonstrate how, contrary to the king’s claims, the reform of the education system concentrated on legitimating the monarchy also on a content level rather than increasing the pupils’ chances in the job market. We will see that the education debate revolves around diverging identity discourses that pitch Arabo-Islamic references against a secular, multicultural narrative. At the same time, the discussion follows neoliberal arguments about the efficiency and economic output of Morocco’s language choice, which ultimately favours international languages like French and increasingly English over vernacular languages like Moroccan Arabic (Darija) and Amazigh (Alalou 2018; Boutieri 2016; Kabel 2023). While the ultimate reform of the education sector resolves neither of these issues, it nevertheless bolsters the position of the king.

Many years had to pass for a fully-fledged reform regarding the redesign of the education sector to be debated in parliament and eventually adopted for implementation. Before a formal debate in parliament, the king used his proxies in the conservative government of PJD leader and Prime Minister Benkirane to ensure that the latter would understand its inferior position in the power struggle over the country’s national identity. In October 2015, Prime Minister Benkirane was taken by surprise by an initiative of his Education Minister, Rachid Belmokhtar, a loyal royalist. To the royal cabinet, the latter had submitted a proposal to start teaching English from the fourth year of primary school, begin teaching French two years earlier in primary school and reintroduce French as a language of instruction for scientific subjects. As described by Alalou (2018), this initiative clearly aimed to end decades of Arabisation in public education, which had failed to eradicate social inequality. Given his diverging ideological views on the need to preserve Modern Standard Arabic as the main language of instruction, it was clear that Benkirane would not tacitly accept this initiative. Angry about his minister’s uncoordinated solo, Benkirane went on the rampage against the Belmokhtar’s decision and tried to call him to reason in a speech in front of the parliament’s second chamber on 1 December 2015. At the same time, he struggled to secure the government’s prerogatives vis-à-vis the palace:

„You’ve set about introducing French, but then the fire will catch! That’s for the head of government to assess and evaluate... That’s why when His Majesty the King decided one day to choose a head of government, he didn’t choose Belmokhtar, he chose Benkirane... If he wanted Belmokhtar, he would have taken him, he knows him before I do. He appointed me so that I would be the one to decide... and that’s why I’ve sent you a letter to tell you that this decision to francise these subjects needs to be postponed so that we can think about it, because I wasn’t aware of it and you didn’t attach any importance to it [i.e. informing Benkirane].”⁶⁴⁸

While insisting on his constitutionally asserted role to determine the direction of the government’s work, Benkirane’s desperate tone clearly shows that, at that point, he knew he had been outwitted by the royal palace. On 6 January 2016, the king presided over a meeting of the ministers’ council in Laâyoune where Belmokhtar’s initiative was validated. One anonymous PJD representative quoted by the French newspaper *Le Monde* admitted his party’s defeat against the king and showed signs of fatalism: „Francising our education is not the best solution, but we are not going to enter into conflict with the monarchy. It’s pointless and counterproductive. This project shows just how powerful the French-speaking lobby still is and how dependent our country is on France.”⁶⁴⁹ While this statement grudgingly accepted the king’s dominance in the process of reforming the education sector, it nevertheless calls into question the democratic legitimacy of the decision process.

A few months later, the new parliamentary elections of September 2016 confirmed the PJD at the head of the ballots but yielded a new PJD prime minister, namely PJD cadre Saadeddine Othmani, an Amazigh by origin and former Minister of Foreign Affairs. After sacking the charismatic hardliner Benkirane, who had been prime minister since 2012 but who had initially failed to form a coalition following the elections, the king mandated Othmani to forge a new government majority (Daadaoui 2017a, 10f.). The discussions regarding framework law 51-17 on the education, training and scientific research system presented the PJD-led government and its majority in parliament with a new chance to turn the tide. As we will see in the following, however, the monarchy did not show any intention to let the country’s political conservatives curtail its efforts to dominate the national identity discourse in education.

Although the new framework law had long been announced, it was certainly not by coincidence that things started to move only in the wake of the large and partly violent strikes and sit-ins of contractual teachers in the spring of 2019 (especially following the 8th anniversary of the 20 February Movement). The need to fundamentally tackle the national education problem became more urgent as resolving the crisis concerning the contractual teachers preoccupied the government majority.⁶⁵⁰ A first consensus on using French to teach natural science subjects was

⁶⁴⁸ Brouksy (2016).

⁶⁴⁹ Brouksy (2016).

⁶⁵⁰ F. Iraqi (2019b).

reached between the leaders of the parliamentary majority on 25 March 2019. Yet, by the end of the same month, some PJD representatives blocked the agreement following a statement from former PJD leader and former Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane, who called to vote no. Consequently, the vote for the framework law scheduled for 1 April 2019 was shifted again – to the dislike of Aziz Akhanouch, RNI president, Agriculture Minister, wealthy businessman and friend of the king. This prompted a reaction from Mohammed VI. The king urged Prime Minister and PJD leader Saadeddine Othmani to align his parliamentary group with the recommendations of the Higher Council of Education, Training and Research, which formed the basis of the draft law handed in by Education Minister Amzazi. Following this royal intervention, on 2 April 2019, Prime Minister Othmani hosted a meeting between the party leaders at the seat of the government. While RNI president Aziz Akhanouch demanded the full support of the PJD for the draft law, Othmani suggested a split vote, allowing the critical voices of his party to abstain during the vote in commission while supporting the adoption in the plenary session.⁶⁵¹ Since, again, no compromise could be reached, Othmani granted another reflection time to his party colleagues, knowing that even with the law ultimately passing the House of Representatives it might still get stuck in the upper chamber, whose education and culture commission was presided over by Abdelali Hamieddine, a loyal to Benkirane.⁶⁵²

However, on several reprisals no solution could be found in the education commission and the adoption of the law remained blocked. On this stalemate, PJD member Mohcine Moufidi commented as follows: „The party’s position has not changed. We are trying to find a consensus on the draft framework law on education, like the one found before, and which consisted of alternating languages in the teaching of scientific and technical subjects.” The elected official also recalled that „this question of languages was a point of disagreement within the Higher Council of Education, but the principle of alternation had everyone’s agreement.” For Mohcine Moufidi and his PJD, it was „impossible to go back” behind this consensus.⁶⁵³ The PJD called upon the Education Minister Amzazi to take back his proposition on the use of foreign languages (i.e. French) for scientific subjects and accept the suggestion of an equal alternation

⁶⁵¹ Mousjid (2019b).

⁶⁵² F. Iraqi (2019c).

⁶⁵³ El Kerf (2019).

Figure 4



Figure 5

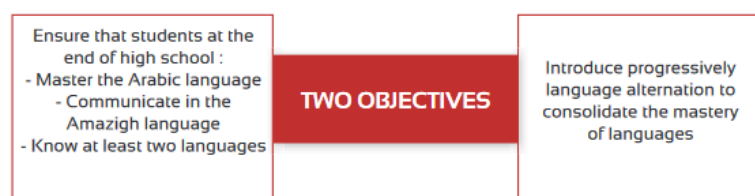


Figure 6

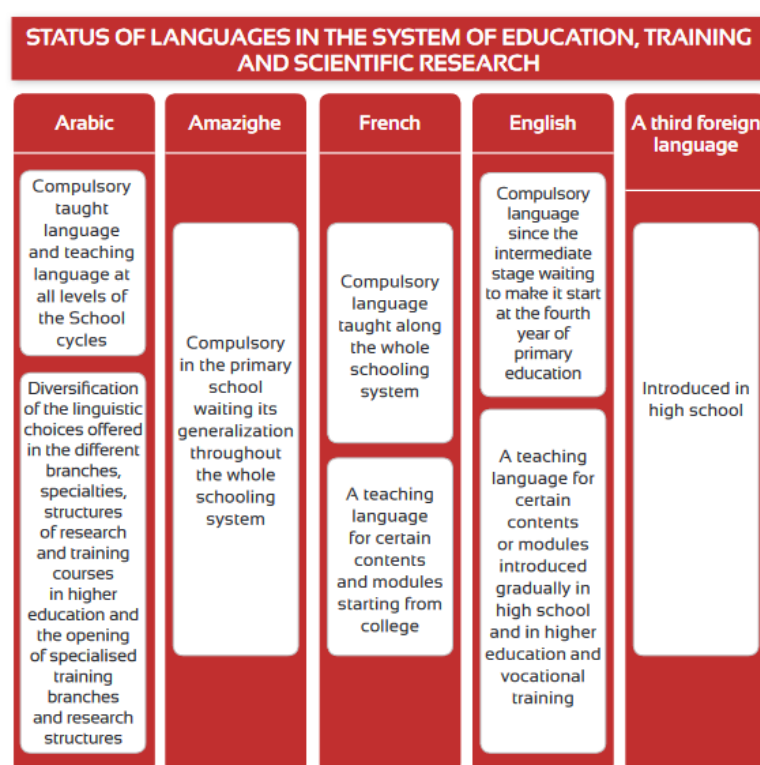


Figure 39: Language alternation scheme elaborated by the Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research

situation is a telling example of how in situations of political impasse, which so often occur in Morocco's controversial cultural policy field, the political class tends to delegitimise and disempower itself by relying on the king's capacity to reconcile the un-reconcilable and decide the undecidable.

between French and Arabic as laid out in the report handed over to King Mohammed VI in 2016. This report entitled „For a school of equity, quality and promotion – strategic vision of the reform 2015-2030” stipulated the language alternation model shown by Figure 39.⁶⁵⁴ The report's recommendations are very ambiguous regarding the status of Arabic and foreign languages within the Moroccan education system (Ben Hammou & Kesbi 2021). Therefore, they provided enough reason for either political side to claim interpretational hegemony. By calling for implementation along the lines of the report submitted to the king, the PJD indirectly called for royal arbitration in this matter that the parties themselves did not manage to resolve. This

⁶⁵⁴ Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research (2015, 16f.): and Tablet (2019).

With the new school year and the end of the parliamentary season in 2019 approaching, the minister for education Amzazi and the president of the House of Representatives, Habib el Malki, agreed to meet. Under rather suspicious circumstances and to the surprise of many parliamentarians, a timeline was set to adopt the framework by mid-July 2019.⁶⁵⁵ The limited implementation success of the Higher Education Council's strategic vision did not necessarily justify adopting its ambiguous character into the formulation of the planned framework law. Furthermore, teachers and other societal stakeholders had not sufficiently been consulted on whether or not they could fulfil the envisaged changes regarding the language of instruction or whether students could likely handle the language alternation so rapidly (Ben Hammou & Kesbi 2021, 2023). Nevertheless, the vote in the Education and Culture Commission eventually took place on 16 July 2019. On the voting day, the PJD parliamentarians proceeded as proposed by Prime Minister Othmani a few months before. 16 of them abstained at the vote on articles 2 and 31 and two representatives voted no. Except for these two hardliners who remained firm, the representatives then voted in favour of the adoption of the entire law. This vote divided the PJD deeply⁶⁵⁶ and led to a massive leadership crisis within the party, provoking some high-ranking PJD officials like former budget minister, Benkirane-loyal and leader of the PJD parliamentary group Driss el Azami to step down.⁶⁵⁷ This happened on 22 July 2019, after Benkirane accused his successor Othmani of having acted „against the interest of the Moroccan people”:

„In all honesty, **this is the orientation of the state and the PJD does not have the guts to oppose** it and bring it down [...] We agree with the framework law because it contains several positive points, but we definitely do not agree to replace the Arabic language in the teaching of scientific subjects with the French language. [...] I will not discuss the text again, I have already made three interventions on this subject. [...] this affair is obviously linked to our Moroccan identity”.

According to Benkirane, the adoption of the draft framework law is a „disaster“ for education in Morocco since „most of the Moroccan people do not understand the French language and do not have the ability to explain it to their children“. For Benkirane, Othmani committed the „first serious mistake” made by the PJD since arriving in government responsibility in 2011.⁶⁵⁸ While it is possible that by evoking „orientations of the state”, Benkirane meant the minister of education, a talk given a year later at a reunion of the PJD youth clarified the reference. On 1 March 2020, Benkirane exhorted his successor Saadedine el Othmani „to step down”, accusing his fellow PJD-cadre and Prime Minister Othmani of acting „against his own convictions” by

⁶⁵⁵ Mousjid (2019b).

⁶⁵⁶ Interview, Parliament, 1.

⁶⁵⁷ Khetrou (2019).

⁶⁵⁸ Ismaili (2019).

helping to pass the framework law on education. He also reproached him for bowing to pressure „from above”, which Benkirane himself had allegedly never done when he was still in office.⁶⁵⁹ Considering the usual codes in Morocco’s political communication, with pressure „from above”, Benkirane most likely implied an intervention from the royal palace since only the king and his entourage are more powerful in Morocco than the Prime Minister. Theoretically, Benkirane’s discrediting insinuations could also be interpreted as an attempt to dissipate rumours about himself. After his mandate as Prime Minister had ended, he publicly lamented his „impoverishment”. Yet, a few weeks before the party meeting, a leak revealed that Benkirane receives a monthly state pension amounting to about 8300 Euros (90.000 Dirhams) as a result of „royal will”.⁶⁶⁰ From this angle, his allegations against Othmani could be read as a public statement to save his credibility and assert that the king’s efforts to buy his silence are in vain.⁶⁶¹ Nevertheless, against the backdrop of earlier royal interventions, it is more than likely that the king indeed stepped in once more in favour of the new framework law.⁶⁶²

Finally, after the framework law had passed the second chamber, it was adopted in the plenary session on 2 August 2019 with the support of PJD votes. The alternation of languages was thereby definitively enshrined as a key principle of Morocco’s education system as was the promotion and education of foreign languages. The modernists in the government and the royal palace had, therefore, prevailed once more. The political debate about the adoption and the massive leadership crisis within the PJD ultimately only benefitted the monarchy and the parties close to the palace, such as the RNI and the PAM. In the plenary session which adopted the education reform, education minister Amzazi praised the new law as the result of a joint effort of various constitutional elements. In his speech, he paid special tribute to the king, saying that the new law is evidence of „the continuously renewed dynamic for the reform of the education and training system, a process which illustrates the royal firm will to modernize the Moroccan school and improve its performance”. Amzazi also reminded parliament and the public that the sovereign continues to call for profound school reform as a main gateway to the development and promotion of human capital and a democratic and prosperous Morocco. Thereby, he contextualised the reform within the monarch’s new development model. He even quoted the sovereign directly by referring to the king’s recent Throne speech held on 29 July 2019. There,

⁶⁵⁹ F. Iraqi (2020a).

⁶⁶⁰ F. Iraqi (2019a).

⁶⁶¹ Cf. Mousjid (2019a).

⁶⁶² Interview, Parliament, 1 also corroborates this interpretation. In the interview, the high-ranking PJD official claimed that royal intervention did not take place for organic and normal laws. However, he confirmed that royal intervention finally imposed the introduction of language alternation in the context of the framework law on education.

the monarch had called to „begin the preparation of a new generation of major sectoral plans likely to serve as a pillar of the development model in its new version” and mandated a commission with elaborating suggestions.⁶⁶³ By referring to the king’s most recent speech, the minister justified the reform process and its outcome. At the same time, he paid tribute to the monarchy, thereby enhancing the king’s legitimacy as a wise ruler who provides orientation in troubled times. This shows that the cultural policy field serves as a playground for Morocco’s power games. It also is a perfect showcase for the circular nature of Morocco’s legitimization system: While the political sphere is legitimised by the king’s good-will, the king, in turn, is legitimised by the lack of governance capacity by the political class, which needs the king to reach complicated decisions.

A closer look at the content of the new education framework law reveals how the education system – and language education in particular – has become instrumental in legitimating the monarchy, even on the content level. Framework Law 51-17, adopted in August 2019, clearly defines key political objectives that help perpetuate the political system. According to this law, the national research, study and education system must aim at „enshrining in the learner the country’s constitutional constants provided for by the Constitution and referred to in Article 4 of this framework law, as fundamental references of the pedagogical model adopted by the education, training and scientific research system and this, in order to consolidate the sense of belonging to the homeland, the pride of its symbols, the values of citizenship and the spirit of initiative” (Royaume du Maroc 2020b, p. 1968). Therefore, the educational system must build upon fundamental principles which among other things include „the constitutional constants of the country, i.e. the Muslim religion, the national unity with multiple tributaries, the constitutional monarchy and the choice of democracy”. Furthermore it should rely on „the unified national identity with multiple components, based on the consolidation of belonging to the Nation and on the values of openness, moderation, tolerance, dialogue and mutual understanding between cultures and human civilizations; the values and principles of human rights, such as set out in the Constitution and international agreements duly ratified by the Kingdom of Morocco or to which it has adhered, in particular the conventions relating to the fields of education, education, training and scientific research” (Royaume du Maroc 2020b, p. 1969). More specifically, the teaching of languages in Moroccan schools must follow a purpose which among other things consists in „consolidating the national identity, allowing the learners to acquire knowledge and skills, to flourish in their local and universal environment

⁶⁶³ Asmlal (2019b).

and to guarantee their socio-economic and cultural integration as well as their adherence to values” (Royaume du Maroc 2020b, p. 1975).

These legal provisions clearly show the patriotic character and purpose of the educational system under Mohammed VI. The civilisational values mentioned in the law undoubtedly aim to legitimise the monarchy and its constituents, including the struggle for national unity in diversity and territorial integrity. By referring to international legal frameworks of which the kingdom is a member, the Moroccan state rhetorically situates itself within the exclusive community of human rights-abiding countries. A high-ranking official at the Ministry of Education who was close to the file confirmed this impression. In an interview with the author, which took place in September 2021, he asserted that, from a pedagogical point of view, Morocco’s cultural policies concentrated on the implementation of the National Education Charta of 1999, which resulted from a national debate with a large consensus approved by late King Hassan II. For this, the ministry based its work on reflections on how to enshrine the transmission of certain values in the national education programme to foster a national culture. According to him, these values are, since 1999 and confirmed by the constitution and the framework-law 51-17, organised in roughly four families: 1) religious: the transmission of Morocco’s tolerant Islam; 2) civilisational: transmission of values which include the achievements of the nation like the cultural/linguistic diversity ; 3) universal values: the transmission of a sense for the universality of human rights; 4) civic values which define the people’s relation to the state.⁶⁶⁴ Education minister and government spokesperson Said Amzazi announced that his ministry would redouble its efforts in the following years to accomplish these goals through language lessons and meet the demand for new teachers trained to teach Tamazight. He explained that, since the introduction of Tamazight into the school system in the early 2000s, the IRCAM and his ministry had developed school manuals for the six years of the primary cycle and trained about 9000 pedagogical cadres, teaching about half a million pupils a year. Facing a lack of stable human resources, he claimed that his ministry had reacted immediately to the adoption of the organic law on the steps to implementing the official character of Amazigh in 2019 by preparing a 10-years-plan (2021-2030) and a transitional working programme (2021-2023). These plans aimed to a) improve the teaching methodology,

⁶⁶⁴ Interview, National education, 2.

b) train teachers and tutors, c) evaluate and test, and d) create interdisciplinary structures for supervision, monitoring and support.⁶⁶⁵

At the end of January 2021, the Ministry of Education announced that there should be new textbooks for Tamazight lessons at primary schools from the new school year 2021/22. This announcement followed an agreement that was reached on 30 December 2020 at a joint ministry meeting with the IRCAM. This meeting stipulated an acceleration in implementing the Tamazight generalisation in all three school cycles and revising the primary school programme.⁶⁶⁶ According to the ministry official, this revision is the result of a larger reform which had become necessary after the constitutional officialisation of Amazigh in 2011. It was delayed, though, by the steady change of ministers in the educational sector and by the governmental change of 2016/17. Hence, the reform slowly started in 2014 and lasted until 2018, when the situation had somewhat calmed down. The Ministry of Education and the IRCAM revised the curriculum in a consultative and participative approach, involving the national academies and instructors teaching Tamazight who were invited to submit their remarks. To discuss and coordinate questions regarding the instruction of Tamazight, a mixed committee was installed, which comes together several times per year and is presided over by the Minister of Education and Ahmed Boukous, the director of the IRCAM. In this constellation, the ministry takes care of the themes and curricula while the IRCAM brings in its linguistic expertise.⁶⁶⁷

Regarding foreign languages, Morocco plans to generalise the instruction of English in *collège*. For the elaboration of the curriculum, they receive help from the USA within the USAid agreements between the two countries. According to a high-ranking official of Morocco's Ministry of Education, these joint programmes have already contributed to improving Moroccan pupils' literacy in Arabic.⁶⁶⁸

For sure, the situation of school textbooks has improved over the last years thanks to the tremendous efforts of the researchers at the IRCAM and its cooperation with national education institutions. In some non-urban areas, however, the new textbooks designed by the IRCAM are refused due to their alleged modern, secular, westernised appearance hardly corresponding to

⁶⁶⁵ MAP (2021b). The numbers are hard to verify. On another occasion, the ministry of education uses varying numbers itself: In 2019, half a million pupils were taught Tamazight by around 5000 teachers, plus a number of 11.000 instructors who had received a special didactical training for teaching Tamazight. Cf. Amrani (2021).

⁶⁶⁶ Hespress (2021a). The ministry aims at generalising the instruction of Tamazight until 2016. Therefore an agreement was concluded with the IRCAM on the training of 400 new teachers per year: Amrani (2021).

⁶⁶⁷ Interview, National education, 2.

⁶⁶⁸ Interview, National education, 2. Cf. also U.S. Agency for International Development (2019).

the conservative environments of rural Amazigh communities (Aslan 2014, p. 193). Also, some local authorities and headmasters refuse to distribute the textbooks to pupils, and parents often do not even find them in the markets.⁶⁶⁹ At the same time, however, the education system has long reached its capacity limits. The introduction of Tamazight into the school system poses yet another challenge for the completely overstrained Moroccan schools, which are already struggling with language chaos⁶⁷⁰ (e.g. a lack of trained teachers and teaching materials). This explains why the Moroccan system is still far from a total integration/generalisation of Tamazight at all school levels. Quite the contrary is the case. By 2016, only around 12% of Moroccan pupils – mostly at primary schools – benefitted from Tamazight courses. At the same time, around 180 teachers – although trained to teach Tamazight – had still not been assigned to any school.⁶⁷¹ The numbers of pupils receiving Amazigh lessons in primary schools vary significantly depending on the source of information. While, according to IRCAM rector Ahmed Boukous, around 2007, the number of Tamazight learners in Moroccan primary schools amounted to approximately 500.000, numbers had regressed to around 400.000 by 2019.⁶⁷² Conversely, media reports citing Moroccan officials of the Ministry of Education indicate that, by summer 2019, ca. 600.000 pupils⁶⁷³ were taught Tamazight. Although, by 2021, the IRCAM had trained over 16.000 teachers to teach Amazigh, the number of qualified teachers effectively teaching Amazigh did not exceed 5.000-6000 benefitting only 400.000-500.000 pupils at primary school (out of a total of over 5.000.000 primary school students).⁶⁷⁴ By December 2023, the number had allegedly increased to about 746.000 students, i.e. a total of 19,5% of pupils in 1803 Moroccan primary schools.⁶⁷⁵ Irrespective of the actual number of specialised teachers and pupils, the proportions indicate that the majority of the personnel teaching Tamazight were untrained to do so. Furthermore, the ministry estimates that the need for teachers qualified to teach Tamazight will reach at least 8000 by 2029/2030 in the primary school sector alone. This tremendous demand for financial and human resources is currently far from being met any time soon.⁶⁷⁶ To this adds the fact that, as mentioned above already, there

⁶⁶⁹ Interview, Language policies, 10.

⁶⁷⁰ Cf. Aït Akdim (2013a).

⁶⁷¹ el Bouzdaini (2016).

⁶⁷² 2MTV (2019).

⁶⁷³ H. Guessous (2018).

⁶⁷⁴ Interview, Language policies, 3.

⁶⁷⁵ Skir (2024).

⁶⁷⁶ LesEco.ma (2019b). Apparently, the Ministry of Education does not share the exact numbers of teachers and pupils benefitting from Amazigh courses, even with the IRCAM. In November 2019, IRCAM's rector, Ahmed Boukous, publicly confessed that he could not verify the numbers communicated by the ministry. Cf. MEDII TV (2019d).

is only very little social capital attached to learning the Amazigh language, providing parents with little incentive to have their children delve into the language.⁶⁷⁷ As argued by Kabel (2023, p. 801), the whole language debate has followed increasingly neo-liberal arguments of efficiency and development over the last years. According to him, the promotion of French and English „international languages, English in particular, as registers of performance dovetails with the reconfiguration of the political economy of performative knowledge predicated on marketization and codification”. Especially since the 2011 uprisings, mastery of French (and to an increasing extent English) enables young Moroccans in urban centres and across the Maghreb and the West African region to participate in the global market and hence provides access to the social elevator (Boutieri 2018, p. 98; Errihani 2007, 243f.).⁶⁷⁸

This problem is deepened by the fact that the standardised version of Tamazight promoted by the state and the IRCAM does not correspond to any of the dialects spoken by the children on the ground (Maddy-Weitzman 2016, 249f.). Alternative propositions involving, for instance, the promotion of the commonly spoken Moroccan-Arabic dialect *darja* and Tamazight as languages of instruction in pre-school and primary classes (not only as subjects) are suffocated by technical arguments or discarded by defenders of modern standard Arabic on ideological grounds (Alalou 2018; Boutieri 2018, 108ff.). According to Boutieri (2016, 155f., 2018, p. 107), multilingualism in public schools only serves to curry favour the pluralist agenda of international neoliberal institutions like the IMF (and other international donors) as long as the Moroccan economy depends on mastering French or English. It also further boosts the privileges of those children blessed with parents who can afford private schools and private language courses. At the same time, it poses an extra obstacle to disadvantaged societal strands. According to interviews with Amazigh activists and journalists, the state also tolerates local authorities, school headmasters or individual teachers who resort to budgetary or ideological pretexts to prevent or deny Tamazight courses. Some of them also advanced legal concerns,

⁶⁷⁷ According to Bouziane (2020), this is also partly true for Arabic compared to foreign languages like French and English.

⁶⁷⁸ These findings echo opinions expressed by some of my own interlocutors (see, for instance, Background conversation, Cultural policies, 3) and some remarks collected by Abdellah Idhssaine (2021, 170, 173 and 178) in a representative study, which he conducted in predominantly Amazigh regions. However, from a quantitative perspective, Idhssaine's study yielded a vast majority of over 71% of the respondents who strongly disagreed with the idea that teaching Amazigh would be an obstacle to social mobility. Over 75% of the interviewed people even agreed that introducing Amazigh at school is an added value. 78% hence advocated for the introduction of Amazigh into Moroccan schools.

claiming to be waiting for the organic law to confirm the official character of Amazigh stipulated by the 2011 constitution.⁶⁷⁹

In the school year 2019/2020, for instance, there were media reports on systematic violations of the state's promise to gradually generalise the teaching of Tamazight. Hespress FR reported critique of no less than 17 NGOs, which declared that „some delegates of the supervising minister withdrew the mandate to teach Tamazight from specialized teachers by forcing them to teach Arabic or French”. Among those most touched by this „exclusion” were teachers who had graduated from the Amazigh study track of the Regional Centres of the Oriental region. According to the activists, „these undemocratic exclusionary measures go against the will of the people, undermine the promises of the State, refute its slogans concerning the restoration of language, culture and Amazigh identity, expose the lie of the integration of Amazigh into the education system and reveal the extent of the contempt accorded to this vital file”. The NGOs also argued that the official statistics which claim that hardly 27% of all Moroccans are Amazighophone are biased or fake. For them, the statistics reveal „an artificial outcome conditioned by the ideological background and exclusive beliefs of its framers, as part of a systematic policy and deliberate system to carry out the plan of complete Arabisation of Morocco.” The NGOs condemn „the crime of obliteration seeking to eliminate the Amazigh language, culture and identity history”, and „the state's treatment of the marginalisation, exclusion and contempt of Amazighs on their lands”.⁶⁸⁰

The generalisation of the Amazigh has so far been primarily treated mainly as a budget matter. Yet, according to IRCAM rector Ahmed Boukous, implementing the constitution should be a political decision. Boukous holds that, by far, the best initiative to promote Amazigh culture in the complicated linguistic field has come from the king. Hence, he expects that any fundamental solution to deblocking the debate will most likely emanate from the sovereign.⁶⁸¹ This puts the Amazigh movement into a waiting position, waiting for the monarchy to launch the next decisive leap forward. The expectations strengthen the monarchy's position as long as hopes are not deceived for too long.

⁶⁷⁹ E.g. Interview, Language policies, 3; Interview, Language policies, 5; Interview, Language policies, 10 and Interview, Amazigh media, 1. For similar results, also see Aslan (2014, 192f.).

⁶⁸⁰ Ahdani (2019b). In a similar vein, Moroccan media reported on prominent personalities like the president of the bar association in Rabat or the wali of Casablanca, who reminded their subordinates that the only national language was Arabic. According to Abdellah Hitous, an expert on the Amazigh cause in Morocco, many decision-makers use the apparent legal ambiguity to justify why they do not promote the Amazigh language. As long as the organic law was not adopted, they refused to advance in the issue, although the latter law was only supposed to regulate the steps of implementation and had no impact on the official character *per se* as stipulated by Art. 5 of the 2011 constitution : Abou El Farah (2018).

⁶⁸¹ 2MTV (2019).

6.4.6. Institutional Diversity Management as a Pretext for Re-negotiation of Power Structures: the Debate on Organic Law 04-16 Concerning the CNLCM

For Driss Khrouz, the former director of the National Library, the organic law on the creation of the CNLCM would allow the state to research, harmonise and structure „the linguistic and social peace between all languages in Morocco.”⁶⁸² Yet, the steps towards creating and harnessing the stabilising benefits of the latter appear just as complicated as the ones concerning the reform of the education sector. After the royal speech to the parliament in October 2015, the national debate on the CNLCM was reopened. On 10 November 2015, Mohamed Amine Sbihi, Minister of Culture, announced before the parliament that the commission on the elaboration of the organic law on the CNLCM would officially take up its work the other day, coordinated by National Library director Driss Khrouz.⁶⁸³ According to the author’s information, already in July 2014 – almost one and a half years before this announcement, Driss Khrouz had been contacted on royal order to coordinate a new ad-hoc-commission charged with conducting a national dialogue on the character of the future CNLCM.⁶⁸⁴

On 11 November 2015, the commission’s first (official) meeting was held in the presence of Mohamed Amine Sbihi, Minister of Culture.⁶⁸⁵ At that point, civil society criticised the untransparent modalities of the commission’s composition. While Amazigh activists complained about the low number of people from their ranks, the conservatives feared that defendants of the Arabic language and Muslim identity were underrepresented.⁶⁸⁶ Driss Khrouz partly admitted the fact but also tried to dissipate all worries about an unrepresentative selection of the commission members, untransparent working modes and potentially pre-determined outcomes. He explained the discrete working methods of his commission by efficiency concerns for the greater benefit of society:

„This is a restricted commission whose mission is limited in time and consists of preparing the draft organic law. It is true that it does not encompass all the potentialities of Moroccan society. Still, it does indeed respect at the level of its composition all the associative and institutional representations working in the field of national languages and culture. [...] The commission members were selected based on objective and transparent criteria without excluding any party. [...] The commission prefers to work with discretion and responsibility for greater efficiency. This does not mean that we are facing a secret or occult commission. Our work is done in complete transparency. And whenever we have something new, we will communicate it without hesitation. [...] Everyone will be able to propose, debate and discuss our organic law proposals. Better, the text in question will be submitted, during its development, to the various

⁶⁸² Aujourd'hui le Maroc WEBTV (2016); Medi1TV Afrique (2021).

⁶⁸³ Médias24 (2015).

⁶⁸⁴ Interview, National Library, 1.

⁶⁸⁵ ALBAYANE (2015); MAP (2015i).

⁶⁸⁶ Abou El Farah (2015); Azmi (2015); Bentaleb (2015).

associations and actors for broad discussions [...] Our task is to prepare proposals for all those who cannot be brought together at the same time and in the same place”.⁶⁸⁷

Khrouz then also referred to the king’s speech in the autumn of 2015 and thereby tried to provide his mission with the royal authority to give flesh and bones to Article 5 of the constitution. Whenever the king sees the nation’s stability and persistence of the political system at stake, he uses ad-hoc commissions to elaborate political solutions like the one to prepare a draft organic law for the CNLCM. At the same time, these commissions reduce the government’s operative margins. They also curtail the legislative capacities of the parliament while enhancing the monarchy’s prestige as Morocco’s political motor. According to media reports and the author’s interview with Driss Khrouz, the commission took three months to be composed. Finally, it involved the Minister of Higher Education, the Minister of National Education, the Minister of Culture and Communication, and 35 other public figures, including party members, representatives of local authorities, scientific experts, civil society associations and cultural actors from cinema, theatre and television. Also, IRCAM’s rector, Ahmed Boukous, became a commission member, as were representatives of CNDH, the Higher Council for Education, and the Rabita Mohammadia of Oulema.⁶⁸⁸ The commission’s dialogue mechanism operated for almost two years (probably counting from Driss Khrouz’s appointment in 2014) and consulted experts from academia, civil society, and political stakeholders on a national and subnational level, including parliamentarians of the two chambers. Eventually, the commission elaborated a draft law and submitted it to the Prime Minister in January 2016. The Ministerial Council adopted the law project on 26 September 2016 and transferred it to the House of Representatives on 30 September 2016.⁶⁸⁹

The parliamentary elections on 7 October 2016 and complicated coalition talks, which dragged on until March/April 2017, further delayed the parliamentary discussion. It was not before the summer of 2017 that the Culture Minister presented the draft law before the Culture and Communication Commission at the House of Representatives. However, the draft continued to be treated at a slow pace. In January 2018, during a study day in parliament, Culture Minister Mohamed Laâraj explained the law project to the representatives, underlining the national, political and social importance of language policies. The MAP’s report on the event also paid tribute to the royal origins of the project by referring to the king’s speech before the parliament

⁶⁸⁷ Bentaleb (2015).

⁶⁸⁸ Bentaleb (2015) and Interview, National Library, 1.

⁶⁸⁹ Abou El Farah (2018).

in 2015.⁶⁹⁰ A parliamentary debate was scheduled for 14 December 2018, yet ultimately needed to be shifted.⁶⁹¹

Some claim that the organic law on the creation of the CNLCM was delayed because the legislators wanted to create a reliable legal basis for the new institution's linguistic services. For sure not without good reason, this involved passing the organic law on the official character of the Amazigh language in parliament before working on details regarding the CNLCM. Conditioning the adoption of the latter on the adoption of the former law significantly slowed down the creation of the CNLCM.⁶⁹² The more concrete reason, though, consists of diverging opinions about the interpretation of the constitution regarding the creation of an instance for promoting foreign languages under the roof of the CNLCM. From the PJD's perspective, Article 17 of the draft law was unconstitutional since Article 5 of the constitution stipulates that the CNLCM is „charged with [,] notably[,], the protection and the development of the Arabic and Tamazight languages and of the diverse Moroccan cultural expressions, which constitute one authentic patrimony and one source of contemporary inspiration. It brings together the institutions concerned in these domains.”⁶⁹³ For the PJD, the fact that the promotion of foreign languages is not explicitly mentioned here as a purpose constitutionally rules out the possibility of integrating the instance into the CNLCM. Hence, the PJD requested to create an instance outside the CNLCM so as not to shift the new institution's priorities away from national languages.

Other parties of the government majority, in turn, referred to another sentence in the same Article 5. According to this sentence, the state „sees to the coherence of linguistic policy and national culture and to the learning and mastery of the foreign languages of greatest use in the world, as tools of communication, of integration and of interaction [by which] society [may] know, and to be open to different cultures and to contemporary civilizations.” Based on this, they justified placing the promotion of foreign languages among the duties of the CNLCM since language policy was supposed to be the new council's primary purpose. The debate occupied the parliament for a long time. The government declined responsibility for the political impasse, while the parties blamed one another for the blockade of the draft law. One parliamentary source declared to TelQuel that „When differences appear within the majority, the minister in charge of the file must play the role of arbiter, something that Amzazi has failed to do. This has meant

⁶⁹⁰ Chambre des Représentants (2018a).

⁶⁹¹ Chahid (2018).

⁶⁹² Cf. for instance 2MTV (2019) and Interview, National Library, 1.

⁶⁹³ Kingdom of Morocco (2011).

that the meetings to adopt the amendments and vote on the law have been postponed several times”. Education Minister Saaïd Amzazi, for his part, made *TelQuel* publish a clarification on the ministry’s behalf reading as follows: „Contrary to what was reported by the author of the article [...] we specify that the preparation of the draft organic law 04-16 establishing the National Council of Languages and of Moroccan Culture falls under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Culture and Communication, Mr. Mohamed Laâraj, who moreover presented it in person in January 2018 to the House of Representatives, before the Commission for Education, Culture and Communication”.⁶⁹⁴ Although Amzazi formally was right to defend his position,⁶⁹⁵ the debate shows that even for people close to the file, it was – at that time – difficult to identify the responsibilities. It also indicates a certain need for public explanations concerning the delay of the new legislation regarding the CNLCM. Deflections of responsibility are, therefore, unlikely to enhance the popularity and credibility of the government and the governing coalition in the parliament. In July 2019, Culture Minister Laâraj defended the law project again – this time before the Education, Cultural and Social Affairs Commission of the House of Councillors, Morocco’s second parliamentary chamber.⁶⁹⁶

Eventually, the debate was settled by a compromise that satisfied the PJD and the other parties. They agreed that one of the duties of the new instance in charge of foreign languages within the CNLCM would consist of promoting „translations”. Yet, on 31 December 2019, during the second lecture in the second chamber, the Councillors adopted a revised draft, which amended the new draft in one essential point. Following a surprising proposition from the Culture Minister, Hassan Abyaba, the revised draft law stipulated that the Moroccan Academy for Arabic and the IRCAM should both be integrated into the CNLCM. At the same time, the Arabisation Institute would be spared the same fate and preserve its independence. This amendment by the second chamber generated a new blockage in the first chamber since civil society and parties like the RNI criticised the unequal treatment of the two official languages, Amazigh and Arabic. They were concerned about the institutional and financial independence IRCAM had enjoyed ever since its creation in 2001. From their perspective, the IRCAM would lose its significance and impact if merged with other institutions, such as the Academy for the Arabic or the Arabisation Institute, which – unlike the IRCAM – are not much more than ink on paper or have remained widely unfunctional ever since their creation.⁶⁹⁷ The loyal Amazigh

⁶⁹⁴ Chahid (2018). Amzazi referred to Laâraj’s presentation on 16 January 2018: *Chambre des Représentants* (2018a).

⁶⁹⁵ *Chambre des Représentants* (2018b).

⁶⁹⁶ MAP (2019a).

⁶⁹⁷ Cf. for instance Interview, Language policies, 5 and Interview, Language policies, 13.

community, therefore, preferred a solution preserving IRCAM's direct accountability to the king.⁶⁹⁸ While the adoption of the amended text in the first chamber had originally been scheduled for 21 January 2020, the RNI faction requested to postpone the vote to 11 February 2020 to discuss the organic law in the commission again. There, they called for the same institutional independence to be granted to the IRCAM. Yet, despite a meeting between the leaders of the majority parties, which included PJD, UC, RNI, MP and USFP, a compromise could not be reached.⁶⁹⁹ Nevertheless, one day later, the law was unanimously adopted on 12 February 2020,⁷⁰⁰ maybe on royal intervention.⁷⁰¹ According to the voted draft, all language institutions would be integrated into the new council. The law was then approved by Royal Dahir on 30 March 2020 and published in the Official Gazette on 2 April 2020.

At this point, I would like to suggest an interpretation of the events around the adoption of the CNLCM, which is different from what is classically advanced by the political observers in Morocco's media landscape. From my point of view, the debate about the CNLCM can only partly be explained by ideological differences and linguistic protectionism, which oppose the conservatives and modernists. Rather, we must also consider that the debate about the CNLCM is only a symptom of a larger power struggle. It stands for a re-negotiation of the power balance between the (more or less) democratically elected government and the monarchy that seeks to monopolise the political sphere. In the following, I will sketch this alternative line of argumentation.

Political deadlocks like the one experienced during the CNLCM result from the heterogeneity in the Moroccan parliament and the government majority. They are a symptom of the predetermined breaking point in the Moroccan parliamentary system, which gives priority to representativity over governability. The Moroccan law used to impose only a low electoral threshold for parties to enter the parliament. They were fully abolished ahead of the 2021 parliamentary elections (Szmolka 2023). Figure 40 shows that 12 parties entered the lower chamber following the 2016 elections, some of them with no more than a single seat.⁷⁰² The balkanization of Morocco's political landscape has, therefore, become a characteristic element of Morocco's parliamentary system (Boukhars 2011, 107f.). This also curtails the big parties's capacity to form a government quickly. This is particularly true for Benkirane's PJD following

⁶⁹⁸ Bencherki (2017).

⁶⁹⁹ Abou El Farah (2020); Jaabouk (2020a).

⁷⁰⁰ Chambre des Représentants (2020); Libération (2020).

⁷⁰¹ This was categorically denied in Interview, Parliament, 1.

⁷⁰² Badrane (2016).

the 2016 elections, which, despite its electoral victory, was faced with an alliance of loyalist parties close to the palace that dictated its terms. This constellation keeps government coalitions notoriously unstable. Political disputes between the many coalition parties are favoured, enhancing the likelihood of political blockages due to ideological

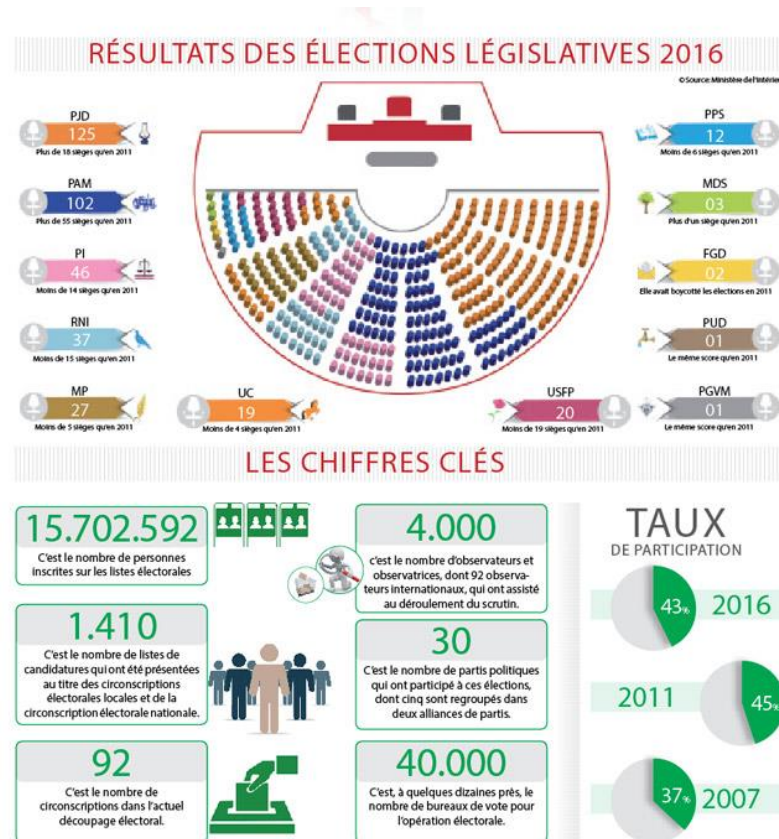


Figure 40: Results of the 2016 parliamentary elections according to the Interior Ministry

discrepancies. Political impasses allow the king to act as a moderator while contributing to the disempowerment of the parties and the government (Desrues 2020; Maghraoui 2020). Parliamentarism in Morocco, therefore, acts as a legitimization mechanism of the monarchy. Or as political observers like Bencheikh have rightly put it: „The strong and continuing presence of the monarch in the economic and social front ... gives the impression that political governance is conducted solely by the monarchical institution. This feeling contributes to the marginalization of parties and their devaluation in the eyes of the public“. ⁷⁰³ The only winner of the resulting parliamentary disharmony is the monarchy, which can act as the impartial arbiter and enters the scene only at the last moment to secure a political outcome. The irrelevance of parties in terms of parliamentary and governmental powers, therefore, makes them all the more relevant in bolstering the monarchical regime (Maghraoui 2020).

In this regard, the cultural domain has proven to be a particularly useful field. Cultural questions often pertain to the thorny national identity issue. They bear a high potential for conflict in a country as culturally diverse as the Kingdom of Morocco. The very fact that the king appointed a constitution writing commission and gave his orientations for the constitution's content can

⁷⁰³ S. Bencheikh: Politique. Le PPS se rebelle, in : TelQuel (8-14 March 2008), quoted from Boukhars (2011, p. 62).

be considered the ‘original sin’ of the political dilemma which unfolded in the 10 years following the uprisings in 2011. When Mohammed VI elevated some identity-related questions languages to constitutional status and had the supreme law ambiguously regulate this field, he considerably restrained any future legislator’s margins of agenda setting. Furthermore, he ensured his executive power in the long run while seemingly giving up some of his prerogatives. It is more than understandable that a government and a parliament that receive their legitimacy from (more or less) democratic elections have difficulties in debating and passing laws that were predetermined by royal orientation years before and enjoy constitutional rank. Under such circumstances, no elected official can come to a different conclusion than that enshrined before by non-democratic means and controlled by vigilant royal ears and eyes.

If we take Lahcen Oulhaj, a former member of the Constitution Writing Commission, seriously, the way the debate on the three language-related questions evolved and got stuck was somewhat foreseeable already by 2011. Back then, Oulhaj had already criticised the royal advisor Mohamed Moâtassim: „The first person to blame is the president of the political mechanism, the king’s advisor, Moatassim. He is the first responsible. Now, maybe it was prompted by the political parties, notably the Istiqlal and the PJD, but he was the constitutionalist who had to pay attention to that. For the parties, who have inspired this idea, the goal was that IRCAM should not remain outside the state’s institutions because it is an institute, which has its independence from the government because it was created by the king. But it has remained outside the institutions.”⁷⁰⁴ Oulhaj thus explained that royal advisor Moatassim, the former head of the political mechanism, was responsible for the confusion about the creation of the CNLCM. Either by negligence or by sympathy for the conservative parties of Istiqlal and PJD, he did not pay attention to the practical implications of such constitutional provisions. The interest of the PJD in pushing for the integration of the IRCAM under the CNLCM would have been to prevent the IRCAM from preserving its royally warranted independence. However, this would only have worked if the CNLCM had been conceived as a government institution, which it did not eventually become. Also, Driss Khrouz underlined that to secure the separation of powers and to avoid „a fight” (*bagarre*) between the institutions, the IRCAM could not keep its exclusive position, which kept the institute only under the royal cabinet’s jurisdiction. Yet, he stressed that the constitution stipulates that it would not lose its independence. Rather, it

⁷⁰⁴ Interview, Constitution, 1. These accounts were confirmed by an article Ali Chibani in the French journal *Le Monde Diplomatique*. There, the journalist examined unpublished material and compared the original version of the constitution proposed by the constitution writing commission and the version modified by the political mechanism headed by royal advisor Moatassim. These modifications imply that Moatassim collaborated with the Istiqlal and the PJD to preserve the conservative traits of the Moroccan state: Chibani (2011).

would continue to exist within an independent conglomerate of other institutions. This conglomerate of institutions would receive a special autonomous status vis-à-vis the executive and the legislative.⁷⁰⁵

With the constitutional mandate to create institutions like the CNLCM independent from the government and reporting only to the king, the legislator was urged to contribute to its own and the government's disempowerment. Moroccan loyalists might argue that such provisions in the identity field guarantee social peace and the persistence of the democratic protection of minority rights by preventing partisan ideologies from abusing the cultural field for their purposes. Yet, this could also be ensured by other means, e.g. by fixing qualified majorities for changing specific constitutional provisions. The Moroccan system, hence, creates a permanent backdoor for autocratic manipulation in the identity field, which entails problems in times of less well-meaning or less vigilant monarchs. Such premises also explain the PJD's inflexibility and Culture Minister Abyaba's seemingly strange initiative to leave the Arabisation Institute out of the CNLCM. Both positions would have allowed them to maintain governmental authority over the institute. Conversely, under the CNLCM, it will now be imposed a legal status similar to the one the IRCAM has enjoyed ever since its creation – outside government control, only subordinate to the king and with administrative and financial autonomy. Both initiatives can be interpreted as desperate government attempts to avoid another step into self-marginalisation that would benefit the king.

Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that a few weeks after the renewed imbroglio concerning the organic law on the CNLCM, on 7 April 2020, King Mohammed VI fired Culture Minister and government spokesperson Hassan Abyaba after hardly six months in office. He was replaced by the young, malleable politician Othman el Ferdaous, a former Secretary of State in the Ministry of Industry, Investment, Trade and Digital Economy.⁷⁰⁶ This interpretation is also corroborated by Driss Khrouz, former director of the national library and coordinator of the commission that formulated the first draft for the organic law on the creation of the CNLCM. He recalled that the Ministry of Education realised that integrating the Arabisation Institute into the new CNLCM would entail losing the institute's facilities, real estate and staff. The ministry tried to prevent this by influencing the legislative process in a way that would not contribute to

⁷⁰⁵ Interview, National Library, 1.

⁷⁰⁶ Although no official reasons were communicated, Moroccan media speculated about Abyaba's incapacity to manage the cultural policy field and blamed his insolent behaviour towards the Moroccan media, including the affair of prohibiting the publication of newspapers for a few months in early 2020: Asmlal (2020); Jaafar (2020); *le Matin* (2020a); *L'Economiste* (2020).

his ministry's disempowerment.⁷⁰⁷ Considering these accounts, bringing the organic laws into the parliamentary process only on an urgent note towards the end of their mandate in 2016 may just as well have been an attempt to outwit the king and make the king approve a draft law which he has no option but to accept unless he wants to risk being blamed for acting against the very constitution, he has so prominently initiated himself. Yet, this plan failed due to the government majority's incapacity to find a compromise. This provided the monarchy a tactical chance to impose its own solution, which ensured its control over the legislative process.

In the past, councils in Morocco had consisted of simple reunions of experts. The organic law, which was finally adopted in 2020, formally endows the new council with a wide range of powers. Given its permanent nature and degree of institutionalisation, the CNLCM might become a special and unique organism in Morocco's cultural landscape. It comprises the IRCAM, a Special Instance for Cultural Development and Heritage Protection and a Special Instance for the Promotion of the use of Foreign Languages and Translation. The Arabisation Institute has been dissolved, and its former duties have been transferred to the Mohammed VI Academy for the Arabic Language, which will also become part of the new council. The IRCAM's and the Arabisation Institute's staff and facilities have been preserved and transferred into the council's property. The organic law on the CNLCM also stipulates the creation of a new institution to promote and protect the Hassani language and culture. According to Lahcen Oulhaj, the experts among the constitution makers were convinced that Hassani was not a language of its own, resembling more to a mixture of Amazigh and Moroccan Darija. This normally would not have justified the creation of an institution of its own, but according to Oulhaj, it was a political decision.⁷⁰⁸ This means that the Western Sahara issue and the question of political stability in the contested region have influenced cultural policy reflections on a national scale. The creation of the Hassani can be considered a concession to the Sahraoui activists in the country's „Southern Provinces”. Yet, legally, the new council „offers strategic orientations” for Morocco's cultural policies. It ensures their „consistency and complementarity”, especially concerning national languages, including Arabic, Amazigh and Hassani. Furthermore, it protects and promotes Morocco's national cultural heritage and takes care of its valorisation. While the king, the government or the two parliament chambers can always ask the council to give its opinion on policy matters, the council is also entitled to formulate recommendations on its own initiative (Royaume du Maroc 2022b, p. 513). It can

⁷⁰⁷ Interview, National Library, 1.

⁷⁰⁸ Ahdani (2020b).

have the government examine these recommendations and bring them into the legislative process.

After the creation of Mehdi Qotbi's National Museum Foundation (FNM) in 2010, yet another institution has been created that has the potential to disempower the Moroccan government, namely the Ministry of Culture. In both cases, such actions were justified by efficiency reasons and the lack of vision on the ministry's side. By creating the Special Instance for Cultural Development and Heritage Protection, the Ministry of Culture loses another of its responsibilities, i.e. the strategic decision on the cultural heritage elements to be preserved, restored and promoted. Apart from technical and financial assistance, no strategic choice will potentially be made, and no priority will be defined at the ministerial level. The king, in turn, receives a large part of the government's former power. Once per year, the council president, who is appointed by royal decree, reports to the king. The sovereign also directly appoints six of the 29 CNLCM members, all experts in their respective cultural fields. The directors of the member institutions and a good share of the scientific council of each member institution are also nominated by dahir (IRCAM: 3 of 8; Special Instance for Hassani: 5 of 7; Special Instance for Cultural Development and Heritage Protection: 4 of 8; Special Instance on the Promotion of the use of Foreign Languages and Translation: 5 of 7; Mohammed VI Academie for the Arabic Language: 4 of 8). On two of the CNLCM's five sub-institutions, the king thus controls the scientific orientation by deciding over the composition of their scientific councils. Technically speaking, with this reform, the king disposes of regulatory power over all state institutions relevant for defining, influencing, and controlling national identity: in the religious sector, given his position as *amir al mouminine*; in the language and cultural heritage sector, given his control over the CNLCM and his special relation to Mehdi Qotbi's FNM. Of course, it remains to be seen if and when the provisions of the new organic law will be implemented. As of early 2023, no such steps have been taken.

In general, the weight of the institutions within the council and in the national debate will depend on the amount of financial and human resources allocated to each sub-entity by the president of the CNLCM with the approval of the council's general assembly. What is clear, though, is that, within the CNLCM, the IRCAM could possibly be reduced to a mere instrument of representation rather than a tool to integrate Amazigh culture and language into Moroccan society and politics as was its purpose upon its creation in 2001 (Maddy-Weitzman 2022, p. 154). The separation of powers in the Moroccan kingdom ultimately hinges strongly on the degree to which the king is willing to execute the powers reserved for him by the organic law, compared to his readiness to leave the field to the government and parliament. From a historical

perspective, my interlocutors estimated that, depending on the state of the actual power balance, the new constitution and the institutions created in its name could evolve in both directions – a deepening of liberalisation or an autocratic reduction of discursive space. Also, it was underlined that the situation of women's rights and the rights of Amazigh depend on global developments. When the oil price favours the rich Gulf States (Qatar and Saudi Arabia in particular), these states can reinforce their economic and political weight in Morocco and push for less liberalisation, benefitting Islamic conservatism and the Arabic language. In times of low oil prices, in turn, the Gulf States have less money to spend, which tends to give more space for women and Amazigh to enjoy and broaden their liberties.⁷⁰⁹

6.4.7. Broadcasting Diversity: the Half-hearted Promotion of Amazigh Television

Moroccan radio broadcasters started airing in Amazigh as early as 1928. Since 1966, Amazigh activists have been advocating for an Amazigh television channel. Yet, Amazigh did not reach television before the late King Hassan II's speech in 1994. A decade later, law 77-03 laid the legal foundations for Amazigh to become present in audiovisual media, also paving the way in 2005 and 2006 for the public broadcaster's legal obligations to include Amazigh in their programming (Belhiah et al. 2020, 124f.). However, it was only in 2006 that the non-compliance of national broadcasters with these obligations pushed Amazigh activists to accuse the National Radio and Television Society (SNRT) of systematic discrimination against their cultural rights.⁷¹⁰ The Moroccan state reacted by allocating a 500 million Dirham budget (~ 45 million euros) to build up an Amazigh channel within four years. In the creation process, the SNRT took care of organisational issues while the IRCAM trained staff and consulted the SNRT in elaborating the programme.⁷¹¹

Ahead of the creation, in January 2009, IRCAM director Ahmed Boukous underlined the importance of the new channel to the Moroccan state by declaring: „First, it should be emphasised that the creation of the Tamazight channel is a necessity for the State as a means of communication with the Amazigh-speaking population for better integration. Then, it is a tool that serves the right to information, which is part of human rights. Finally, the channel in question will contribute to safeguarding and promoting Amazigh culture.”⁷¹² From this declaration, we can deduce at least two things which are relevant for our assessment of the Moroccan risk perception from which it deduced its cultural policy reaction hardly two years

⁷⁰⁹ Interview, Constitution, 1.

⁷¹⁰ *le Matin* (2006).

⁷¹¹ AFP (2010a); Vourlias (2010).

⁷¹² Ouchagour (2009).

ahead of the 20 February Movement: Firstly, the state's realisation that it lacked a communication tool to convey its messages (and possibly propaganda) to a major share of the population; Secondly, the decision-makers' conviction that the targeted community would be sensible to a discourse of human rights and cultural diversity promotion. Addressing these two elements would, therefore, equal an attempt to legitimise the political system through cultural performances underpinned by a legal-humanitarian justification.

In January 2010, the Amazigh channel „Tamazight” was finally launched to become the 8th national channel. It has a generalist mission, broadcasting entertainment programmes, shows for women and youth, documentaries, cultural performances, religious programmes and parliamentary debates, as well as providing news on politics and economics. Contributing to the generalisation of standard Tamazight and preserving material and immaterial expressions of Amazigh cultural heritage is another element of the new channel's mission. Former *Tamazight* director Mohammed Mamad asserted that they „had to invent everything; it is a channel that we created, *ex nihilo*.” For him, the biggest challenge was „to satisfy an audience that had never had access to such a channel and not lock them into a ghetto or folklore, outside of what is considered modernity”.⁷¹³ To face this challenge, his team „went to Holland to meet media managers who targeted minorities, to Belgium, at RTBF, to Spain, particularly learn from Catalan media, and to Switzerland, which has several national languages”. From these accounts, we can deduce that by trying to satisfy the people's demands, the Moroccan regime sought performance legitimacy. This becomes even more manifest in the following statement from Mamad collected by Reuters: „Our watchword is proximity,” he said. „Our news programmes will be closer to people's concerns... We have the resources and the manpower to go to places that no one else goes.”⁷¹⁴ Spreading its broadcasting offer all over Moroccan territory,⁷¹⁵ this move was well received by a range of Amazigh activists.

IRCAM rector Ahmed Boukous called the inauguration „the culmination of social expectations and demands of the Imazighen”⁷¹⁶ and, therefore, a „historic event”. Brahim Baouche of the Amazigh Citizenship Network declared this act „a kind of reconciliation with the” Imazighen.”⁷¹⁷ Despite the obvious clientelist nature of the regime's cultural policies, *Tamazight* director Mamad also underlined that the channel is supposed to have a federal rather

⁷¹³ Guaaybess (2012).

⁷¹⁴ Pfeiffer and Abdennebi (2010).

⁷¹⁵ Haute Autorité de la Communication Audiovisuelle .

⁷¹⁶ AFP (2010a).

⁷¹⁷ Vourlias (2010).

than exclusive character, which would lead to a „ghettoisation” of the channel: „Getting this chain up was tricky business. We had to avoid the major pitfall of making it a ghetto channel”. „We had to imagine a concept that could correspond to Moroccan demographic and linguistic reality. Hence, the project to launch a national television channel of Berber expression, with programs subtitled in Arabic and which should address all Moroccans without exception”.⁷¹⁸

This shows that the Moroccan regime saw the risk in 2010 that the creation of a seemingly ethnocentric channel may upset parts of the population while bolstering the confidence of another. Therefore, also ten years after the channel’s creation, Mamad still underlined the unifying purpose and inclusive character of *Tamazight* by stressing the responsiveness of the decision-makers to demands from the Moroccan people: „It is no coincidence that the slogan, chosen at the time of its launch, was deliberately unifying and transversal: ‘a channel for all Moroccans - تمازيغت قناة لكل المغاربة’. It is one indeed since – in addition to the three components of the Amazigh language in which it was going to broadcast its programmes – it made the fully assumed choice to subtitle part of its programs in Arabic. A concrete response to a fundamental claim of all Moroccans, namely, Moroccan identity is necessarily multiple and its ramifications necessarily diverse and varied.”⁷¹⁹ What formulated positively sounds like an important step to the democratisation of the country appears like a premeditated measure to pre-empt contesting tendencies in the population and avoid the Algerian scenario where a radicalised Amazigh movement forced the regime to create a Kabyle television channel in 2005 and acknowledge Amazigh as an official language.⁷²⁰ It is, therefore, not surprising that Mohammed Mamad also referred to the central unifying figure of the king as a warrantor of change to explain the channel’s creation. For him, the creation has to be interpreted against the backdrop of the great dynamics and multisectoral mutations within the „central question of the cultural diversity management as addressed especially by the founding speech of His Majesty the King Mohammed VI in Ajdir on 17th of October 2001.”⁷²¹

From this example, we can assess the regime’s capacity to adapt to societal pressure and use it for performance legitimation. Authoritarian learning is essential for creating effective tools to meet the social discontent of a specific social group and avoid deepening frictions between this and other groups. Hence, the *Tamazight* channel produces 70% of its programmes in one of the three Amazigh varieties (always with Arabic subtitles), while 30% may be produced in other

⁷¹⁸ Gaaaybess (2012).

⁷¹⁹ Moukhlis (2020).

⁷²⁰ Westerhoff (2010).

⁷²¹ Moukhlis (2020).

languages. Starting with a daily broadcasting time of 6 hours (and 10 on weekends) in 2010, the Tamazight channel had produced 145 films, 16 series, 4 sitcoms, 110 documentaries and synchronised 56 programmes and 16 series by 2018.⁷²² With the development of the channel over the years, the central diversity argument, as advanced by the king, was supplemented by a legal narrative which referred to the new 2011 constitution: In 2017, Mamad announced a „toilettage”, i.e. grooming or up-grading, of the channel by enhancing the accessibility of the programme. By launching „multitrack broadcasting”, the channel will „allow each viewer to follow all of the channel’s programmes in the Amazigh language component that they master best [i.e. Tamazight, Tashelhit and Tarifit]. One tool, among others, which will undoubtedly help to manage linguistic and cultural diversity on our channel optimally. Our way also of being in phase with the provisions of the new Constitution relating to the Amazigh language and culture.”⁷²³ Both narratives – the royal leadership in diversity questions and the compliance with constitutional regulations – are systematically put forward in the channel’s external communication.⁷²⁴ However, as political observers of international media have suggested ever since the creation of the channel, this ostentatiously integrative management of cultural diversity may also serve to convey a certain image of unity and righteousness to the international community and to target Moroccans living abroad in order to bind them closer to their country of origin. Mohammed Mamad suggested such a dimension by stressing the following to Deutsche Welle in 2010: „The fact that Morocco now has such a channel reflects the country’s development. Only an intact society can so self-confidently emphasize its diversity. This channel promotes Morocco’s democratisation and national identity!”⁷²⁵

However, this narrative is not uncontested, even within the *Tamazight* channel. Data from interviews suggest a less positive way of governing diversity. According to a staffer of *Tamazight*, his channel is still marginalised and fights a „combat to exist” since it remains victim to racist state discrimination, with the state being the ensemble of all state institutions on a national and subnational level. According to him, the state wants to prevent the channel from taking the first position among all national channels. From his perspective, his channel deserves this position because the Amazighophone population represents the biggest share of the Moroccan population and, hence, Morocco’s majority culture. While the official census does not support this view,⁷²⁶ the state does not allocate the necessary funds, which would allow

⁷²² Guisser (2018).

⁷²³ Guisser (2017).

⁷²⁴ Hespress (2022).

⁷²⁵ Göbel and Pape (2010).

⁷²⁶ Haut-Commissariat du Plan (2014).

the channel to extend its programme to 24/7 broadcasting and fulfil the mission to inform the non-Arabophone population and give visibility to their heritage. At the moment of the interview in February 2020, the channel only managed to cover 12 hours per day, of which only six hours were new content and six hours were re-broadcastings of already aired recorded material.⁷²⁷ In turn, allocating the necessary funds would enable the channel to cover all national news in Amazigh, thereby granting the Imazighen the power to fight for their rights and due appreciation of their existence. Denying these funds – and even the funds that are legally their own – thus prevents the channel from reaching its real force in a highly competitive national and international media market. It also prevents the Amazigh community from exerting pressure on the state authorities through the media. Keeping the Tamazight channel attached to SNRT allows the state to control the channel's finances, management, and staff. Also, the interviewee deplored that the content creation is supervised by the SNRT and the High Authority of Audiovisual Communication (HACA), which keep the programme within the boundaries of red lines which exclude criticism against the monarchy, religion or the high authorities of the country and prevent the channel from diffusing any emancipating discourses about the Amazigh cause (except strictly cultural domains like language, history or songs etc.). Furthermore, the staffer criticised that – unlike other national channels – *Tamazight* cannot afford a department on the verification of orthography and correct language use in the channel's programme, which strongly affects its mission to establish itself as a linguistic reference for the Amazighophone population and to contribute to the generalisation of a relatively standardised version of Tamazight. For the interviewee, the marginalisation of Channel 8, therefore, represents only one – yet very important – facet of the state-sponsored cultural silencing, marginalisation, oppression and ultimately extinction of the Amazigh culture. Even though the monarchy has granted a minimum of rights to the Imazighen, it is still hesitant to grant more rights because it would risk turning over the Arabo-Muslim pillar of the Moroccan state system. Although the Amazigh movement acknowledges the specificities of the Moroccan system and would not search for violent turn-over or revolution against the monarchy, the state's discriminatory behaviour would only benefit the official ideology of Arabo-Muslim identity and the maintenance of the monarchical regime of King Mohammed VI.

These findings confirm similar accounts collected by other researchers like Belhiah et al. (2020) and Idhssaine (2021). In his representative study on Amazigh language revitalisation in Morocco, Abdellah Idhssaine (2021, 196ff.) showed that only 8,2% of all respondents from

⁷²⁷ Belhiah et al. (2020) accounted for up to 14 hours per day. Nevertheless, these findings confirmed the findings of Belhiah et al. (2020), who reported on the same shortcomings.

predominantly Amazigh areas believed that Amazigh is always used in visual media, 14,3% claimed it is usually used and 51,4% think it is sometimes used while 19,3% emphasise its rare usage and 6,8% outrightly deny its presence. While a similar picture prevails for auditory media, the outright denial stands out even more starkly in print and digital media, where over a quarter of all respondents claimed Amazigh was never used (Idhssaine 2021, pp. 200–203). On a qualitative level, according to Idhssaine, reasons for this perception were sought in a lack of political will on behalf of the state media to fully comply with their specification books, allegedly leading to a regression of the broadcasting time rather than an increase since 2011. Respondents also missed a sufficient allocation of public funds, preventing private media initiatives from thriving (Idhssaine 2021, pp. 196–204). In fact, in 2018, the PJD parliamentary group issued an oral question to the government regarding the public media's non-compliance with the obligation to present 30% of their programmes in Amazigh. As a reaction, Mohamed Laâraj, then Minister of Culture and Communication, announced in December 2018 that his ministry aimed to bring the broadcast time from 14 hours daily up to an around-the-clock programme.⁷²⁸ Indeed, between 2018 and 2020, the annual spending on Amazighophone media content almost doubled in Morocco, with a fast increase in 2020 (Figure 41). In that year, foreign language productions and Amazigh programmes peaked, also compared to Arabic content. There is no ready-made explanation for this development; however, it is not unlikely that the Moroccan state's effort to make up for the shutdown of national schools by introducing teaching programmes in national television programmes played a role.

⁷²⁸ Al Haraka (2018).

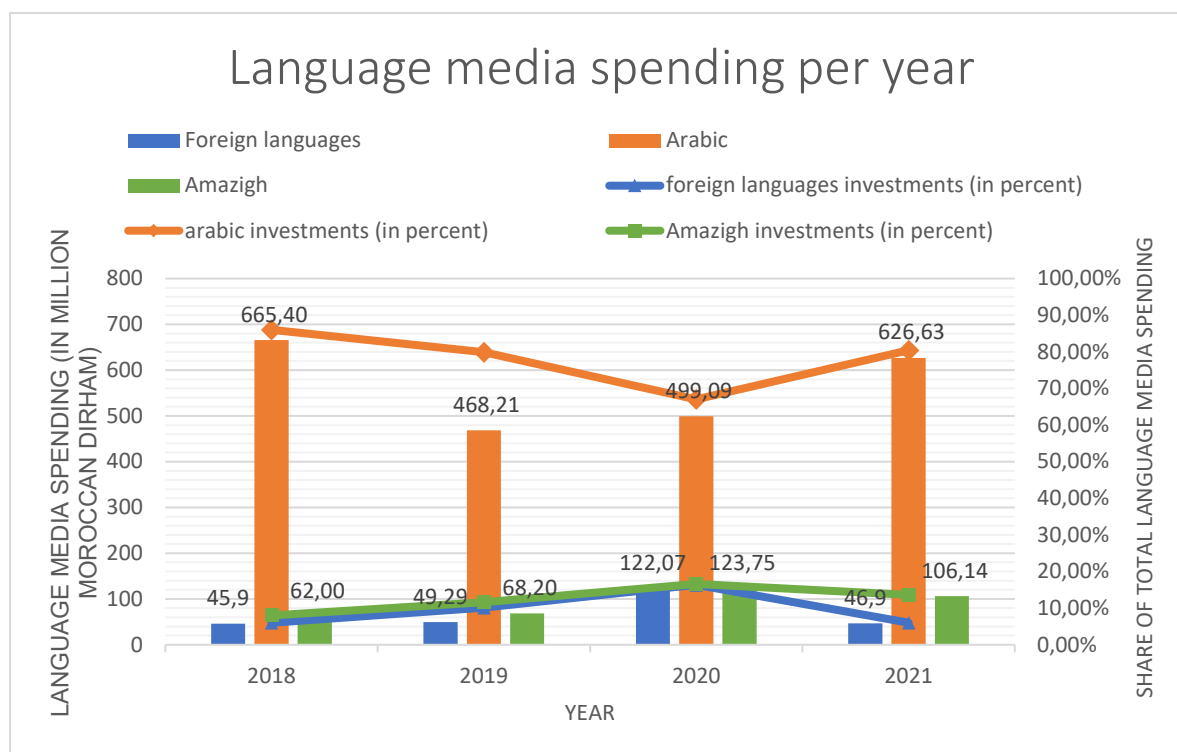


Figure 41: Media spending per year and language⁷²⁹

Yet, this trend could not be maintained, and spending dropped again the following year. Time will show how the market will evolve in the next years. The audience rate also mirrors the huge difference between spending for Arabic programmes and those in Amazigh. As of September 2024, the underfinanced Tamazight channel and other minor channels together only reached 3,5% of the audience (Centre Interprofessionnel d'Audience des Médias [CIAUMED] 2024a).

However, by accepting to work for *Tamazight*, Amazigh activists like the staffer interviewed by the author can also provide a platform to the most marginalised parts of the Amazigh community. They treat thorny issues in a subtle (sometimes hidden) manner through the films, documentaries, and other elements of the programmes they produce and diffuse on the channel.

From his point of view, the Amazigh community must display certain flexibility and intelligence to achieve the movement's goals within the tight margins allowed by the state without directly confronting and provoking the authorities.⁷³⁰ These explanations of the *Tamazight* staffer clearly show that the creation of the Amazigh channel constitutes an act of co-optation which serves both sides – the regime that wants to pre-empt the contesting potential

⁷²⁹ Own compilation with corrections from available data published in the respective annual reports of the Haute Autorité de la Communication Audiovisuelle between 2018 and 2021. Cf. Haute Autorité de la Communication Audiovisuelle (2018, 2019, 2020) and Haute Autorité de la Communication Audiovisuelle (2022).

⁷³⁰ Interview, Amazigh media, 1.

of the Amazigh communities and the Amazigh movement, which strives for the full recognition of their social, political and cultural rights.

6.4.8. Old Wine in New Bottles? Recent Developments in Diversity Management

The lethargy or stalling tactics of the government started to change towards the end of the Othmani administration after the adoption of the two organic laws and the framework law on education. On 14 March 2018, the government amended the law on the *Book Award of Morocco* to incorporate a *Moroccan Prize for the encouragement of Amazigh literary creation* and a *Moroccan Prize for the encouragement of studies in the field of Amazigh culture*.⁷³¹ On 10 December 2019, Saadeddine el Othmani published a circular letter (n°19/2019) to all Moroccan administrations requesting them to prepare and submit, within six months, their specific action plans for the implementation of the official character of the Amazigh language in conformity with the recently passed organic law 26-16.

So far, the elaboration of specific action plans for each ministry has been curtailed by resistance at various levels. One of my interlocutors reported his experiences as an Amazigh within a national ministry. Being the only cadre within his ministry to be mandated to implement the official character of Amazigh within the ministry's administration, he faced multiple challenges. According to him, Morocco's cultural policies vis-à-vis the Amazigh population emanate from the state's narrative about diversity, tolerance and openness to the world. They serve as a good governance alibi in diversity matters to avoid criticism from the international community about the state's disrespect for human rights.⁷³² Hence, for him, the external reality does not correspond to the internal reality where the old Arabo-Muslim identity narrative prevails. He regrets that he must support the official internal ideology to obtain and keep his job at the ministry. While this job is essential for him financially, he is totally unhappy with his job description since his post has been created without a clear vision. So far, his duties have been essentially limited to translating official documents that transport and bolster Morocco's unitary ideology from Arabic into Amazigh. He also provides Amazigh lessons to other ministry cadres. However, he was not allowed to teach them within working hours, resulting in voluntary work in his free time outside of the ministry. Furthermore, his work remains limited to the capital Rabat, while regional branches of his ministry cannot be reached. He proposed an action plan to improve the situation within the ministry that would inter alia involve cooperating with the IRCAM, creating a working unit dedicated to the implementation of Amazigh

⁷³¹ Ministère de la Jeunesse, de la Culture et de la Communication Chabaa (2018a).

⁷³² I encountered this opinion in other interviews, cf. for instance Interview, Language policies, 4.

officialisation within the ministry, using Amazigh in the ministry's external communication and financing posts for Amazigh co-workers within the ministry on national, regional and local level. His propositions were all rejected by the hierarchy on the grounds of missing budgets or legal difficulties to change the ministry's organigram. His superiors only announced they were considering a cooperation agreement with the IRCAM. Against this backdrop, he felt personally „deadlocked” in his work and considered the officialisation of Amazigh to be „handicapped”. However, he hoped that the prime minister's new deadline to submit action plans would force the decision-makers within the ministry to finally take the matter seriously.⁷³³

In September 2020, the *Commission was created to monitor the implementation of the official status of Amazigh*, which was announced as required by the organic law. The commission's chairman is the head of government. It is supposed to meet at least twice a year. The secretariat, which was established under the roof of the Ministry of Culture, prepares and organises the meetings and formulates the annual reports. Access to the commission should be granted to any government body or other instance involved in the processes related to the implementation of the organic law, including the National Education Council and the CNLCM.⁷³⁴ During the highly media-covered first session of the commission in April 2021, Prime Minister Othmani evoked the government's achievements in the officialisation of Amazigh, paid tribute to the royal orientations and positioned himself as a mere executor of the royal will. He said that the meeting „constitutes the culmination of a fruitful and constructive national debate on the cultural and linguistic diversity of Moroccan society, in perfect harmony with the strong royal will, expressed in the two royal speeches of the Throne Anniversary and of Ajdir in 2001, which aimed at consolidating societal cohesion and preserving the plural Moroccan identity.”⁷³⁵ This formulation echoes the royal standard narrative about the contribution of Amazigh to social peace and political stability. Coming from the conservative government, such statements can have a multitude of functions: first, it is the mandatory tribute to the head of state; second, it is an almost unquestionable legal justification of the government's actions; third, it can be read as an apology towards all those of the PJD's electorate who do not favour the officialisation of Amazigh to the detriment of the nation's Arabo-Muslim identity. Whatever intention might have prevailed, its reception depends on the respective audience's attitude regarding the promotion of the Amazigh language and culture. At any rate, it also bears a strong legitimization potential for the monarchy.

⁷³³ Interview, Cultural policies, 7.

⁷³⁴ Hespress FR (2020).

⁷³⁵ Hespress (2021b); le Matin (2021b); MAP Express (2021a); Médias24 (2021a).

In July 2021, Prime Minister Othmani sent a communiqué to all government sectors to remind them of their obligation to implement the official character of Amazigh through their government institutions. He distributed and published a governmental action plan adopted by the first meeting of the Interministerial Monitoring and Evaluation Commission in April 2021.⁷³⁶ It called for creating a committee within every government department to monitor the implementation process.⁷³⁷ This pinnacle of the political debate about the role of Morocco's culture in the national identity framework and its translation into national legislation coincides with a major project initiated by the king: In July 2019, he announced the creation of an ad-hoc commission to formulate a new development model that should help to make all strata of the Moroccan population benefit from the rising wealth.⁷³⁸ The king was well aware of the risk that this initiative could be perceived as a means to disempower the government and rule through a shadow cabinet. He emphasised „that the said committee will not serve as a second government or be a parallel official institution. This is an advisory body with a specific time-bound mission”.

Despite this pre-emptive denial, the following paragraphs will show that the commission's work nevertheless impacted the government's work, yielding a de facto hollowing of government responsibilities. The first point to be considered is the way the commission was composed. Chakib Benmoussa, Morocco's ambassador to France and former president of the *Economic, Social and Environmental Council* (CESE), was appointed commission president. Its members, however, were not chosen from among government officials. Rather, 35 experts from business, academia, politics and civil society were appointed to take stock of the kingdom's development issues and engage in a public dialogue to reach a maximum consensus about the country's future path to development.⁷³⁹ Along with the creation of the new development commission, the king mandated the government to „ask the Head of Government to submit [...], after the summer break, proposals to fill executive posts in the Government and the civil service with high-level national elites chosen on merit and competence.” The king asserted that this „does not mean that the current Government and our civil service are completely lacking in qualified human resources.” He only wanted „to make sure the new phase is a success thanks to people with a different mentality and officials who are capable of raising performance levels and bringing about the radical change” Morocco was „yearning for.” A few months later, in October 2019, a

⁷³⁶ le Matin (2021b).

⁷³⁷ Khetrou (2021).

⁷³⁸ Mohammed VI (2019b).

⁷³⁹ le Matin (2019e).

new government was presented, and the number of ministers was cut down by almost half from 41 to 23.⁷⁴⁰ Before the new government was announced, the PPS party had already left the government coalition, denouncing a „democratic deficit” in the Moroccan political system, thereby creating a vacancy in the ministries of housing and health.⁷⁴¹ Another minister who had to leave was Culture Minister Mohamed Laâraj, who had done a good job since the government reshuffle in 2017 but became a victim of the government’s need to present tangible outcomes to the king by October 2019. He was replaced by Hassan Abyaba. Beyond his duties as Minister of Culture and government spokesperson, Abyaba was charged with the ministries of youth and sport.⁷⁴² This was the start of a series of reshufflings within the Ministry of Culture, with no minister staying more than a few months. This situation further contributed to the marginalisation of the Culture Ministry.⁷⁴³ The results of the commission’s work – albeit delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic – were presented to the public and the king in May 2021. Like the context of the commission’s creation, the content of its report shows strong signs of a monarchical rather than democratic spirit.⁷⁴⁴ Already at the outset of the report, king’s ad-hoc commission made a strong claim about the participatory nature of its work mode, thereby seeking procedural legitimacy.⁷⁴⁵ By the end of the commission’s mandate, the commission allegedly interacted with 9719 people through public auditions, expert sessions, institutional hearings, field trips, calls for contributions, a digital platform, conferences and free contributions.⁷⁴⁶ With this seemingly interactive approach involving the Moroccan, the king tried to foster his image as a ruler, caring for the opinions of his people. At least this is what suggests the results of the public interactions: The commission explained that their consultation with the people living in the country yielded a strong consensus on the unifying and stabilising function of the monarchy beyond all complaints about the dysfunction of the current development model and political system:

„This participatory approach enabled the SCDM to inventorize the state of development in the country, as perceived by its citizens and stakeholders, highlighting achievements, expectations, and aspirations. The recognition of the Kingdom’s assets and potential was a common theme in the various consultations. At the top of the list of these assets, there was a general consensus around the monarchy as a symbol of the Nation’s unity, guarantor of the durability and continuity of the State and supreme arbiter between its

⁷⁴⁰ Guerraoui (2019).

⁷⁴¹ Reuters (2019).

⁷⁴² Spurgeon (2019).

⁷⁴³ As already seen above, Hassan Abyaba was fired hardly half a year later. He was replaced by Othman Ferdaous who stayed until the end of the legislature in October 2021 before being replaced by the current minister Mohamed Mehdi Bensaid.

⁷⁴⁴ Some political observers share the same point of view. See for instance Chahir (2021); Zine (2021a).

⁷⁴⁵ La Commission Spéciale sur le Modèle de Développement (2021, p. 17)

⁷⁴⁶ Commission Spéciale sur le Modèle du Développement (2021b, p. 1).

institutions. This consensus reinforces the stability and security enjoyed by the Kingdom and its ability to manage its affairs over the long term.”⁷⁴⁷

Backed by these findings, the commission called for a solid doctrine between the state and society which

„draws on the concept of «responsibility and development», developed by His Majesty the King in the throne speech he delivered in 2019. It reflects the singularity of the Kingdom’s development model where the monarchical institution is the keystone of the State, the symbol of the unity of the Nation, the guarantor of balance, the bearer of the vision of development and long-term strategic projects and the monitoring of their implementation in the service of citizens.”⁷⁴⁸

In this political contract between the monarchy and its people, the role of a democratically elected government is presented to be merely executive. It is subject to permanent and systemic distrust for prioritising short-term benefits over the country’s long-term prosperity as envisioned by the king and the citizens:

„Morocco stands out as a political system designed to alleviate tension between time scales and to combine the benefit through the presence of the monarchical institution guaranteeing the course of action defined by the national community, alongside stakeholders in democratic competition to outline the paths to reach this course. This system offers the opportunity to protect our choices and commitments from short-term management.”⁷⁴⁹

Continuously citing the king’s speeches or instructions,⁷⁵⁰ the commission outlined the framework which shall constitute the new development model of the kingdom. Among the development model’s pillars, the commission stressed the strategic choice „to mobilize cultural diversity as a lever for openness, dialogue and cohesion”. The commission recommends a variety of measures to strengthen the integration of cultural training into the education system, support the development and diversification of media to achieve Morocco’s information sovereignty, foster cultural production and innovative initiatives in the cultural sphere, improve and decentralise the kingdom’s cultural infrastructure and protect and promote the country’s national heritage. However, the cultural sector is not perceived as a generous provider of space for individual self-perfection. Instead, it is endowed with a strong political mission:

„Culture is set to become a major global breakthrough, one of emergence and sovereignty, stemming from the renewed and universal need for meaning and social cohesion, and from global challenges that favor the emphasis on «soft» assets, content and quality rather than infrastructure and massification. Morocco thrives on its cultural plurality, its historical depth and on its tangible and intangible heritage. In this context, culture in Morocco is destined to become a multidimensional lever of economic prosperity, inclusive social ties and geopolitical soft power: it is a matter of national unity in connection with the demand for meaning and historical and identity markers; culture also offers a source of growth, investment and employment closest to the territories and local needs; Morocco’s historical depth is an asset to be leveraged as a source of regional stability, cultural influence and coexistence.”⁷⁵¹

⁷⁴⁷ La Commission Spéciale sur le Modèle de Développement (2021, p. 23).

⁷⁴⁸ La Commission Spéciale sur le Modèle de Développement (2021, p. 62).

⁷⁴⁹ La Commission Spéciale sur le Modèle de Développement (2021, p. 63).

⁷⁵⁰ The word „Majesty“ appears 26 times, the word “royal” 7 times, mostly (except for one time) as a reference to royal instructions or royal speeches.

⁷⁵¹ La Commission Spéciale sur le Modèle de Développement (2021, p. 124)

Cultural policies are supposed to use Morocco's cultural diversity, profound history and (in)tangible cultural heritage as an asset to close an identity void and give orientation. With this identity fostering function and its strong economic potential, culture is perceived as a means to promote social cohesion and stability. Furthermore, cultural policies are prominently described as a geo-political soft-power instrument that can help advance Morocco's national unity, foster regional stability and leverage cultural influence. Against the backdrop of similar uses of these terms, we can deduce that the Western Sahara issue lurks beneath these codes, as does the Moroccan claim for regional hegemony. This vision strongly mirrors and confirms the monarchy's firm interest in cultural actions over the two decades since the beginning of the reign of King Mohammed VI. That the monarchy's take on culture found its way into the development model can undoubtedly be explained by the presence in the commission of cultural experts (8 on 35), some of whom are known for their pro-monarchy attitude and are for sure familiar with the king's preferences. These experts also included Mohamed Tozy, political scientist and expert on the political implications of Islam in Morocco and former member of the constitution writing commission in 2011; Driss Ksikes, celebrated writer and dramaturge; Ahmed Joumani, sociologist specialised in the contribution of Hassani culture to regional development; Farida Benlyazid, cinema critic and producer; Rachid Benzine, author and academic expert on Islam; Fouad Laroui, writer and economist; Hassan Rachik, anthropologist and expert on identity questions between ideology and religion, and Lakbir Ouahajou, geography professor and expert of the oasis environment. At the end of its report, the commission reiterated its stance on the pre-eminent role the monarchy should play to ensure the country's development. For them, the king should be in charge of monitoring the progress of the new development model. The commission recommends

„the establishment, under the authority of His Majesty the King, of a mechanism to monitor the NDM, to give impetus to strategic projects and to support change management. By ensuring overall coherence and strategic alignment, driving and supporting transformational reforms, this mechanism would hold the stakeholders involved accountable and strengthen overall performance.”⁷⁵²

Although this suggestion was not directly adopted, the new concept did not remain without echo. The publication of the new development model coincided with the end of the PJD's mandate at the head of the Moroccan government.

Despite the belated actions of the Othmani administration, the implementation of the cultural promises and legal frameworks really accelerated only after the 2021 parliamentary elections yielded the RNI as leader of a new governmental majority. The RNI is considered close to the royal palace. The new Prime Minister and RNI president, Aziz Akkhanouch, served as minister

⁷⁵² La Commission Spéciale sur le Modèle de Développement (2021, p. 162)

of agriculture between 2007 and 2021 and controls a large empire of companies, making him one of the wealthiest persons in Africa. Furthermore, he maintains close and friendly ties with the king, the royal family and the king's advisors, including Fouad Ali el Himma.⁷⁵³ From the beginning of his mandate and even before his election, Akhanouch declared the new development model his priority to reinstall trust in the political institutions.⁷⁵⁴ Unlike the PJD and their leaders in parliament and government, Akhanouch accepted the primacy of the king's orientation. This acceptance was underlined by the fact that the king appointed Chakib Benmoussa, former president of the special commission for the elaboration of the new development model, education minister within the new Akhanouch administration, a position which is perceived as key for the implementation of both, the reform of the education system as outlined in the new framework law and the new development model.⁷⁵⁵

However, during the first year of its mandate, the new government – just like the old administration and the rest of the world – was very much concerned with the day-to-day management of the COVID-19 pandemic. As of this writing, it is too early to assess to what extent the Akhanouch administration will succeed in bringing about real change for the population and how this will impact the people's opinion about the king and the government. Despite public scepticism about the prospects of the new development plan,⁷⁵⁶ a few signs may indicate how the new government may implement the major legal and strategic provisions. On 11 October 2021, Akhanouch announced before the parliament his programme to implement the official character of Amazigh and promised to allocate a budget of one billion Moroccan Dirhams, usable over four years until 2025, to promote the Amazigh language and culture in the country.⁷⁵⁷ In November 2021, the Ministry of Digital Transition and Administrative Reform a dedicated budget to implement the programme, entrusting the money to the Fund for the Modernization of Public Administration (FOMAP) with the intention to provide administrative services in Tamazight and ensure language training for civil servants to facilitate communication with monolingual citizens.⁷⁵⁸ Consequential budgets in line with this strategic decision were allocated in the 2022 and 2023 finance laws, totalling 200 and 300 million Dirhams, respectively.⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵³ Correspondant de MEE au Maroc (2016).

⁷⁵⁴ PAM (2021); Rhoul (2021).

⁷⁵⁵ Rhoul (2021).

⁷⁵⁶ Chahid (2021).

⁷⁵⁷ LesEco.ma (2021).

⁷⁵⁸ Haskouri (2021).

⁷⁵⁹ MAP (2022a); Sahnouni (2023).

During a session of the government council on 13 January 2022, Aziz Akhannouch positioned himself as the executor of the royal will to reinvigorate Morocco's Amazigh identity as set out by king Mohammed VI in his Ajdir speech of 2001 and as stipulated by the 2011 constitution.⁷⁶⁰

While such statements may help Akhannouch legitimise his policies, they are most likely more beneficial for the king, who is presented as the mastermind behind all actions in favour of Moroccan cultural diversity. All strategic choices leading to current policies are clearly attributed to the royal palace. This makes Moroccan „democracy” appear like a relationship between the king and his subjects rather than the government and the country's citizens. Akhannouch commended the royal efforts for the officialisation of Amazigh in a similar way when, in January 2022, the prime minister announced the training of social assistants that would help Amazighophone people in the justice system. In line with the Amazigh officialisation law of 2019, a cohort of 100 social assistants was promoted in June 2022, 60% of whom speak Amazigh and Hassani and who will follow a three-week training before passing an exam and receiving a laptop to ensure their continuing education and their effective contribution to digitising the justice system.⁷⁶¹ Under Akhannouch's government, we note that the monarchy acts more openly in the cultural sector, leaving the government merely enough space to praise the royal interventions. On 3 May 2023, the king fulfilled a longstanding request of the Amazigh movement, promising to make the Amazigh New Year a public, paid holiday in recognition of this “essential component of the authentic Moroccan identity”..⁷⁶²

This royal decision also broke with a trend of political inflexibility: The PJD-led governmental majority had always remained deaf towards any political attempt to put the adoption of the Amazigh New Year as a public holiday on the agenda,⁷⁶³ although a similar decision had already been taken in neighbouring Algeria in 2017.⁷⁶⁴ Also, the Akhannouch administration had to deal with similar motions from within the parliament.⁷⁶⁵ By underlining that the royal initiative should be read as an expression of the king's personal solicitude for Amazigh as an authentic part of the Moroccan identity, the king, once more, imposed himself as the impartial arbiter who sets himself above the untransparent considerations of the political elite. Also, the king's order publicly reduced the government to an executor of the royal will. The Akhannouch administration openly embraced this secondary rank and willingly accepted that public credit

⁷⁶⁰ MAP (2022a).

⁷⁶¹ H24Info with MAP (2022).

⁷⁶² Royal Office (2023).

⁷⁶³ Eljehtimi (2019); H24Info (2018a).

⁷⁶⁴ Meddi (2023).

⁷⁶⁵ Benadad (2021).

was given to the king rather than the government.⁷⁶⁶ In November 2023, facts were created, and the royal decision was confirmed by the official inscription of January 14 as a paid public holiday in Morocco's calendar.⁷⁶⁷ Translated into national law, this policy constitutes a highly symbolic act that may help bolster the king's image as the people's benefactor. It may also foster the monarchy's links with the Amazigh movement. By stressing the constitutional background of the king's decision, the monarchy also seemed to pre-empt any accusation of undue favouritism towards the Amazigh community. It underlined the monarchy's „democratic” and law-abiding nature, setting it apart from the unlawful/corrupt behaviour often associated with the political class. The introduction of the Amazigh New Year as a public holiday is, therefore, only the most recent example of the monarchy using a combination of symbolic and legal legitimation.

Overall, however, it remains to be seen whether, in the long run, the monarchy will stick to salami tactics regarding the implementation of Amazigh's official status or whether it will allow for fundamental change. In 2019, Ahmed Boukous postulated that, with the legal framework being ready, the Moroccan state needs to invest in the cultural production of the Imazighen to put flesh on the bones to protect Amazigh as a culture. Since 2003, the IRCAM annually invests 2 million Dirhams (i.e. 1/7 of its budget) to support cultural production within civil society. The Ministry of Culture, in turn, only began doing so recently.⁷⁶⁸ The Moroccan state may continue to count on symbolic policies to satisfy urban Amazigh elites while delaying profound reforms that would upset the country's conservative defenders of an Arab-Muslim identity. It is doubtful that such symbolic modes of recognition will suffice to keep Amazigh protest at bay for long. Quantitative research has shown that, in authoritarian contexts, minority language policies are hardly useful in enhancing trust in the authorities (Kao et al. 2023).

There is evidence that seems to substantiate this finding also for Morocco. According to a recent study on people's views about the revitalisation of the Amazigh language in Morocco, only 43,8% of the respondents in predominantly Amazigh-speaking areas are convinced that the state's language policy has contributed to a revitalisation of Amazigh against 32,4% who either disagree or strongly disagree and 23,7% who were neutral about the question (Idhssaine 2021, p. 222). Whether the state will progress in the revitalisation hinges on the Amazigh movement's capacity to mobilise and unite people beyond the cities to push for a fast roll-out of the promised

⁷⁶⁶ MAP (2023c).

⁷⁶⁷ *le Matin* (2023b).

⁷⁶⁸ *MEDI1 TV* (2019d). This concurs with numbers from 2015 which speak of annual state subventions totalling 70 million Dirhams. Cf. Mokhliss (2015). This number is confirmed by Aslan (2014, p. 187)

reforms. According to Abdellah Idhssaine, considering the future integration of the IRCAM into the CNLCM, about 38,2% of respondents in predominantly Amazigh areas were optimistic about the prospects of the future status of Amazigh alongside Modern Standard Arabic against 28% who were not sure, 16% believed in stagnation and 17,8% were convinced that Amazigh would remain marginalised despite its officialisation (Idhssaine 2021, p. 230). One of my interlocutors at IRCAM reckoned that while all great reforms regarding the recognition of Amazigh culture have taken place at the beginning of King Mohammed VI's reign following the pressure of the Amazigh movement, „the power of the makhzen is now re-established” and individual liberties decline. For him, Morocco is in another transition phase that might eventually „suffocate” it by reducing its budget and visibility.⁷⁶⁹ Another prominent activist and specialist at IRCAM told me in a neutral tone that seemed to originate in disappointment: „The monarchy never says no, but never implements”. According to him, while laws were reformed in Morocco to promote cultural diversity, the Moroccan state has failed to sensitise people. Conversely, the state was repressing the real vernacular culture of Morocco because „power holders feed on traditionalist, religious and fundamentalist archaisms when it pretends to be fighting them”.⁷⁷⁰ Considering the past experiences with delayed or curtailed reforms, this frustration is more than understandable and may even foreground the potential for future societal unrest.

At the same time, however, I am convinced there is also reason for hope in Morocco. With the new legislation of the last years, Amazigh activists also have a good legal lever to make change happen. The sincere and honest personal and intellectual investments of IRCAM researchers will certainly also try their best to lobby for a deepening and broadening of Morocco's cultural liberalisation. At least all of the researchers interviewed during the field visits to IRCAM were working hard to make scientific contributions to the institute's mission. Some also maintained links to activists of the more radical spectre of the Amazigh movement in the Rif. Seemingly, this was not only tolerated by the IRCAM officials but somewhat institutionalised, as described also by El Guabli (2023). Once, when one of my interlocutors offered to establish contact with the more radical wing of the movement in the Rif, the communication officer stepped in and insisted on a lengthy interview at the IRCAM first. This proves that, just like the *Tamazight* channel, the IRCAM is more than a tool of the state to keep critical potential at bay. Rather, it is used by the movement itself to achieve its goals by scientifically re-formulating its political demands and channelling them to be heard by the governing elite. More than a tool of co-option,

⁷⁶⁹ Interview, Language policies, 13.

⁷⁷⁰ Interview, Language policies, 4.

it is a platform of controlled dissidence. This argument is corroborated by a statement of another IRCAM official who was very critical of the regime but never directly questioned the monarchy as such. He claimed that, despite some changes ever since the enthronisation of King Mohammed VI, the genuine and only interest of Morocco's cultural policies remains „to reinforce the double-glazing system [système de double vitrage]” with a modern and pluralist surface and a conservative and traditional fundament. From his point of view, the state perceives „culture as something revolutionary that threatens stability”, and it „is treated as something dangerous that needs to be monitored” because it „disturbs the system” when cultural players in society raise issues of concern. Yet, for my interlocutor, a real revolution does not overthrow the incumbent head of state but rather changes people's mentalities.⁷⁷¹ Hence, as long as activists and IRCAM officials have not lost hope that change from within the system is possible, why should academia? Yet, it appears certain that the monarchy will continue to make sure to be accepted as the supreme arbiter in societal reforms wherever they may lead the country.

6.4.9. Creating Symbols of Recognition for Amazigh Heritage

As many of Morocco's rural, economically disadvantaged regions are inhabited by Imazighen, being Amazigh is often characterised by dissatisfaction with the experience of deprivation and state violence for economic exploitation. Over the years, frustration and deprivation have grown among many Imazighen in the countryside and the urban strata. Silverstein (2005, 2010), Di Tolla (2016, p. 322), Ryser (2019), Maddy-Weitzman (2017, 2022, 139ff.) and Nicolai (2023 (to be published), 328ff.) described how tribal land of Amazigh families has been expropriated or acquired by the state for little money only to extract enormous wealth through farming, mining or solar plants leading to ecological degradation, food insecurity, a lack/poisoning of drinking and irrigation water. At the same time, protests against land/green grabbing, extractive policies and economic marginalisation were crushed, demonstrators intimidated, and local actors were either coopted or put on trial. In some cases in southern Morocco, for instance, the state accuses local actors of „inciting racial hatred, tribalism”, the „destruction of public property”, or „threatening the public order”. While such allegations are exaggerated, „the conflict was between state efforts at national development and the attempts of local groups to control resources that they identified in Berber tribal terms. In other words, the struggle is not merely taking place within the framework of ethnicity — between an Arabized state apparatus and a Berberophone ‘indigenous people’ seeking regional autonomy — but also on a racialized terrain of contestation over the definition and control of the ‘local’” (Silverstein 2005). As we

⁷⁷¹ Interview, Language policies, 4.

have seen above, economic grievances are inseparable from cultural ones (Crawford 2005, p. 185). Over the last decade, the regime has tried to address this issue more systematically.

On 30 July 2014, King Mohammed VI pronounced his annual speech to the nation on his 15th throne anniversary. In this largely mediatised and impactful speech, he pinpointed the advancements and deficits in Morocco's development since his enthronisation. As an indicator of the positive developments under his rule, he quoted World Bank reports that rank Morocco's total wealth among the top African nations and attributes this to Morocco's intangible capital. The king cited historical and cultural heritage, as well as security and stability, as the country's key strengths. Yet he wondered about the still omnipresent signs of poverty and social vulnerability. He, therefore, called upon the Economic, Social and Environmental Council to carry out a study that would take stock of Morocco's wealth evolution between his enthronisation in 1999 and 2013. This speech incentivised Moroccan policymakers to invest more in Morocco's cultural heritage, especially since December 2016 when the Bank al Maghrib and the Economic, Social and Environmental Council published their report based on the royal speech of 2014.⁷⁷²

In this report, both institutions call culture the 4th pillar of sustainable development and a lever to just distribution of wealth in Morocco. While commending the king's efforts to promote the Amazigh component of Moroccan identity and pointing out UNESCO's appreciation for this approach towards culture, they also emphasise the state's insufficient efforts to use this lever (Bank al Maghrib & Conseil Economique, Social et Environnemental 2016, p. 65). They, therefore, call on all state actors to build upon a) the provisions of the 2011 constitution regarding cultural diversity; b) the king's status as *amir al mouminine* to strengthen „Moroccanness" as a specific identity of the Moroccan people; and c) their sense of belonging to the Moroccan nation as well as their attachment to values of Moroccan citizenship. State actors should think of culture as a means of inclusion. For this, they should elaborate a national charter and create a national agency that would help to preserve the kingdom's tangible and intangible heritage, bring people into conversation with their own history and cultural identity and make Morocco's cultural assets usable in economic terms (Bank al Maghrib & Conseil Economique, Social et Environnemental 2016, 135ff.). The following examples show how the royal vision and interpretation of international concepts transpired into national policies that

⁷⁷² Mohammed VI (2014).

integrated marginalised communities into narratives of national identity while centring around the king as the crystallisation point of this identity.

6.4.9.1. The Renovation of Ksour and Kasbah

As the case of the renovation of the Kelaa Torres mentioned in chapter 6.5.2.1.3. will show in more detail, the Moroccan regime readily uses the international community to cast credibility upon its cultural nation-building efforts. A similar act of recent cultural co-option can also be observed with regard to the Imazighen living in the Atlas regions and the southern provinces. Over the centuries, the rural areas in the pre-Atlas regions of the oasis in the south and east of the kingdom have developed a specific kind of human settlement called ksour (plural of ksar) which evolved from peasant villages or around zaouias (Sufi brotherhoods), and kasbahs which were usually individual residences for local aristocrats (Cherkaoui 2014; Popp & Fasskaoui 2017). According to an inventory made by local authorities, 817 ksour and kasbah exist on Moroccan territory. With their inside-oriented houses and fortifications of defensive walls and towers, these settlements show architectural styles and organisations specifically adapted to their natural environments using earth materials (Figure 42).



Figure 42: Freshly renovated Kasbah Taourirt in Ouarzazate

They are characterised by the social and economic activities evolving around caravans' activities and agriculture. Some of these former peasant villages are nowadays part of urban agglomerations. Others, in turn, lie outside town. Before the protectorate, the architectural substance of these settlements used to be maintained by the local communities. However, the colonisers' foundation of new middle centres in rural areas and the growing preference for new

building styles with modern living comfort have led to urbanisation trends in the countryside. People increasingly abandoned these ancestral buildings, which are so typical for the north of Africa and left them to structural decline. The remaining inhabitants often live under desolate conditions. Since Morocco's independence, the state has shown initiatives to renovate the ksour and kasbahs. Yet, in its marketing strategies, the National Tourism Office pictured these buildings as cultural icons of Moroccan identity, hardly relativising the orientalist image conveyed under the French protectorate (Boum 2007, p. 215).

On a larger scale, however, a lack of funding prevented the implementation of early plans by the Culture Ministry in the 1970s to preserve the historical value of the buildings. The king's speech about preserving Moroccan heritage made the Housing Ministry launch a new programme to stop the ongoing deterioration of the buildings. Like in the old medinas, though, these renovations were of limited effect due to legal and regulatory problems, unclear real estate ownership, the lack of involvement of the local communities, the lack of skilled labour trained in the traditional construction methods and a lack of convergence of the different ministerial initiatives. Sometimes, this even caused some old buildings to crumble, making whole families flee the imminent danger. Between 2000-2012, for instance, the al Omrane Holding renovated 17 ksour and kasbah, essentially located in the Tafilalet region. In the context of its 2020 Vision, also the Ministry of Tourism planned to rehabilitate 16 kasbah and to make them exploitable for tourism purposes (Cherkaoui 2014; Ministère de l'Habitat et de la Politique de la Ville & Programme des Nations Unies pour le Développement 2014). Al Omrane claims to choose the ksour depending on the state of degradation.⁷⁷³ However, Cherkaoui (2014, 144f) shows that the selection of ksour for renovation appears somewhat biased, mainly benefitting the makhzenian ksour, i.e., settlements founded by the Moroccan sultans for their entourage. This is circumstantial evidence of how much state actors, willingly or not, contribute to enhancing the monarchy's splendour by focussing on specific palace-related elements of the kingdom's history.

In November 2014, hardly four months after the king's speech on the effect of cultural heritage on the overall wealth of the Moroccan nation, the Ministry of Housing and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) signed a new project agreement that was planned to be executed by al Omrane, CERKAS and Agence de développement des zones oasiennes et de l'arganier (ANDZOA) (Ministère de l'Habitat et de la Politique de la Ville & Programme des Nations Unies pour le Développement 2014). The project was dedicated to elaborating an

⁷⁷³ Interview, Cultural heritage, 12.

integrated strategy for the sustainable valorisation of Morocco's kasbah and ksour. It also aimed at capacity building for maintenance works, rehabilitating 10 (later 15, then 22) kasbahs and ksour, and promoting local revenue-generating activities. The initial project was planned for five years until 2019. Later, it was extended until 2022 and, due to COVID-19, eventually until December 2023. By 2021, the programme was assessed as satisfactory by the final evaluation. It enabled 22 pilot sites to be rehabilitated and developed sustainably with local stakeholders' active and effective participation. The programme, amounting to around 28,5 million US Dollars, was rolled out in three regions, seven provinces and twenty local authorities. It has helped to improve the living conditions of almost 220.000 inhabitants and supported the social economy by financing 26 income-generating projects for almost 1.100 beneficiaries. According to the evaluation, the monuments to be renovated were jointly chosen by elected officials, municipalities, local authorities and external services. The spending sheets (Figure 43) show that the bulk of the renovation work (grey bars standing for the 3rd work package) took place between 2019 and 2022. According to the evaluation, it led to a significant improvement in the local inhabitants' living conditions. Nevertheless, the living standards remain overall precarious and require further support in revenue-generating activities. The last goal, however, i.e. the introduction of a permanent national agency dedicated to perpetuating the renovation efforts for the kasbah and ksour, could not be implemented due to a lack of political initiative to create such an institution (Houzir 2022).⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷⁴ The contribution of the Moroccan Ministry of Country Planning, Urban Development, Housing and City Policy totalled 92%. The remaining 8% were carried by the UNDP and the local project committee of Figuig. Cf. Houzir (2022).

Tableau n°3. Répartition du budget par produit et par année dans les plans de travail (USD)

WP	Budget 2015	Budget 2016	Budget 2017	Budget 2018	Budget 2019	Budget 2020	Budget 2021	Budget 2022	Total
P1	12 720,00	124 920,53	53 000,00	2 279,00	159 085,00	239 720,00	379 000,00	72 800,00	1 043 524,53
P2	0,00	220 617,60	805 000,00	387 642,00	266 653,00	561 080,00	624 520,00	257 400,00	3 122 912,60
P3	0,00	513 419,06	1 649 300,00	592 858,00	3 181 127,00	7 705 360,00	4 503 928,00	3 317 600,00	21 463 592,06
P4	157 240,00	203 811,49	0,00	285 356,00	224 337,00	462 516,00	599 716,00	570 049,00	2 503 025,49
Annuel	169 960,00	1 062 768,68	2 507 300,00	1 268 135,00	3 831 202,00	8 968 676,00	6 107 164,00	4 217 849,00	28 133 054,68

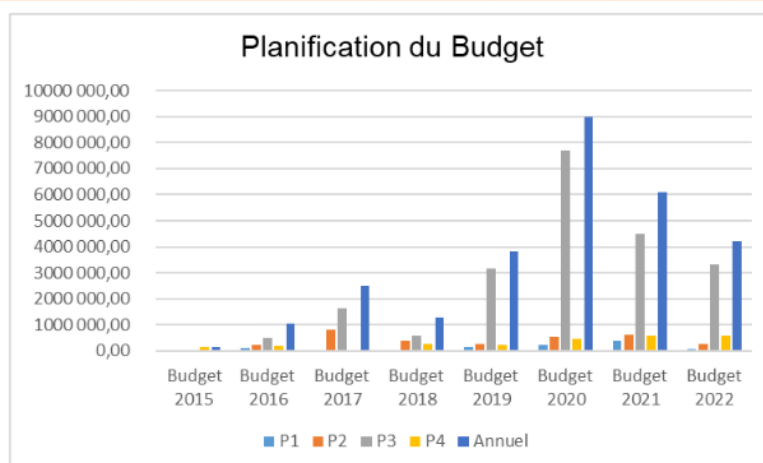


Figure 43: Spending sheets for the renovation of Moroccan kasbah and ksour⁷⁷⁵

In August 2021, a new project phase was launched by the UNDP and Nezha Bouchareb, Minister for Country Planning, Urban Development, Housing and City Policy. In her speech, the latter announced a new strategy worth 5.3 billion Dirhams that would be implemented in two stages, targeting 494 ksour and kasbahs. The first phase of the 2022-2026 action plan, at an estimated cost of 993 million Dirham, is planned to cover 147 ksour and kasbahs at an average rate of 28 ksour and kasbahs per year, with priority given to the most densely populated. In its first phase, the strategy is supposed to sustainably reduce the unemployment rate to less than 5% by creating at least 250.000 working days for the local labour force.⁷⁷⁶ While the first joint renovation project hardly received public attention, this launching ceremony was widely mediatised.⁷⁷⁷ Housing Minister Nezha Bouchareb seized the media attention to underline that the new strategy was „part of the implementation of the high directives of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, may God assist him, calling for the preservation of the tangible and intangible heritage on the one hand, and for the improvement of the living environment of the inhabitants of these areas and the fight against the various factors of fragility on the other”. So, the minister

⁷⁷⁵ Houzir (2022, p. 49). In parallel, by 2016, also a comprehensive plan with strategies and best practices for the rehabilitation of the Kasbah Taourirt in Ouarzazate was elaborated on behalf of the Ministry of Culture in collaboration with the CERKAS and The Getty Conservation Institute, Cf. Cancino et al. (2016) and Boussalhi et al. (2016).

⁷⁷⁶ UNDP (2021).

⁷⁷⁷ Cf. for instance Akalay (2021); V. Becker (2021); InfoMédiaire (2021); Le Reporter (2021); MAP (2021f); M. Senhaji (2021).

presented herself as a humble executor of the royal vision to promote Morocco's cultural heritage and fight poverty and social misery. Through the UNDP's contribution, the international community grants credibility to this narrative. The strategy to upgrade Morocco's kasbah and ksour is meant to be considered an important mechanism to achieve sustainable development. According to a UNDP resident representative, the project „aims to support some of the most vulnerable and poorest populations in Morocco, i.e. the inhabitants of the ksours and kasbahs. The programme's long-term strategy and accompanying action plan are perfectly aligned with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular, the fight against poverty and inequality, but also, of course, decent and sustainable housing. It is also perfectly aligned with the principle of the Sustainable Development Goals, which is to leave no one behind.”⁷⁷⁸ The UNDP's website even adopted Morocco's official narrative about the implementation of the king's high directives, thereby casting international legitimacy on the monarchy's performance claims.⁷⁷⁹

The launching ceremony was orchestrated in a way that bolstered the monarchy's position as an active manager of the people's cultural and economic needs. It made the ksour and kasbah project appear as an essential element of the royal strategy to advance national development that complies with the United Nation's 2030 Agenda. This finding is corroborated by another project, which is supposed to enhance the touristic value of Moroccan heritage and is tightly associated with the Moroccan monarchy. While the „Road of 1000 Kasbahs” has existed for a long time as a tour recommendation by Morocco's Tourism Ministry (Popp 2008),⁷⁸⁰ yet another tourist route has only recently been established.⁷⁸¹ Financed by France and executed in collaboration with the French Centre Jacques Berque, the Ministry of Culture and the INSAP chose six archaeological sites along an old merchants' route from the Sahara and the anti-Atlas

⁷⁷⁸ Rédaction AY (2021).

⁷⁷⁹ UNDP (2021).

⁷⁸⁰ Moroccan National Tourist Office

⁷⁸¹ Ahdani (2021); Zine (2021b).

to the Atlantic Sea to become part of a mobile phone application for tourists. This app, „Route of Empires”, became available in 2022 (Figure 44).⁷⁸²

The chosen sites date from the pre-Islamic and medieval times. The app presents rock art and fortified locations built by the Almoravids, Almohades and Saadians. The tourist route promoted by the app also includes one of the most emblematic imperial kasbahs, namely the

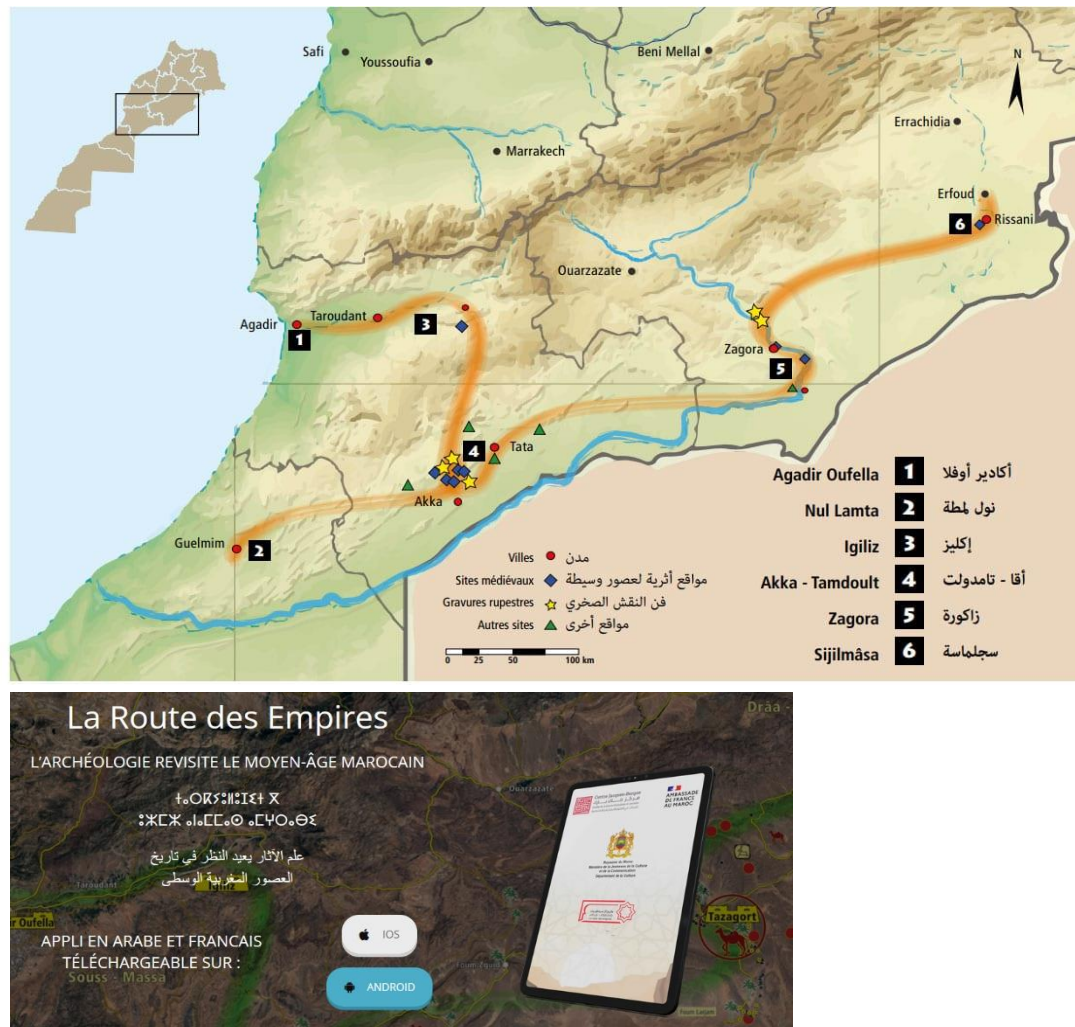


Figure 44: Route of empires developed by French Centre Jacques Berque, the Ministry of Culture and the INSAP

kasbah of Agadir Oufella. The locations are researched using modern techniques. They provide explanatory signs for tourists that highlight the site’s historical significance. Hence, the sites offer visitors an immersive archaeological experience exploring the history of the various sultanic (including Amazigh) dynasties that ruled the land. This shows that the Moroccan state is also ready to take new, digital paths beyond classical means of presenting its royal history through museums and exhibitions. This enhances the accessibility of information about the longevity of the monarchical rule in Morocco, even for foreign tourists. However, the example

⁷⁸² Ibnouzhahir (2022b) and <https://laroutedesempires.ma/>

of the ksour and kasbah projects is not an isolated case. It is one piece of a larger pattern where rural Amazigh culture is framed as constituent elements of Morocco's civilisational accomplishments. The artefacts become reified tokens of the king's personal engagement to diversify Morocco's national identity. As the next example shows, this trend was established and gained weight in Moroccan politics only recently.

6.4.9.2. The Preservation of Collective Granaries

Collective granaries, called Iguidar (= plural of agadir) have long been identified by academia as an essential element of Amazigh culture from a historical, architectural, sociological and religious perspective (Adam, Jürgen, A. 2004; el Fasskaoui 2014b; Naji 2011; Popp et al. 2011). Hundreds of these early banking institutions for natural goods exist in Moroccan territory, although most have lost their traditional function with new technologies and changing societies and have experienced significant dilapidation (Kagermeier 2014b; Zainabi 2004).⁷⁸³

Next to ensuring security for the stocked goods, these buildings have a strong ethnological and spiritual significance. The Moroccan state has invested heavily in the renovation and economic exploitation/touristification of the imperial cities (el Fasskaoui 2014a).⁷⁸⁴ However, despite their sociological importance for the rural Amazigh communities, the state has undertaken little to maintain Amazigh heritage (Kagermeier 2014a) like these extraordinary monuments. The reasons for this are diverse, as demonstrated by the case of the Imchguigulne granary. Nowadays, the renovation project for this collective granary is considered a role model for an inclusive approach that includes the participation of state and civil society actors alike. Yet, this has not always been the case. According to Mohamed Bousalah, director of the *Centre for the Conservation, Restoration and Rehabilitation of the Architectural Heritage of the Atlas and Sub-Atlasic Zones*, the state „tried to carry out studies of the Imchguigulne granary in the 1990s, but nothing came of it. On the one hand because we didn't have the means, but also because of the sensitivity of certain inhabitants who feared looting.”⁷⁸⁵ This testimony shows two things:

a) The personal engagement of some state actors who were aware of the socio-economic and historical importance of the sites was not backed up by sufficient financial means. The interest in cultural policies among state actors differs not only in the horizontal dimension but also in

⁷⁸³ For a very pertinent anthropological study on the modes of preservation of some iguidar through cultic and traditional practices, see Naji (2011).

⁷⁸⁴ Apart from the Road of 1000 Kasbahs, the Ministry of Tourism also recommends a tour to the “Imperial Cities” Fès, Meknès, Rabat and Marrakesh. Cf. Moroccan National Tourism Office last consulted on 29 October 2024.

⁷⁸⁵ Oudrhiri (2018b).

the vertical. By that time, the top-down allocation of financial resources from Rabat to the local level hinged very much on the personal conviction of the responsible budget staff in the capital that cultural policies are not merely a matter of luxury but can make a difference in local development.

b) The state lacked credibility and trust in the rural population, which had nothing to expect from the state at that point. This lack of state legitimacy made useful or even necessary investments in local development projects difficult or impossible unless significant trust-building measures were undertaken.

This only changed with an initiative by a civil society association of female architects from the South (ASAS, Association Solidaire des Architectes du Sud). In 2004, ASAS got interested in the Igudar in the region and issued a first study in 2005. The voluntary responsible of the project, architect Samira Saoudi, and her team then managed to obtain the political support of parliamentarian Saïd Dor and also convinced locally elected representatives of the rural municipality of Aït M'zal. Furthermore, the regional delegation of the Ministry of Culture and ANDZOA joined the project. In 2017, the Regional Council of Souss-Massa region eventually financed the entire restoration, totalling 1,3 million Dirhams. ANDZOA carried out the construction of adjacent tourist facilities, including a parking space, for a total sum of another 3 million Dirhams.⁷⁸⁶ Of course, the initial distrust in state authorities was not immediately overcome. Since the granaries, legally speaking, are private property under the collective management of a group of families, convincing all affected persons proved difficult. It necessitated constant and careful sensitisation work by the Conservation Centre vis-à-vis the local population. Nevertheless, the local people were not always ready to share the necessary documents and archival information concerning the tribes owning the granary, the building's history or even the meaning of the site's name. Finally, despite all the obstacles, the renovation succeeded, and the granary could be preserved for future generations in a unique collective effort by state actors and civil society. In the meantime, things also changed on the institutional level between the 1990s and 2017. Given the strong impact of the Amazigh movement on national politics, especially since the coronation of King Mohammed VI and the creation of the IRCAM, Amazigh heritage steadily gained more attention. Both horizontally and vertically, the sites moved into the government's focus. In fact, between 2009-2011, about 3 million Dirhams were invested to renovate some collective granaries of the Souss-Massa Draa and Tadla-Azilal

⁷⁸⁶ ALAMI (2018); LesEco.ma (2018); Oudrhiri (2018b).

region.⁷⁸⁷ Furthermore, in the wake of the 2011 uprisings, the IRCAM announced that a conference on the economic development potential of Amazigh heritage would be held in Oujda in 2012. The IRCAM published an announcement of the conference, including a call for contribution in which it clearly recognised the material and immaterial heritage of the Imazighen as an authentic and „fundamental component of Moroccan identity”. Furthermore, the royally supported institution acknowledged that „despite the characteristics common to all Moroccans (geography, history, religion, civilisation, etc.), many forms of engineering are specific to the Amazigh socio-cultural context. This shows the importance of indigenous or local knowledge, which needs to be rediscovered, revitalised and promoted, not only to help strengthen Moroccan culture and civilisation but above all to enhance people’s well-being and their economic, social and cultural progress.” It then continued to declare that in modern-day-Morocco „heritage is destined to become, within the framework of regionalisation and decentralisation, a driving force for mobilising energies capable of serving as a pillar for human promotion, by favouring its economic and social environment.”⁷⁸⁸ This quotation proves that even before the great regionalisation reforms, the Moroccan regime, through its royally supported Amazigh institution, noted the socio-economic development potential of Amazigh heritage sites. It also considered decentralised heritage promotion a means to reconcile the Amazigh with the state and to foster social cohesion. Despite these declarations, however, the implementation process was challenging for the Moroccan state. At the 2012 conference in Oujda, Mustapha Nami, a representative of the Culture Ministry, drew an ambiguous picture of the government’s dilemma by explaining that the renovation of the old and often endangered constructions might entail a trend for solidary and social economy while it could also engender an abusive folklorisation of these constructions (IRCAM & Université Mohammad Premier - Oujda 2012, p. 10). Nevertheless, for many years, the ministry included the goal of renovating some of the most exceptional examples of Iguidar (like the one of the UNESCO World Heritage site and tourist hotspot Aït Benhaddou, Figure 45) in its heritage strategies.⁷⁸⁹

⁷⁸⁷ Ministère de la Culture - Direction du Patrimoine Culturel and Sbihi (2013, p. 18).

⁷⁸⁸ <https://www.minculture.gov.ma/fr/?p=2336> , last consulted in December 2019.

⁷⁸⁹ Cf. for instance Ministère de la Culture (2014a, p. 63)

However, almost nothing happened except a minor renovation programme for some collective granaries which, since 2014, aimed at preserving the Amazigh heritage in the Souss-Massa region and resulted in the renovation of four granaries in the Chtouka-Aït Baha province,



Figure 45: Collective granary in Aït Benhaddou, heavily damaged by the 2023 earthquake

including the ones of Ikonka, Ouidoulhan, Imhilline and the above-mentioned agadir of Imchguigulne. Some successful renovations indeed yielded an increase in tourism and a generation of revenue (Kagermeier 2014b). Apart from this initiative, however, it was mostly thanks to private initiatives that some sites could be preserved. Enthusiasts like architect Salima Naji even obtained funding from the US Embassy and occasionally the

Moroccan state.⁷⁹⁰ In April 2021, though, the Minister of Culture, Othman el Ferdaous, announced in a broadcast seminar that the heritage department of his ministry planned to have 554 Igudar inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage list.

On one of the slides of the announcement which was also shared on Facebook (Figure 46 and 47),⁷⁹¹ the minister explained that „among the elements selected are the Igudar, whose candidacy naturally constitutes recognition of the role and place of this institution, which is rich in its material and intangible heritage in Moroccan society, particularly Amazigh” (Ministère de la Culture - Direction du Patrimoine Culturel 2021, p. 8).⁷⁹² Also the minister praised the unifying function of the constructions by saying that they „build useful solidarity in times of crisis (droughts, famines, epidemics, invasion of locusts, etc.)” and thus constitute „a strong testimony of the genius and the human creativity in the face of constraints, particularly ecological ones.”

⁷⁹⁰ Naji (2016).

⁷⁹¹ Othman El Ferdaous (2021).

⁷⁹² Cf. also H. Guessous (2021).



Figure 46: Culture Minister Ferdaous announcing the launch of a UNESCO inscription project for Morocco's collective granaries

The minister also underlined that the workshop on the plans to add the Igoudar on UNESCO's World Heritage list „confirms the strategic orientation of the ministry to diversify inscriptions in the context of the regionalisation [i.e. the decentralisation of Morocco] and the valorisation of the Amazigh heritage”.⁷⁹³

The details shared in the Moroccan media show that this time, the Moroccan government was very serious about valorising the Amazigh heritage, wanting to advance the inscription as fast as possible.⁷⁹⁴ Therefore, during the seminar, an agreement was signed between the Ministry of Culture, the Souss-Massa region, the province council of Chtouka Ait Baha, the municipality of Ait Baha and the Regional Tourism Development Society of Souss Massa. This agreement worth 6 million Dirhams stipulated the creation of a centre on a 4.000 m²-real estate in Ait Baha designed to promote the Igoudar and prepare their inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage list.⁷⁹⁵ These plans will likely involve the facilities around the role-

model-agadir of Imchguigulne, which finished in 2018. Although it remains unclear whether the regime's financial commitment will suffice, we are supposed to understand from these efforts that with the officialisation of Amazigh, the kingdom now fully embraces its Amazigh history and the contribution of the Imazighen to the nation's development. The result of this process will decide whether Kabel (2023, p. 793) was right when he claimed that

„neoliberal multilingualism, along with neoliberal didactics, co-habits with ‘neoliberal multiculturalism’, a new-fangled politics of recognition which legislates formal, but only nominal, Amazigh cultural recognition and celebrates cultural inclusiveness outside any substantive politics of democratic deliberation or redistribution. Culture/identity is depoliticized as a site of political struggle and symbolic

⁷⁹³ TelQuel (2021a).

⁷⁹⁴ El Ouardighi (2021a).

⁷⁹⁵ The Ministry of Culture will contribute 3 million Dirhams, the region Souss-Massa 2,5 million Dirhams and the province council of Chtouka Ait Baha 500.000 Dirhams, cf. Médias24 (2021b).

authoring, and fixed as an artifact in a compartmentalized and reductive ‘mosaic’ of difference or retooled as spectacle and marketized resource. Neoliberal multiculturalism reinscribes Amazigh ethnic identity, culture and diversity as development constructs immersed in the paradigms of sustainable and local development, and resemanticizes them as both enterprise and market. These narratives dovetail with the global neoliberal development tenets of ethno-development (Pieterse 2010), vernacular development refracted through commodified and reified local cultural identity and agency.”

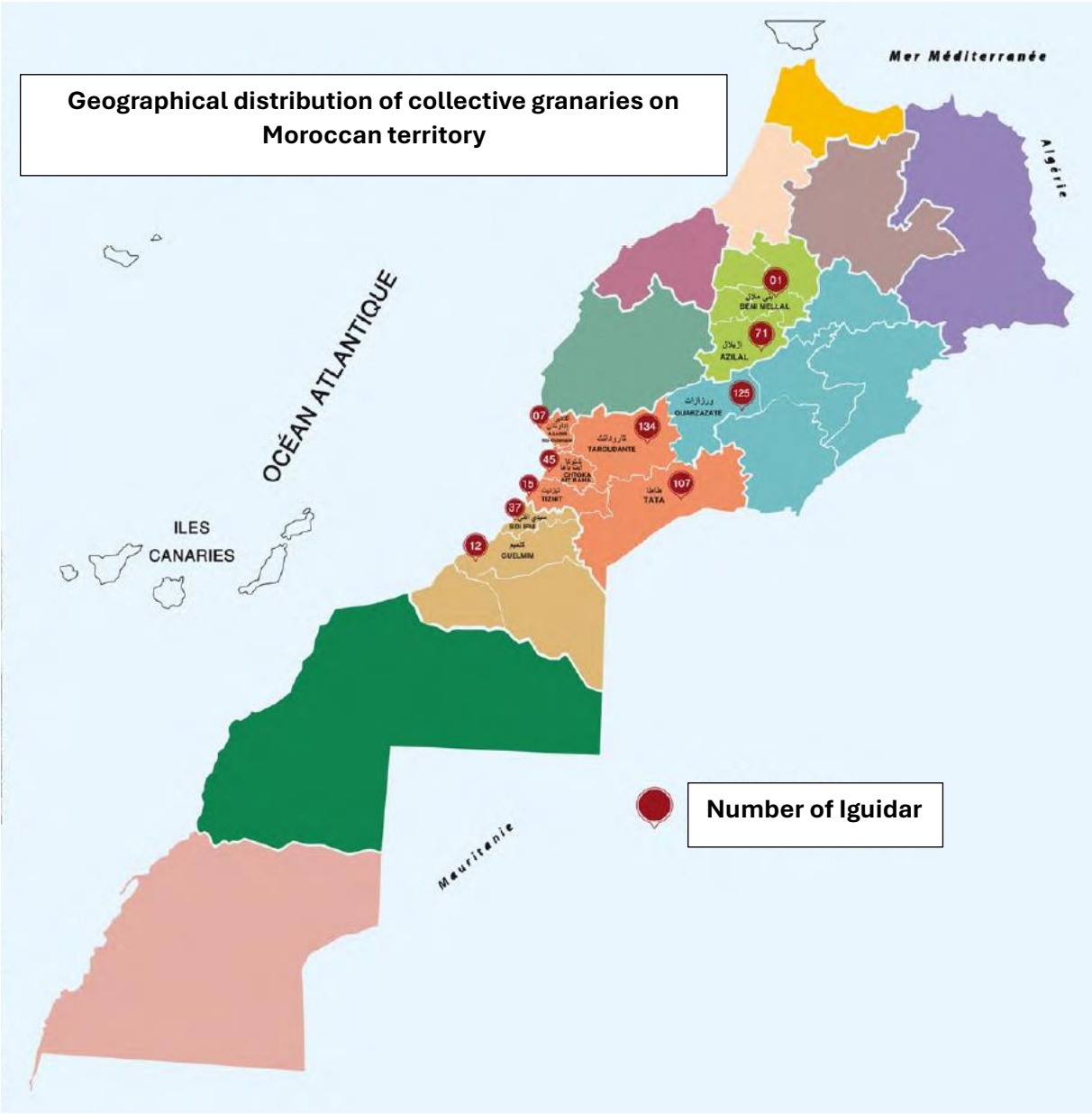


Figure 47: Distribution of collective granaries on Moroccan territory

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⁷⁹⁶ Adapted from Ministère de la Culture - Direction du Patrimoine Culturel (2021, p. 14).

6.5. The Art of (De-)Centralised Cultural Governance

6.5.1. State Organisation Reforms or Cultural Gerrymandering?

Decentralisation in Morocco has a long tradition. Before the protectorate, the *jamâa*, a tribal council on the local level, was the centre of decentralised decision-making. While, already in these times, most of the towns within the realm of the sultan formally acknowledged the sultan's authority, some territories were more subject to sultanic control (*bled al makhzen*) than others (*bled es-siba*). With the protectorate, Morocco was divided between French and Spanish-controlled parts. While Western Sahara (back then by the name of Spanish Sahara) and the Northern provinces at the Mediterranean coast stretching from Tangier and the Rif mountains to the province of Nador became Spanish, the North-eastern provinces of Berkane and Oujda as well as the centre of Morocco along the Atlantic coast, the Atlas Mountains and the desertic areas beyond the ridge were controlled by the French. Although the French were keen on maintaining tribal self-administration at the local level, they also introduced a written communal legal code. They designated three civilly organised regions (Rabat, Casablanca and Oujda) and four regions administrated by the military (Fès, Meknès, Marrakesh and Agadir). The development speed varied considerably across the regions, leading to heavy economic and intellectual productivity inequality. This led to a categorisation which characterised some regions as „Maroc utile – useful Morocco” and „Maroc inutile – useless Morocco” (Reifeld 2014, 98f.).

As we have seen in chapter 6.4.1., the French also instrumentalised the tribes as allies to keep the local population in check. They used the so-called „Berber Dahir” of 1930 to pit mainly rural, Amazigh-dominated regions against urban elites by granting them the right to apply customary law instead of sharia law (Moha Ennaji 2005, p. 14). After the independence of the northern and central parts of Morocco, decentralisation was torn between strife for territorial integrity and unity on the one hand and the re-organisation of the state along modernist lines, which aimed at reducing traditional feudal and tribal power on the other hand. While the late King Mohammed V praised the tribes as the “glory” of the Moroccan kingdom and used patrimonial networks as well as patriarchal relationships with the tribes to build a counterweight to the urban-based nationalist parties in national politics, he also used the bureaucratic institutions of the very same urban, modernist central-government elites to curtail the tribes' legislative and judicial influence in the kingdom (Charrad 2011, pp. 58–61). In the same regard, the decentralisation dossier was taken away from the elected government to curtail the modernists' grip on local elite production, and a parallel administrative structure of loyal royalist authorities supplemented the elected administration on the municipal level. The era of

the late King Hassan II was marked by a violent struggle between secessionist, leftist-republican and democratic forces on the one side and the authoritarian system on the other side. The failed assassination attempts against Hassan II in the 1970s resulted in the systematic neglect and marginalisation of the northern and eastern regions, especially the Rif and the Oriental region. The division into seven planning and organisational entities which, inherited from the French, did not necessarily follow socio-cultural but rather economic, geostrategic and political logics. Yet they had not proven efficient in developing all regions. Therefore the kingdom was re-structured in 1997 (Reifeld 2014, p. 102). It was not before this reform, that the primarily economic territorial entities were promoted to become legally constitutionalised regional governance authorities (Bouabid & Iraki 2015, 57f.). According to this plan, the country is organised into 16 regions, subdivided into provinces (rural) and prefectures (urban), which incorporate municipalities (Figure 48). The regions are administrated by elected regional councils, headed by a president elected from within the councils. While these elected officials take care of the general orientation, they have to coordinate with the *walis*, whom the king invests upon the proposition of the cabinet to represent the crown in the regions. On the level of the prefectures and provinces, the elected provincial/prefectural council headed by the council's president is seconded by a governor whom the Ministry of the Interior appoints to represent the royal palace on this sub-regional level. Next to the elected mayors in the municipalities, the ministry appoints *caids* (rural) and *pashas* (urban) municipalities to stay in touch with the local population (Reifeld 2014, 106f.). This bicephalic organisation with a democratically legitimated representative and a crown representative curtails the parliamentary power. At the same time, it bolsters the position of the palace on every organisational level of the state. In the wake of the Green March on Western Sahara, the second municipal charta was introduced in 1976 (Reifeld 2014, p. 101). It granted new administrative competencies pertaining to cultural, economic and social affairs to the municipal councils and the presidents elected from within their ranks (Bouabid & Iraki 2015, p. 55). Even though this new law strengthened the position of the municipalities, it also came with a certain risk of local governance instabilities, which allowed for corrective interventions from the central state. Furthermore, these reforms were criticised for being an instrument of delegating (or rather) deflecting responsibility for reasonable and accountable resource allocation away from the central state down to the regional and local levels (Bouabid & Iraki 2015, pp. 60–64). The communal code reforms successively introduced under King Mohammed VI since 1999 accounted for some of these shortcomings. Nevertheless, the factual power of the decentralised governance entities still finds its limits in technical and budgetary restrictions and limitations.

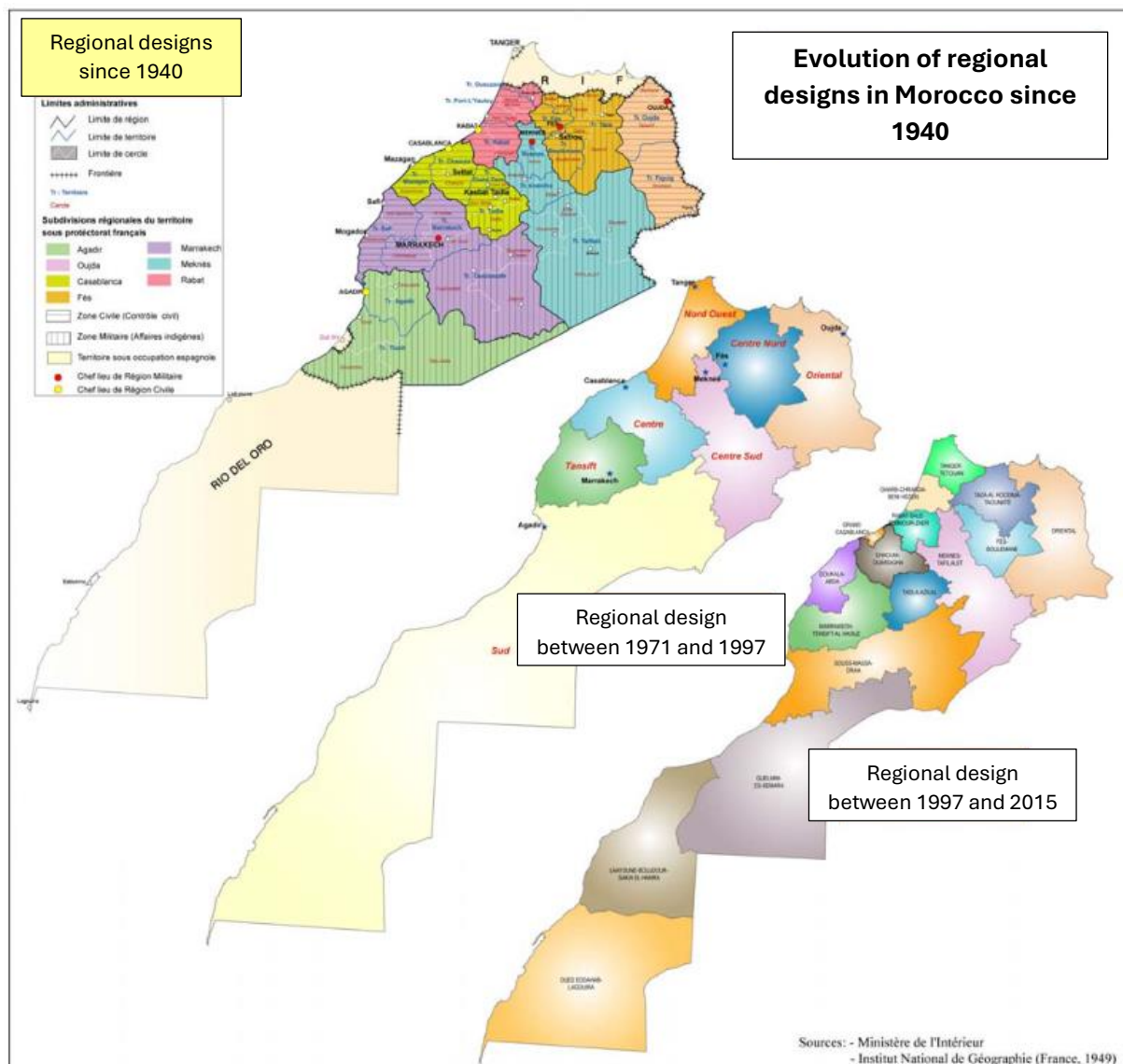


Figure 48: Evolution of Morocco's regional structure between 1940 and 2015⁷⁹⁷

Although tax collection on the local level is partly possible today (Reinfeld & Rais 2017), regions, prefectures/provinces and municipalities remain widely dependent on money transfers from the central government (Vollmann & Bohn 2021). This, at the same time, allows local authorities to blame the central government for handing its implementation problems down to the subnational level while not holding its promise of providing sufficient means for the local authorities to fulfil their constitutional obligations (Bouabid & Iraki 2015, pp. 60–64). In the wake of his liberalisation trends, King Mohammed VI initiated a revision of the decentralisation framework and launched a consulting commission active from 2010 to 2011 (CCR). As a result of the social uprisings of 2011, decentralisation reforms became a favoured tool of the

⁷⁹⁷ Adapted from Royaume du Maroc - Commission consultative de la régionalisation (2011b, p. 148).

Moroccan monarchy to manage the social unrest. The principle of subsidiarity between the various subnational levels was introduced (Houdret & Harnisch 2019). Also, the principle of *tutelle* (the obligation of elected subnational bodies to have major decisions approved by the crown's representative) was formally abandoned, yet persists as a powerful principle in day-to-day political practice among local authorities that remain reluctant to take decisions without prior approval from above (Bergh 2020, p. 31; Bohn & Vollmann 2021, 72f.; Reifeld 2014, 110f.; Vollmann & Bohn 2021, p. 119)

The design of the regions in the decentralisation phases of 1971 and 1997 followed mainly the economic principle of complementarity. This means the regions were designed to make them self-sufficient as far as possible, incorporating components of different milieux, including mountains, plains, deserts, and (wherever possible) a window to the sea (M. Berriane 2015). Often, these regions were centred around urban poles from which development was supposed to radiate into the periphery, a model that eventually proved to have only a limited impact. Given the overall higher level of infrastructure provision in Morocco in comparison to the levels of 1971 and even 1997, and considering the spreading of economies and exchanges beyond local/regional boundaries to a national and even international level, the CCR considered the principle of complementarity to be outdated and inappropriate for the reorganisation of Moroccan territory within the new regionalisation approach (Royaume du Maroc - Commission consultative de la régionalisation 2011b, 146f.). While the CCR also rejected the general idea of an ethnocentric, tribal or merely linguistic re-design of the Moroccan regions,⁷⁹⁸ the CCR proposed a combination of essentially five main principles, i.e. building upon decentralisation experiences, efficiency, accessibility/proximity, representativity, proportionality/balance (Royaume du Maroc - Commission consultative de la régionalisation 2011b, 150ff.). These principles are applied along two main organisational rules, i.e. polarisation and homogeneity. The former principle describes the idea of making urban centres efficient „locomotives” of development. The latter is particularly interesting for this study since it seems to make an exception from the overarching decision to leave ethnocentric and linguistic considerations out of the picture. This principle was suggested to be applied to five of the 12 new regions where no strong metropolis or economic gravity centres could be identified and where acceptable (travel) distances between the periphery and urban centres could not be ensured. These regions are proposed mainly on the grounds of cultural/historical arguments. This is the case for the three Saharan regions, the Oriental and the Transatlas regions.

⁷⁹⁸ This idea of ethno-communitarian territoriality was considered as risk to national unity, cf. for instance Royaume du Maroc - Commission consultative de la régionalisation (2011b, p. 164)

The propositions of the CCR were widely praised but also heavily criticised. While the suggestions to reduce the number of regions and strengthen their political weight by widening their administrative competencies and budgetary resources were widely commended, the disrespect of the cultural component was heavily criticised. On 11 May 2011, at a conference organised by the Royal Institute of Strategic Studies (IRES), two members of the CCR introduced the commission's report, followed by commentaries by various experts in the field. Abdelali Doumou, former president of the Marrakech-Tensift-El Haouz, for instance, criticised that the category of homogeneity was at all applied in the CCR's concept, considering it a risk to diversity within the decentralisation process (Doumou 2011, p. 32). Others agreed that the concept was not appropriate for the regional level and called for rather making the cultural dimension a driver for development projects on an intercommunal level (el Kadiri 2011, p. 39). While, for these commentators, the CCR was already going too far in using culture as a category within the new regionalisation project, other observers seemed rather disappointed by the lack of courage to attribute more autonomy to culturally homogeneous zones. Political analyst Mimoun Charqui criticised that any re-tailoring of the regions could not be done in a centralist manner from an office in the capital but should rather be the object of democratic people's decision upon considerations of their cultural identity and feeling of belonging. Hence, for him, the question of enjoyment of cultural rights is – like all other democratic virtues – tightly linked to the question of autonomy (Charqui 2011, pp. 42–44).

The harshest critique indeed came from IRCAM director Ahmed Boukous. He said, „it appears that the proposed territorial division responds to administrative and security considerations in the first place. In fact, the cultural and linguistic dimensions have not been taken into account since the traditionally Amazigh speaking regions are included in areas where there are also Arabic speaking communities. Thus, it is clear that the configuration of the regional map as presented in the report does not make it possible to provide the Amazigh language and culture the spatial environment suitable for the conditions for sustainability” (Boukous 2016, p. 274). According to Boukous, the regional reform was not far-reaching enough considering the social and cultural reality in Morocco's regions. For him, no territorial democracy was possible without acknowledging the cultural identities on the ground, manifesting itself in the material and immaterial heritage of the respective territory. He considered it unacceptable that the CCR associated the insistence on cultural rights and the insistence on one's cultural identity with „exacerbating particularisms” that would necessarily lead to jeopardising „national unity”. From his perspective, the CCR's proposition remained deaf vis-à-vis the expectations and demands of the people for cultural and linguistic democracy. He even went as far as to accuse

them of not rightly interpreting the king's orientations who, in his speeches of 2001, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2011, had stressed the benefits of the cultural specificities of the regions within the decentralisation process of the country and Morocco's national identity. From this, he suggested revising the proposal by extending the autonomy model, which had been elaborated for the Saharan regions, and treating predominantly Amazighophone areas similarly. Only such an extension of the autonomy model would ensure sustainable national unity, social cohesion, and development (Boukkous 2011). Also, from within the IRES, some critique was issued against the CCR's approach to culture. Mohammed Benjelloun also called for adopting a principle of identitarian territoriality that could reform the nationalist paradigms by taking local/regional identities as a basis for national identity (M. O. Benjelloun 2011). It becomes clear that the question of culture within the regionalisation project is a matter of stability in the eyes of the CCR members, just as it is from the point of view of many political observers and actors in the field. However, both approach the matter from different ends. Some prominent actors in the cultural policy field, including Ahmed Boukkous, are convinced that regionalisation along cultural categories ensures the country's stability, while others, including the CCR members, see stability at risk if culture becomes a dominant determining factor.

Considering the polarisation of the Moroccan debate about the extent to which the re-design of the Moroccan regions should follow cultural categories, it is no wonder that the decentralisation reform project took another few years to be implemented. In 2013, the IRES published another report in which the authors discussed historical accounts of Morocco's geographical and political organisation throughout the ages, from the late medieval times through the colonial age until today. In this regard, they also showed that the Rif as a geographical and political entity was also represented in these accounts on Morocco's provinces, including the very influential ones of 16th-century geographer Léon the African and the 18th-century French king's ambassador to the sultan Louis de Chenier. The IRES found that over the centuries and especially since the installation of the protectorate, the cultural dimension has always played a subaltern role in Morocco's decentralisation process. In turn, the regions were instead tailored with the aim of „pacification“. The IRES, therefore, advocated for considering the cultural component when retailoring the new Moroccan regions (Ahmahane et al. 2013, 69 and 110ff.). While the study's authors acknowledged the linguistic component as highly relevant for constructing cultural identity, they mapped geographical zones of relative cultural homogeneity in Morocco by considering immaterial heritage like handcraft, music, living habits and traditions (Figure 49). These cultural zones were compared to the regional models applied in

the successive decentralisation projects in Moroccan history, including the CCR's propositions.

Carte n° 12 : Les sous-aires culturelles

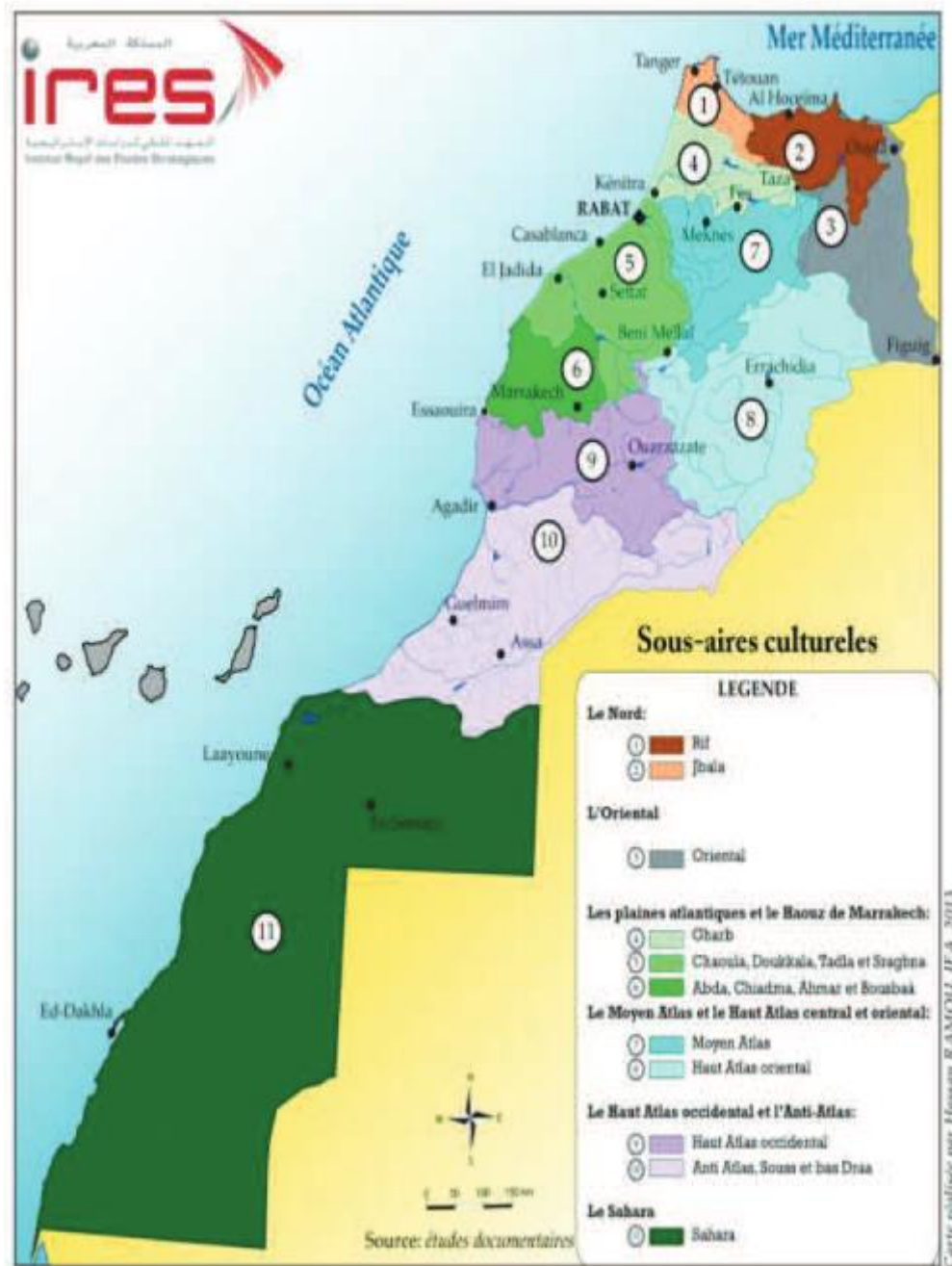


Figure 49: Cultural sub-areas⁷⁹⁹

The IRES considered that the CCR's suggestions – with the notable exception of the Drâa-Tafilalet region – showed real convergence with the cultural zones defined by the IRES in that they respect the cultural specificities of the newly proposed political region (Ahmahane et al. 2013, 68–71). The IRES called for allowing each region to grow a regional identity built upon a fundament of shared cultural traits. Yet, they also reminded the legislator that the relative

⁷⁹⁹ Ahmahane et al. (2013, p. 71)

cultural homogeneity of these regional identities must not lead to tensions and the eradication of local specificities on a sub-regional level. They also suggested that to improve the cultural representativity on a political level, the chamber of councillors within Morocco's parliament be replaced by a second chamber representing the regions and that a permanent conference between the central state and the regions be created to coordinate politics between the two organisational layers of the state. Finally, they also proposed strengthening the Ministry of Culture with its regional branches and cooperating with educational and scientific institutions to promote cultural diversity and attachment to civic values (Ahmahane et al. 2013, 110ff.). By 2015, with the adoption of the regionalisation reform (Figure 51), the shape of the new regions largely followed the propositions of the CCR (Figure 50). It is interesting to note where the implementation diverged from the original proposal. This is the case in the regions that most commentators had in mind when criticising the CCR approach, namely the northern areas, including the Rif and the kingdom's Oriental region. While the provinces remained untouched compared to their 1997 shape, many regions changed considerably.

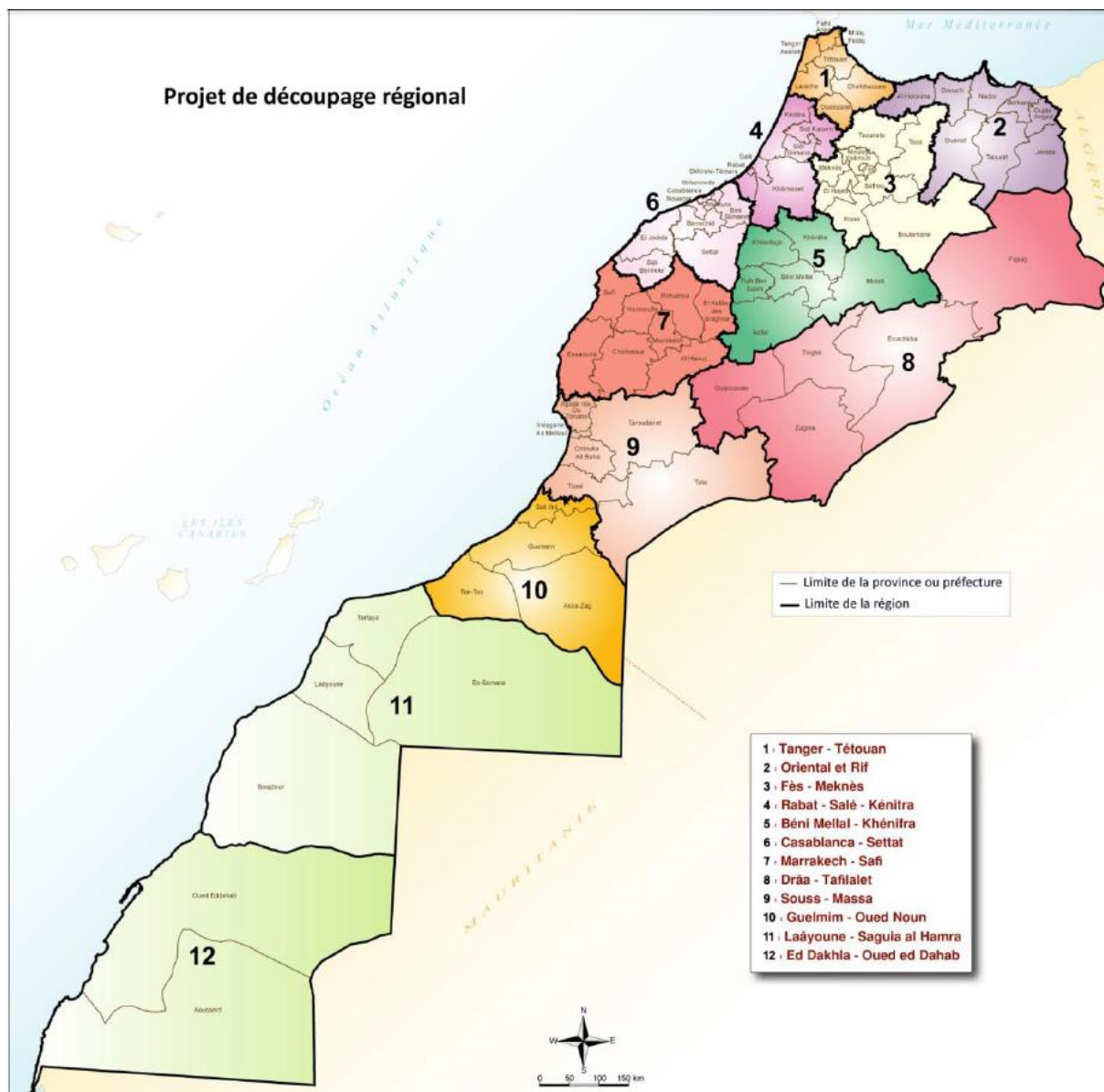


Figure 50: The CCR's first proposition for a new regional design⁸⁰⁰

⁸⁰⁰ Royaume du Maroc - Commission consultative de la régionalisation (2011a, p. 36).

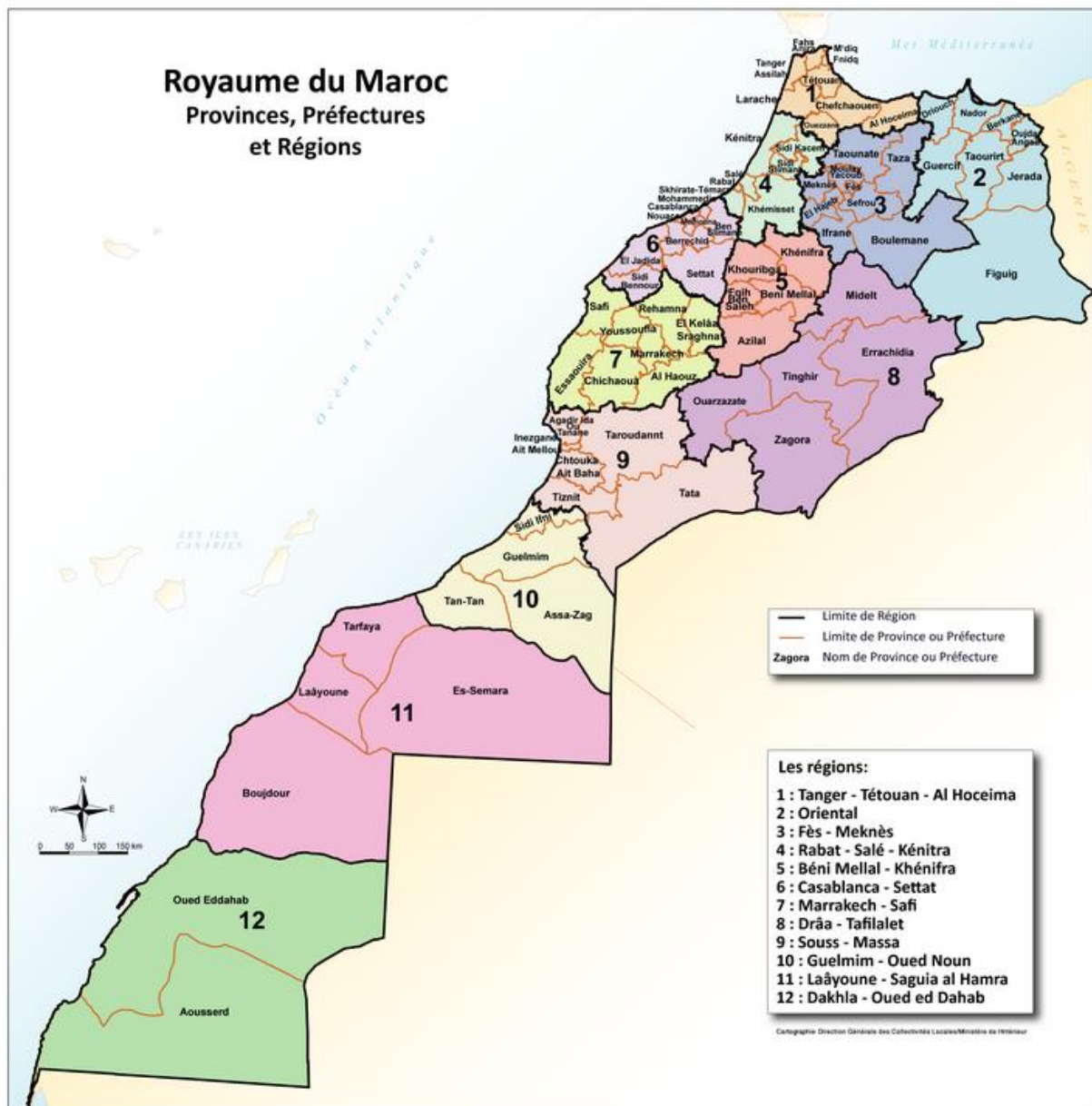


Figure 51: Region design as adopted by the Moroccan parliament in 2015 ⁸⁰¹

One of the most remarkable changes concerns the attribution of the al Hoceima province. The CCR, supported by the IRES (Ahmahane et al. 2013), had recommended respecting the cultural homogeneity of the Rif by dissolving the Taza-al Hoceima-Taounate-region and joining the al Hoceima province into one region with the neighbouring Rif-provinces of Driouch and Nador which were already part of the Oriental region. In 2015, the Moroccan legislator, in turn, decided to dissolve the Taza-al Hoceima-Taounate-region but added the al Hoceima province to the Tangier-Tetouan region, which is still culturally close, yet structurally and linguistically different from the other Rif provinces which incorporates the rest of the oriental Rif. The

⁸⁰¹ Portail National des Collectivités Territoriales

Guercif province, in turn, was attributed to the Oriental region following the recommendations of the CCR. At first glance, the legislator also disrespected the CCR's recommendation to attribute the Figuig province to the Errachidia region. Yet, the CCR's report included a variant in which they supported leaving Figuig with the Oriental for historical continuity and cultural homogeneity (Royaume du Maroc - Commission consultative de la régionalisation 2011b, p. 197) (Figure 52). Since the legislator largely followed most of the CCR's recommendations regarding regional attributions, it is noteworthy that, with the al Hoceima province, he did not.

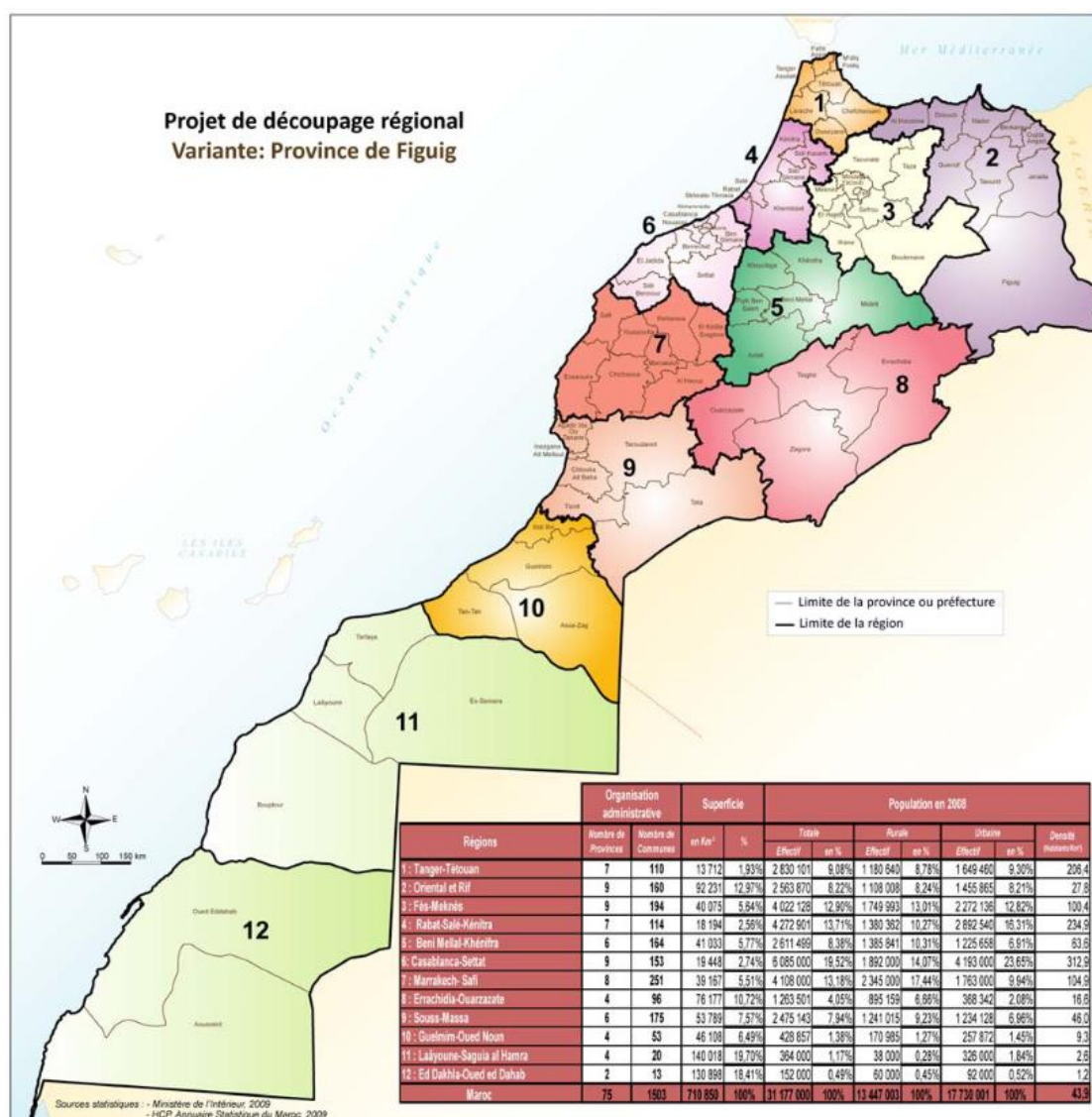


Figure 52: The CCR's 2nd proposition with Figuig province being part of the Oriental region ⁸⁰²

While the decision was criticised by some researchers (Bennis 2016, 2018; M. Berriane 2015; Mezgheri 2023, p. 136), suggesting that the considerations of preserving central power and control might have played a role, corroborating data concerning the actual reasons behind the

⁸⁰² Royaume du Maroc - Commission consultative de la régionalisation (2011b, p. 197)

choice for the final territorial structure are scarce. Also this study's data collection in field research was complicated during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, one piece of information gained in an expert background conversation implied that a last-minute intervention by the royal palace might have played a role.⁸⁰³ Although there is no final proof for this claim, there is at least circumstantial evidence that corroborate this claim: I argue that one reason to divide the Rif might have been that sectarian calls for the creation of a „Grand Rif” including the entire northern regions from the Atlantic Sea to the Algerian border thrived among the protestors of the 20th February Movement (Nahhass 2022). To prevent these calls from gaining more weight, it was helpful to keep the region politically divided. Vázquez (2018) explained this argument in more detail. She pointed out that Omar Azziman, the CCR's president, was also the former Moroccan ambassador to Spain. Furthermore, documents issued by the CCR explicitly mentioned the Spanish autonomy concept, which the Moroccan press commended as an ideal model of territorial management to appease autonomist aspirations in certain regions. Therefore, the Spanish model that involves autonomy for culturally distinct regions like Catalonia has been on the table (Vázquez 2018, p. 144). Nevertheless, the Moroccan monarchy needed to factor in socio-economic questions alongside identity issues. Furthermore, it needed to take warnings of the PJD and Istiqlal party seriously and be aware that „conceding autonomy” could potentially be „a source of division that” would „provoke the weakening of the State and the fracturing of the nation, particularly because it could reinforce identities that threaten national unity” (Vázquez 2018, p. 146). Furthermore, the monarchy had to acknowledge that the new regionalisation would ultimately also „affect the composition of the country's political elites”, making the project „fight for power and control over economic resources” (Vázquez 2018, 144–146).

In the following, I argue that considerations about possible pathways to improve indirect rule via proxies aligned with the palace might also help to explain the decision to ignore the calls for respecting the cultural identity of the Rif in the decentralisation process. After three years of hesitation, in September 2014, the Ministry of the Interior, at the time headed by Mohamed Hassad, aligned itself with the proposition made by the CCR, still with the Figuig-province being attributed to the Draâ-Tafilalet-region and with the Tanger-Tetouan-region remaining untouched as compared to its composition of 1997 to „maintain its homogeneity”.⁸⁰⁴ This model, however, was shaken when, on 27 September 2014, during an assembly of the royalist PAM, members of the party, coming from the Rif, led by Mohamed Boudera, deputy for the

⁸⁰³ I am grateful to Erik Vollmann for pointing this out to me. Cf. e-mail conversation of 07/11/2023, at 09:30.

⁸⁰⁴ Gueye (2014).

PAM and president of the Taza-al Hoceima-Taounate region, publicly called for a deviant constellation of the Rif that would unite all the „historical Rif” provinces reaching from Tangier in the west to Saidia at the Mediterranean coast in the east, thereby even exceeding the territory controlled between 1921 and 1927 by the Riffian hero and independence fighter Abdul Karim Khattabi. For them, the regional design of the CCR adopted by the Ministry of the Interior would seriously harm a reconciliation with the Rif. It would equal an „intifada” of the population.

Finally, background negotiations made the initiators drop their proposition, leading them to opt for a solution that would involve shifting the al Hoceima province into the Tangier-Tetouan region. Strategically, this proposition made sense for the royalist PAM since the party enjoyed broad support on this territory ever since royal advisor Fouad Ali el Himma led the party to victories for the PAM in the cities of Tangier and al Hoceima during the municipal elections of 2009.⁸⁰⁵ In fact, PAM candidate Fouad el Omari worked as mayor of Tangier and president of the city council of Tangier between 2010-2015, was representative of the Moroccan parliament for the Tangier-Assilah circumscription (11/2011-9/2021) and served as a member of the municipal council of Tangier (09/2015-09/2021). His brother Ilyas el Omari even became secretary general of the PAM (01/2016-05/2018) and was president of the regional council of Tangier-Tetouan-al Hoceima (09/2015-09/2019). Even before that, Elyas el Omari was president of the *Association Rif pour le développement et la solidarité* (ARID), an NGO composed of influential personalities of the Rif that worked for „the promotion of material and moral living conditions of the population in the region”⁸⁰⁶ and al Hoceima in particular.⁸⁰⁷ Given the majority of the PJD in the Moroccan national parliament at the time, it is likely that some political forces close to the monarchy had a strategic interest in forming a royalist bastion in the north. After the parliament adopted the regionalisation reform, the retailoring paid off in the subsequent regional elections, yielding the PAM as winners in the new Tangier-Tetouan-al Hoceima and the Oriental regions.⁸⁰⁸ This is even more notable since the overall results of the regional elections showed the PJD as the winner, with the PAM in second place. On the municipal level, the PJD won major cities, including Rabat, Marrakesh, Fès, Casablanca, and Tangier, but the PAM won the majority of the municipalities. In the wake of the elections,

⁸⁰⁵ Jaabouk (2014b). Similar declaration had already been made during the IER process, cf. Nahhass (2017a).

⁸⁰⁶ Farissi (2010).

⁸⁰⁷ MAP (2004a).

⁸⁰⁸ Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima region: PAM (18 seats in the regional council), PJD (16 seats), PI (7 seats), RNI (7 seats), USFP (5 seats), MP (4 seats), PPS (4 seats) and UC (2 seats). Oriental region : PAM (16 seats), PJD (9 seats), PI (9 seats), MP (5 seats), RNI (4 seats), USFP (4 seats), UC (2 seats), Al-Ahd Addimocrati (2 seats). Cf. Maroc.ma (2015).

the Moroccan regime used the opportunity to capitalise on the election results by emphasising the stabilising effect of the monarchy. The MAP, for instance, praised the successful organisation of regional and local elections and emphasised the king's agency before all government efforts or the democratically elected parties. King Mohammed VI was commended for his visionary and inclusive governance style, which is conscious of the nation's culture and history and enabled Morocco's exceptional development path to become a fully democratic country. As such, it is also recognised by the role model of democracy, the United States of America.⁸⁰⁹ This reference to the USA shows that the monarchy is keen on having its strategic political choices validated and confirmed by the international community. The parties and democratically elected state representatives are relegated to the second rank, often mentioned not at all. Even though parties and their candidates won the elections, the real victory is attributed to the king – because his vision of the state's organisation allowed him to reconcile the nation with its different cultural and political tributaries, including the moderate Islamists. By overriding the recommendations made by the CCR and the IRES, the monarchy gave political reasoning about state stability and monarchical influence in the regions the priority over cultural considerations that would seek cultural homogeneity. This finding only contradicts the CCR's recommendation at first glance. At second glance, the final re-organisation of Moroccan regions – especially in the northern and eastern regions of the kingdom – was totally in line with the CCR's idea that „the division must be based on homogeneity, taking into account the recognised historical, environmental, cultural and geostrategic (border areas) importance of these regions”. Therefore, „the notion of proximity, as a synthetic modality that includes various components of the definition of a regional area in terms of its history, economy, culture the physical environment, etc.) must be put into perspective [relativisée]” (Royaume du Maroc - Commission consultative de la régionalisation 2011a, p. 33). As we have seen above, the ultimate choice of how to re-design the regions is a rather radical interpretation of the CCR's principle, with *relativiser* (=putting into perspective) coming close to yielding completely to political and geostrategic considerations.

I call this process “Cultural Gerrymandering”. It involves redesigning national territory to curtail existing cultural identities in specific regions for political or security reasons while promoting the people's cultural identification with new administrative entities.

The following chapter will show how the monarchy uses cultural engineering to support these political choices and create new regional identities. The division of the Rif into an oriental and

⁸⁰⁹ Maroc.ma (2015).

an occidental part may, just like in the 1997 regionalisation model, serve to prevent a unitary Rif identity from thriving. Furthermore, the division appears to go hand in hand with the promotion of concurring regional identities gravitating around the respective metropolises Tangier and Oujda. The first argument corroborating this idea concerns the worries which had already been present in the CCR reports and also became visible among other actors in the field. As shown above, the cultural category was perceived as potentially exacerbating cultural particularism and an aggravation of sectarian trends to the detriment of national unity. The second argument involves the half-hearted promotion of specific Rifian culture and identity and the tactics delaying the implementation of measures to preserve the memory of the Leaden Years under Hassan II. The third argument refers to the weight of cultural investments in the newly created regions, which shows a considerable disbalance between the urban poles in the Tangier-Tetouan-al Hoceima and the Oriental region that favours Tangier in the west and Oujda in the east. The middle centres al Hoceima and Nador, in turn, although experiencing continuous announcements of generous projects, still await the execution of the latter and do not receive the same attention. Yet they are included in the splendid narratives about the cultural grandeur showcased in the regional capitals Tangier and Oujda. While the first argument has already been addressed in this chapter, the following chapter will further develop the other two arguments.

6.5.2. Cultural Decentralisation and Royal Backdoor Performance Monopolisation

6.5.2.1 Symbolic Legitimation: Rif Culture Reloaded or All for the King?

6.5.2.1.1. The Rif: From Cultural Marginalisation to Partial Recognition

The Rif comprises a region in the north of Morocco stretching more than 300 km along the Mediterranean coast from Tangier in the West to Melilla in the East. The region is marked by moderately high mountains whose highest point is reached at the Jebel Tidghine (2456 m), deep canyons and steep valleys with high cliffs. Often, this ridge is presented as a logical geographical reason for the Rif's marginalisation, separating it from the rest of the country like a natural barrier. From the past to this date, this topographical reasoning was supplemented by pretexts that blame the inhospitable nature of the region's population, who are often characterised as brute mountain people with a wild, individualist, independentist and anarchical culture of permanent resistance (Nahhass 2016, 238f.). This rebellious image was purported during the Spanish occupation in the context of the Rif War: Under the leadership of Muhammad Abdul Karim Khattabi, a Riffian intellectual from Ajdir who was trained at the Qaraouiyyin University in Fès and who had been imprisoned by the Spanish authorities for

preaching sedition between 1916-1917, the Rif people fought the Spanish occupation. After losing large battles against the Riffians, the Spanish had to abandon 5000 square kilometres where Abdul Karim Khattabi managed to implant himself and founded the so-called „Rifian Republic” with a government, currency and administration as well as compulsory conscription of its own (S. G. Miller 2013, 105ff.).

France joined the fray when the Riffian forces expanded to the south into the French-occupied lands. Despite some heavy defeats and huge losses, the French eventually succeeded in their counter-push in 1925, relying on heavy armoury, aerial shelling, poison gas and tanks before capturing Abdul Karim Khattabi in May 1926. After years in exile, the latter died some years after the Moroccan independence in Cairo in 1963. Although he may be considered a spearhead of Moroccan nationalism, Moroccan nationalists under the re-instated Alawid monarchy to this date hesitate to credit him and his Riffian fighters for their anti-colonial efforts given their revolutionary spirit „in defiance of the claims of the state” (S. G. Miller 2013, 110f.).⁸¹⁰ While downsizing Abdul Karim Khattabi’s contribution to Morocco’s independence, Moroccan official history emphasises the efforts of Arabophone urban elites to establish a national movement against colonialism (Maddy-Weitzman 2022, p. 144).

In 1955, Sultan Mohammed V returned from exile and, in both alliance and competition with the Istiqlal party, he became the beacon of Morocco’s nationalist strife for independence, which was reached a year later. In 1957, however, a new independence group called Popular Movement took shape in the North among the Riffian Amazigh under the leadership of Mahjoubi Aherdane, who „felt alienated from the left-leaning, urban-centred and seemingly Istiqlal-dominated political process” (S. G. Miller 2013, p. 157). His movement, in turn, was crushed violently by crown prince Hassan, who, as his father’s right hand, had taken control of the newly formed Royal Armed Forces (FAR) and the whole security apparatus. While this intervention against the Riffian revolt earned Hassan the reputation of a capable leader (S. G. Miller 2013, 157 and 162f.), it also represents the starting point of Hassan’s continued discrimination against the Riffian Imazighen. This discrimination reached its culmination point in 1984 during the leaden years of Hassan II’s rule with the violent repression of popular uprisings protesting against high living costs and the raising of study fees for students (Aixelà-Cabré 2022, p. 192; Nahhass 2016, p. 249).

⁸¹⁰ For details on the colonial legacy of the Spanish and French protectorate and interventions in the Rif also see Aixelà-Cabré (2022) and Wyrzten (2014).

In the wake of the 1984 uprisings, the stereotypes against the Rif people were accentuated when King Hassan II stigmatised the Rif people with new clichés about stealing and smuggling. While the local people assimilated some of the stereotypes about their allegedly rebellious and fighting nature, they rejected others, such as stories about drug trafficking and political violence. However, the growing population of the Rif had increasingly changed the local economy during the 19th and 20th centuries. Many formerly self-sufficiently producing peasants now turned to illegal sources of revenue and started to grow cannabis weed. Despite a prohibition edict being in place since 1954, Morocco is today the world's biggest cannabis producer, even satisfying up to 80% of Europe's weed demand (Nahhass 2016, 240f.).⁸¹¹ In the slipstream of these events and against the backdrop of ongoing discrimination and marginalisation, many Riffians left the region, migrating to other countries, mainly in Europe. The exchange with the Amazigh diaspora living abroad helped forge a strong Amazigh identity (Silverstein 2011, p. 73). After King Hassan II's death, the monarchy presented King Mohammed VI's coronation as a fresh start, turning the page of the former king's authoritarian ruling style. This was symbolically underpinned by the king's visit to the Rif only two months after his enthronisation in 1999, the first journey to the region since Mohammed VI's grandfather had travelled there in 1959. King Mohammed VI countered the politically dangerous feeling of frustration in the Rif and among the Amazigh population. For instance, the „king's initial visit also included a meeting with Abdelkrim's son, who flew in from Cairo for the occasion. By acknowledging the legacy of Abdul Karim Khattabi, Mohammed VI was obviously keen to emphasize that the Rifian Berbers were an integral part of the Moroccan fabric—and thus expand the boundaries of collective Moroccan identity – all the while making sure that the monarchy remained the central axis of the Moroccan polity and society” (Maddy-Weitzman 2012, p. 145). Mohammed VI ensured that the same spirit of renewal was perceivable throughout his actions in the first years of his rule. As we have seen above, in October 2001, he pronounced his Ajdir speech, creating the Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture (IRCAM). By choosing Ajdir, the birth town of ‘Abd al Krim, as the location of the speech, the king conveyed a strong symbolic signal that he „recognised the ancestry of the Riffian community in the Moroccan Amazigh body politic, while at the same time, sending out a message of peace to counter the region's troubled past within the state framework of the state” (Aixelà-Cabré 2022, p. 195).

⁸¹¹ Updated data on cannabis production in Morocco can be found on EUDA (2023) and UNODC (2022).

If analysed closely enough, the fresh start revealed a repeat of the old pattern of reparation, which focuses on merely economic programmes that left aside the identity- and culture-related aspects of the Rif's marginalisation. Also, under Mohammed VI, Moroccan schoolbooks and official events commemorating Morocco's struggle for independence continued to largely ignore the role of 'Abd al Krim while strongly emphasising the leadership of the king's grandfather, Mohammed V (Maddy-Weitzman 2012, p. 145; Pennell 2017, p. 810). The marginalisation and development issues of the Rif region became ever more obvious when, on 24 February 2004, an earthquake struck the region around al Hoceima, causing around 630 casualties, almost 1000 injured, massive destruction in and around the city and leaving over 12.500 people homeless. The protests that started to shake the surrounding villages before spilling to the city of al Hoceima were driven by young, jobless graduates. They were not only concerned with the slow arrival of assistance from the central state but also loudly criticised the lack of infrastructure and basic services that rendered the region an enclave within the country. Furthermore, they demanded employment in state administration that should end the long tradition of deliberate marginalisation by the state (Nahhass 2016, 234f.). The public uprisings caused by the state's absence made the regime react. From 28 February 2004, King Mohammed VI spent several days in al Hoceima. A month later, he pronounced a speech in which he promised a strategy to rebuild al Hoceima, take preventive measures against earthquakes and combat negligence and incompetence in Morocco's public administration.

The recommendations of the IER, whose mission had only started a month before the earthquake and ended its mission in 2006, also paid special attention to the Rif region and other desolate rural and urban places in Morocco. Hence, the state suggested projects that would enable the Rif to generate revenues on its own. As Nahhass has shown, the local people's call for development for the region through the central state was countered by the regime's narrative about the development of the Rif by the Rifians. Willingly or not, however, both currents ignored the historicity of the state's absence, and the region's marginalisation was reduced to a merely economic problem (Nahhass 2016, p. 235). However, among the measures to be taken, the IER also recommended dedicated cultural projects, including – as already outlined – the transformation of former detention centres into memorials as well as the creation of several cultural spaces and activities in the Rif (Kingdom of Morocco -Equity and Reconciliation Commission 2009a, pp. 96–98):

- „the establishment of the Abdul Karim Khattabi Research Centre” within „the former pasha's residence in al Hoceima which will be donated by the town council for this purpose”;

- the renovation and transformation of the house of Abdul Karim Khattabi into a historic monument, to „use it as a history centre to publicize the person of Abdul Karim and as a socio-cultural centre”;
- restoring, renovating and enlarging „the mausoleum of Cherif Mohamed Ameziane in the Municipality of Zghenghen” for him being „the first person to resist colonialism in the Nador region (1910-1912)”;
- „Organizing a national travelling exhibition about Abdul Karim Khattabi”.

At first glance, these projects seem to go beyond the state’s old pattern of perceiving the Rif’s marginalisation as a mere economic one. However, as shown by Nahhass (2017a) and Nahhass and Bendella (2022), the path of transitional justice offered by the IER and its recommendations were widely rejected in the Rif because the IER lacked autonomy vis-à-vis the palace. It also failed to establish the truth about the human rights violations that had been carried out against the region in the king’s name, refusing to hold the perpetrators within the monarchy and the institutions of the central state accountable. Also, no official apology was presented to the Rif people on behalf of the palace. Therefore, it is unsurprising that apart from the national archives hardly any of these recommendations have been (sustainably) implemented.

Nevertheless, we have observed a clear shift of paradigms in Morocco’s cultural investment policy and a revision of the kingdom’s tourism strategy for the region over the last 15 years. In the *Vision 2020* strategy of the Ministry of Tourism (version of 2013), the north of Morocco, with its access to the Mediterranean Sea, clearly focused on classical seaside/beach tourism.⁸¹² A few years later, the *Manuel Professionnel du Tourisme* on al Hoceima had a much more nuanced vision presenting the whole diversity of the region, including the cultural monuments, immaterial heritage, cultural events and an outlook on the future Rif museum (Conseil Régional du Tourisme d’Al Hoceima 2016). The change stands out even more starkly if we focus on the time since the start of the uprisings in the *hirak* in 2016/17: Between 1998-2012, for the whole Taza-Hoceima-Taounate region, the Culture Ministry spent 11,9 million Dirhams in total on cultural heritage including monuments, archaeological sites and museums.⁸¹³ In 2017, within the framework of the al Hoceima development programme, the Moroccan state launched five restoration projects in the al Hoceima province, totalling investments of „highly symbolic” 34,2 million Dirhams, of which 18,2 million Dirhams were provided by the Culture Ministry alone (data from 2020).⁸¹⁴ This coincides with a reorganisation of the Moroccan territory into new

⁸¹² Ministère du Tourisme (2013, 17,18,23)

⁸¹³ Ministère de la Culture - Direction du Patrimoine Culturel and Sbihi (2013, p. 17)

⁸¹⁴ Ministère de la Culture and el Mesbahi (2020, 1 and 4)

regions which, as we have seen in chapter 6.5.1, politically divided the Rif and joined its central and eastern parts in new constellations with other formerly independent regions like the Tangier-Tetouan and the Oriental region.

In October 2015, King Mohammed VI launched the „Al Hoceima - Manarat Al Moutawassit” (al Hoceima – Lighthouse of the Mediterranean Sea) programme, which assigned a huge five-year-budget of 6,515 billion Dirhams to the development of the Rif region. The programme’s title already hints at the ambition to make al Hoceima a model city whose reputation is supposed to reach far beyond national borders and radiate across the Mediterranean. As laid out in a royal message pronounced in the context of the 2011 uprisings,⁸¹⁵ the city is to become a showcase of Morocco’s democratic and inclusive path to modernity. The programme stipulates executing 1.088 development projects, mainly to improve the region’s infrastructure and upgrade agriculture. Next to refurbishing streets, building hospitals and housing, and providing desalination stations, the state also planned cultural projects, including a Grand Theatre in Hoceima, as well as the renovation of existing mosques and the construction of new ones. To finance and implement the plans, an agreement was sealed between the responsible ministries and the *Agency for the Promotion and Development of the North* as a coordinating instance. During the signing ceremony in front of King Mohammed VI, Ilyas El Omari, President of the Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima regional council, gave a speech in which he highlighted the government’s achievements ever since the royal speech following the earthquake that hit al Hoceima on 24 February 2004. He also outlined the key elements of the new programme, stressing the participative approach chosen for its execution.⁸¹⁶ Thereby, the regime ensured that the programme would be associated with the king’s name while the responsibility for its execution would lie with the government. This rhetoric hints at the monarchy’s awareness of the need for performance and procedural legitimacy. This construct would become relevant hardly two years later.

In October 2016, the parliamentary elections yielded another victory for the PJD party, which had led the government since 2012. This time, however, Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane from PJD had difficulty forming a government coalition due to huge differences between him and the rest of the parliament. Meanwhile, however, since November 2016, another series of massive protests started to shake the Rif heavily: Mohsen Fikri, a young fishmonger, had died after police confiscated his illegally caught fish and threw it away into a rubbish press. When

⁸¹⁵ Mohammed VI (2011b).

⁸¹⁶ MAP (2015f). Cf. also LesEco.ma (2019c).

he tried to save his catch by climbing into the press, the machine was launched, and Mohsen Fikri was killed. Already in the evening, crowds gathered in al Hoceima to demonstrate against state arbitrariness and discrimination, followed by months of riots against the authorities. This contestative potential came to be known under the name Moroccan *hirak* (= movement in Arabic) and „is often considered by observers to be a continuation of the 20 February Movement, which emerged in Morocco during the Arab Spring and demanded increased political and economic rights and freedoms. However, the 20 February Movement fractured and lost effective influence soon after Mohammed VI conceded to some of its demands by announcing constitutional revisions, which in a July 2011 referendum were approved by 98.5% of the voters. By contrast, the Hirak movement in the Rif has demonstrated a much higher degree of persistence and unity – and this despite more violent repression of its activists by the authorities“ (Wolf 2019, p. 1).

In the wake of the 2016 parliamentary elections, King Mohammed VI dismissed PJD leader and Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane after the latter had failed to form a new government. He mandated PJD cadre Saadeddine el Othmani to find a new majority in March 2017. With el Othmani, the monarch chose an Amazigh as Prime Minister and appointed Abdelouafi Laftit as Minister of the Interior, responsible for the police and other security concerns. Laftit comes from the Rif region himself and, until then, had served as wali of the Rabat-Salé-Zemmour-Zaër region. Also, the new minister for culture, Mohammed Laâraj, originally comes from Nador, a city in the oriental Rif and won the mandate as representative of the al Hoceima region three consecutive times.⁸¹⁷ It is evident that, by selecting officials from an Amazigh and even Rifian background, the monarchy hoped to lift some pressure from the government. This symbolic gesture, however, was not enough to appease the masses.

By the end of June 2017, at a cabinet meeting, King Mohammed VI emphasised his disappointment with the slow progress of the *Al Hoceima - Manarat Al Moutawassit* programme and declared that most of the responsible ministers – including culture minister Mohammed Laâraj and Habous minister Ahmed Toufiq – were deprived of their right to summer holidays.⁸¹⁸ This royal wrath continued in October 2017, two years after the *Al Hoceima - Manarat Al Moutawassit* programme launch, when the *Cour des Comptes* handed over a report to the king, which the latter had mandated in summer.⁸¹⁹ This report examined the performance of the government institutions in implementing the development plans. The report

⁸¹⁷ Boudarham (2017a) and MAP (2017b).

⁸¹⁸ Ollivier (2017) and Boudarham (2017b).

⁸¹⁹ Cour des Comptes (2017a), Cour des Comptes (2017d).

concluded that if „the examination of the documents and information available to date has not revealed any wrong-doing or embezzlement, it nevertheless allowed to note dysfunctions, both in the preparatory phase of this program, in the development of the Framework Agreement that governs it and in its implementation.” By the end of 2016, only five of 644 projects had been executed (totalling 146,8 million DH), and 45 more projects had been launched (totalling 565 million DH). Against the backdrop of the allocated expenses of 6,515 billion Dirhams over five years, this summary could not convince the auditors. They reported that some signatories of the agreement blamed the late delivery of the framework agreement, the non-assignment of loans to their budget and difficulties in mobilising the necessary real estate. For the court, it was evident that the stakeholders did not show enough political willingness to advance the projects, considering that the delivery of the framework agreement could have been accelerated by using certified copies of the original; also, the government could have unblocked the necessary funds so that the respective departments could fulfil their part of the responsibilities. Furthermore, given the high land prices and the complicated status of many land parcels (especially religious, housing, water or forest), the government did not prioritise mobilising the necessary real estate. Also, some departments, including the ministries for education, health, youth and sport, culture and environment, prematurely rushed to liberate themselves from any responsibility by handing their obligations down to the Agency for the Promotion and Development of the North without the necessary studies ready and real estates being cleared. However, unlike the ministries, the agency was neither prepared nor possessed the required financial or staff capacities.

The monarchy’s reaction to the auditors’ devastating report on the progress of the Rif development programme was swift. On 24 October 2017, King Mohammed VI fired four ministers and prohibited several former officials from ever serving in public office again. Among the latter category was Mohamed Amine Sbihi, who had been culture minister until the government was reshuffled in the spring of 2017. This step did not come completely unexpected. Already in April 2017, the Cour des Comptes published its annual report on the use of public funds in 2015.⁸²⁰ The analysis of the Culture Ministry’s budget use was devastating, noting a high amount of bad governance, reaching from a lack of strategic planning over insufficient accounting to untransparent and unmonitored grants to non-functional culture groups.⁸²¹ If the monarchy had not planned to monopolise the cultural identity sector by then, the report delivered sufficient pretext to disempower the ministry to benefit other institutions more closely associated with the king. An indicator of this is that, contrary to the allegations

⁸²⁰ Cour des Comptes (2017b).

⁸²¹ Cour des Comptes

made by the Court of Audit, the ministry well possessed strategies with a planning horizon until 2020 for cultural productions and the promotion of cultural heritage. Between 2013 and 2015, the Ministry of Culture under Amine Sbihi had been particularly active in taking stock of the ministry's assets and to-dos and clearly articulated the financial needs to implement the strategy. The documents even show that the ministry – long before the start of the *Al Hoceima - Manarat Al Moutawassit* programme – had planned to renovate archaeological and monumental sites in the Rif including al Mazamma, the kasbah of Ajdir, the kasbah and towers of Torres, the kasbah of Snada.⁸²² A few years before, in early 2010, the State Secretariat to the Ministry of Energy, Mining, Water and Environment had commissioned a report on the state of the cultural heritage in the central Rif region to assess its potential in the context of a sustainable development programme of the region's coastal area. The authors drew a devastating picture of the cultural monuments in the region, of which none was listed or classified on national heritage lists by then. They were, therefore, almost all subject to a high risk of degradation due to a complete lack of political interest to make the sites a vehicle of development or income generation for the region (El Arbi er Bati & Drocourt 2010).

Conversely, the Culture Ministry's appreciation for the sites a few years later constitutes a paradigm change following the 2011 popular uprisings and testifies to the ministry's sincere interest in preserving the sites. Yet, the ministry still lacked funding to execute its plans to restore the cultural heritage in the region and on a national scale. In diagnosing the state of Moroccan cultural heritage, the minister and his staff clearly explained the problems in maintaining the sites. As shown in chapter 6.2.1.1., they criticised the fact that the Moroccan legislation regulating cultural heritage protection was not adapted to the requirements of modern times. Furthermore, they pointed out a lack of personnel and financial resources and awareness of the importance of national heritage.⁸²³ Concerning the cultural heritage in the Rif region, an agreement on the modalities of financing and executing the necessary renovation works was only reached in January 2017, involving the Ministry of Culture (18,2 million Dirhams) and the Ministry of the Interior (16 million Dirhams) as well as the governor of the Al Hoceima Province and the director of the Agency for the Development of the North.⁸²⁴ This shows that for almost two years into the development programme for the Rif region and over three years after the Ministry of Culture had already requested more money to finance the

⁸²² Ministère de la Culture (2013 (version of 2014), 76f.). Also the programme of the conference on Rif heritage which had taken place under royal patronage in 2011 already dealt with the sites of Mazamma, Torres al Qala and the kasbah of Snada. Cf. Royaume du Maroc (2011c).

⁸²³ Ministère de la Culture - Direction du Patrimoine Culturel and Sbihi (2013, p. 29)

⁸²⁴ Ministère de la Culture and el Mesbahi (2020, p. 4)

renovation projects, other priorities prevailed. Only when the protests in the Rif began to boil up again in 2016/2017, a supplementary budget was allocated. This is more circumstantial evidence that the government – and the completely underequipped Culture Ministry – functioned as a scapegoat for the monarchy whenever there is a need to deflect the blame from the king.⁸²⁵

Therefore, analysing the monarchy's wrath only as a response to the Court of Audit's reports would certainly be a shortcoming. It rather must be read against the backdrop of the *hirak* in the Rif region, which continuously exerted pressure on the government, resulting in violent confrontations between the state's security forces and protesters. As Wolf (2019, p. 4) observed, the demonstrators used historical references as a mobilisation tool by framing „their activism in terms of the region's identity and the specific legacy of rebellion, which bolstered the coherence and unity of their movements. For example, activists flew the flag of the Rif Republic alongside the multicoloured Amazigh banner, and sang songs in honour of" Abdul Karim Khattabi. The demonstrations had grown even stronger when one of the most prominent leaders of the rebellion, Nasser Zefzafi, was arrested after he had created the scandal during the Friday prayers of 26 May 2017 in the Mohammed V Mosque in al Hoceima (see chapter 6.1.2.2.). To mitigate the protests, the regime resorted to carrots and sticks. While the protestors were discredited as nihilists and negativists and while they were accused of secession (Wolf 2019, 4f.), firing the Rif officials was a way to soothe public anger. As Hibou and Tozy (2020, 254f.) argue, the legitimacy and legality of the king's wrath, which sealed the political death of several officials, have never been questioned by the press nor other public commentators. According to Hibou and Tozy, the royal „earthquake" – the arbitrary dismissal of the officials – has been normalised and naturalised as an institutionally anchored political solution like any other. The royal „malediction" has become more than symbolic violence. Through public acceptance (even by the affected individuals), it takes quasi-legal status, rationalising and institutionalising imperial violence.

One and a half years after the imprisonment of Nasser Zefzafi, in July 2018, King Mohammed VI visited al Hoceima for the 19th anniversary of his accession to the throne. The fact that he pronounced his anniversary speech from al Hoceima was intended as a gesture of reconciliation and appeasement with the Rif. In his speech, Mohammed VI made a strong patriotic call for national unity and solidarity under his leadership in times of chaos. Alluding to the turmoil in the Rif and the threats to stability, he called for a shared effort to advance the nation's

⁸²⁵ As we have seen above, this interpretation is also corroborated by Interview, Cultural policies, 5, reporting on the circumstances of royal wrath.

development through reforms in the education and economic sectors building upon Morocco's "immutable values" of which he is the depositary:

Dear Citizens,

At all times and in all circumstances, Almighty God has blessed Morocco with **unity and cohesion** throughout its long history.

The commemoration of Throne Day, which today marks the nineteenth anniversary of my accession to the throne, is testament to the allegiance binding me to you, and to the mutual covenant between us to remain forever **faithful to Morocco's sacred, immutable values and to make whatever sacrifices are needed for its unity and stability.**

This **covenant between the kings and the citizens of this nation** was, and still is, similar to an impregnable fortress protecting Morocco **against the schemes of enemies and against various threats.**

It has also enabled us to overcome difficulties and to make a great many achievements in a climate of unity, **security and stability** – achievements we are proud of.

Morocco is our motherland; it is our common home. We must all safeguard it, protect it and contribute to its development and progress.

True patriotism enhances **unity and solidarity**, especially in testing circumstances.

Moroccan patriots are not affected by the vicissitudes of life, however harsh they may sometimes be. These hardships **enhance their faith** and increase their resolve to **tackle difficulties and rise to challenges.**

I am confident that Moroccans will not allow the advocates of chaos and nihilism or the peddlers of misconceptions to exploit certain deficiencies in order to encroach upon Morocco's **security and stability** and belittle its gains and achievements.

They realize that **when chaos and subversion spread** in the land, the biggest losers are the homeland and the citizens.

We shall continue to **move forward together and work hand in hand** to overcome transient as well as objective hurdles and bring about conditions that allow us to continue **implementing development programs and projects, create jobs and provide for a dignified life.** [...]

In fact, we cannot **rise to challenges and fulfil our aspirations** unless we are united and committed to **solidarity and stability**, have **faith in our common destiny** - in good times and bad - and embrace the **spirit of genuine patriotism and responsible citizenship.**

Given the developments currently taking place in our country, we do need to remain **committed to our longstanding religious and national values.** We should **remember the sacrifices made by our forefathers** so that Morocco could remain a **united, sovereign and dignified nation.**

I cannot, in this regard, but honor, with deep **reverence, the memory of Morocco's valiant martyrs**, particularly my **venerable grandfather**, His Majesty King Mohammed V, and my **revered father**, His Majesty King Hassan II. May they rest in peace.⁸²⁶

In this speech, the king alluded to the legacy of sacrifices committed by former generations who created the Moroccan state and built its unity on a shared religious and moral fundament that is still valid today. The sovereign thereby appeals to a feeling of transgenerational and quasi-sacred responsibility to maintain the longstanding pact of allegiance between the monarchy and the people. This royal intention for appeasement in the Rif was underlined by the symbolic gesture that King Mohammed VI welcomed Aicha Khattabi to the Throne Day reception. A few weeks before, this daughter of the late independence fighter Abdul Karim Khattabi and

⁸²⁶ Mohammed VI (2018).

„national” hero from the Rif had sent a letter to the sovereign asking for a mild treatment of the detainees.⁸²⁷ In a widely reported statement at the Throne Day reception, she recalled the king’s early steps to reconciliation with her father and brother in 1999, i.e., the first days of King Mohammed VI’s reign. She also publicly declared her conviction that King Mohammed VI paid particular attention to the socio-economic situation of the Riffian population and shared her hope that the king would solve the issue of the detained *hirak* protesters.⁸²⁸ The same day, King Mohammed VI issued a royal pardon to 1204 convicted persons, of whom 899 were imprisoned.⁸²⁹ A few weeks later, 889 persons, including Rif protesters, were granted a similar pardon for the Aid al Adha celebration. However, while everyone expected that, during the royal visit (or the visit’s aftermath), King Mohammed VI would also grant a royal pardon to the leaders of the *Hirak*, Nasser Zefzafi and his companions were excluded.⁸³⁰ This speaks to the state’s effort to strike a fragile balance between showcasing comprehension of the people’s grievances and deterring any potential attempts at upheaval. As we will see in the following paragraphs, this complicated challenge also transpired into the cultural projects that are supposed to boost the visibility of the Imazighen and especially the Rif people.

6.5.2.1.2. The Rif Museum in al Hoceima or How to Obliterate Public Memory

Nahhass (2016, 2017b) noted that the Rif Museum in al Hoceima, which the IER had suggested to create to commemorate the legacy of Abdul Karim Khattabi, „constitutes a textbook case of the denial of the historicity of marginality. How it was conceived makes marginalisation a result of a deliberate strategy. On the one hand, the museum is presented as an unambiguous place of univocal memory, with an emphasis on the rehabilitation and preservation of ‘places of memory’ (Nora); it is not placed within a complex historical trajectory. On the other hand, the problem is set out in terms of ‘reparation’, as a way of attributing responsibility for the marginalization of the Rif to the state and its policy. The museum illustrates three ways in which the marginality of the Rif is narrated. The first treats it as a natural fact springing from the region’s geographical position and/or from the cultural and personal characteristics of its inhabitants. The second turns it into an inevitable outcome of the Rif’s historical trajectory. And the third considers it to be the result of an intentional strategy dictated by the deliberate will of the political authorities to neglect this territory” (Nahhass 2017b, pp. 3–4). Creating a Rif Museum had been a longstanding demand from the civil society in the Rif. The IER

⁸²⁷ Jeune Afrique with AFP (2018).

⁸²⁸ le Matin (2018a); H24Info with MAP (2018a); Kasraoui (2018); Ouilani (2018).

⁸²⁹ bladi (2018).

⁸³⁰ MAP Info (2018).

recommendation adopted the idea, but none of the projects presented by the IER were executed by 2011 when the Rif region became, once more, a major hotspot of popular contestation against the central state in the context of the 20th February movement. The protestors identified with idols of Riffian resistance like ‘Abd al-Krim and constructed a local narrative of Riffian identity calling for the independence of the „Grand Rif” that would reach all along the Mediterranean coast from the Atlantic Sea to the Algerian border (Nahhass 2022). The trans-generational trauma of suffering and marginalisation, as well as the lack of official commemoration about the state’s wrong-doings in the Rif, worked as myth motors, creating a regional identity among the protestors based on common values and spatially organised cultural memory. Analogies were drawn between the events in Tunisia and the deaths of young protestors in the Rif who were elevated to the status of „martyrs” (Karrouche 2017).

On 15/16 July 2011, the CNDH convened an international scientific colloquium in al Hoceima (Royaume du Maroc 2011c),⁸³¹ which raised the question of how to implement the IER’s recommendations and advance the recognition of Rif history. At this colloquium, which was under royal patronage, Mohammed VI had a royal message read out in his name in which he made very clear what role the museum and public dealings with the history of Morocco and the Rif region play in the formation of the country’s identity and the reparation of a collective prejudice (*préjudice collectif*). In the message, the king inscribed the creation of a Rif Museum in the context of the ongoing democratisation of his country. He explicitly referred to the IER recommendations and the new constitution, which he describes as a supreme law „by Moroccans for all Moroccans”. For the king, it was important that the museum pays tribute to „the historical contribution of the Rif’s brave men and women” and that it fosters the „popularisation of the historical knowledge on a regional level, especially among young people and rising generations, so that they can appropriate their centuries-old history with complete pride”. The museum shall become a model for other regions of the country. For him, this ambition is legitimised in the fact that the „advanced regionalisation – of democratic essence, dedicated to development and solidarity, and enshrined in the new constitution – is based on the consolidation of territorial, participatory and citizen democracy, the affirmation of the cultural and historical anchoring of the different regions of our country and the highlighting of the regional and local specificities which are specific to them.” From the monarchy’s point of view, the museum is part of the modernisation of the state along the standards of good governance. It is supposed to allow all regions to unfold their full potential and make their

⁸³¹ Ccme (2011).

cultural heritage contribute to the democratic development of the country. The Moroccan case, for the king, is meant to be a role model for the world for how to deal with cultural diversity and succeed in national reconciliation in the context of transitional justice:

In this regard, we would like to salute the tireless efforts that the National Human Rights Council continues to deploy, in collaboration with its partners, with a view to implementing the recommendations of the Equity and Reconciliation Authority, with their multiple ramifications. Let us cite in particular those linked to the reparation of collective harm, to History and the safeguarding of memory, which are of capital importance in the consolidation of the **singular Moroccan model. A model whose leadership is recognised regionally and internationally in matters of transitional justice**, dedicated to achieving **equity and reconciliation**.

This is why We **reaffirm the need to attach the necessary interest to safeguarding the collective memory of Moroccans. This is, in fact, an essential step in the process of completing a democratic society, the foundations of which we are working to consolidate and preserve the achievements.**

At the same time, it is important to help **Moroccans become more reconciled with their history** and to **transcend the shortcomings of the past** so that they can preserve their present and continue to invest resolutely in the project of democratic reform and global development which We set in motion, thanks to the approval, by the Moroccan people, of the Kingdom's new Constitution during a free and fair referendum.⁸³²

Against the backdrop of the uprisings in the region of 2011, several things emerge from the speech:

1. the spirit of liberal reform in the course of the constitutional process;
2. an effort towards reconciliation and reparation through acknowledgement of injustice suffered;
3. the desire to build a Morocco that is strong because of its cultural diversity;
4. An almost cautionary appeal and reminder that all cultural pride of the Moroccan regions, while legitimately assimilated into advanced decentralisation efforts, must never be corrosive or secessionist but must be at the service of a shared, unified plural Moroccan identity;
5. This identity, united in diversity, must serve to preserve and promote the joint (democratic) state project.

In the following years, this royal vision was cited repeatedly and can legitimately be considered as one of the ideological founding texts of contemporary Moroccan heritage policy. Furthermore, the king's speech is only one of many occasions when the management of marginality – despite yielding little tangible outcomes – helps to promote the king and the institutions under his direct control. The results of the 2011 conference on the future Rif Museum were published in a book by the Croisée des Chemins. To put flesh on the bones of

⁸³² Mohammed VI (2011b).

the Rif Museum project, a partnership agreement was also concluded between the CNDH, the CCME, the municipal council of al Hoceima and the region of Taza-al Hoceima-Taounate. In September 2011, the CNDH convened another meeting to involve civil society in the museum process. The museum aims to honour the region's cultural heritage and deal with the injustices of the *Année de Plomb*. For the realisation of the project, even the EU⁸³³ got involved, and a Spanish company was hired to refurbish the former Pashalik headquarters with its decorations in Moorish style and Art-Déco elements to host the future Rif Museum. By allowing and even encouraging public involvement, the royally endorsed CNDH combined aspects of performance and procedural legitimation. Since 2012, a general renovation of the building has been taking place. Yet, the project soon fell massively behind schedule due to alleged political disputes in the region. Eventually, the Spanish enterprise pulled out when the project got stuck. Then, it was put on hold, and the purpose-renovated building was used as a squat for homeless people in 2017. Overall, the initially allocated budget of 14 million Dirhams dedicated to realising the future Rif museum was insufficient to carry out the necessary works.⁸³⁴ By looking at the findings of Badiha Nahhass (2016, 2017b), we can get a clearer picture of the mechanisms that led to a paradoxical situation where the lack of regime performance ultimately strengthened the monarchy's position.

While the central state represented by the CNDH refused to create a „torture museum” and rather envisaged a place that would examine the Rif history in its globality of which the decades of marginalisation would only represent one element of many other, many local civil society associations pleaded for a different vision. They called for a memorial dedicated to the Riffian struggle for independence under Abdul Karim Khattabi, the events of 1958-1959 and the leaden years of repression under Hassan II. They viewed the state's vision as a deliberate attempt to minimise the accomplishments of the Riffian resistance and to drown local history. Thus, the museum project pitched the regime's common narrative about a shared vision of national history against a strong local Riffian identity, which is defined in opposition to the central state (Nahhass 2016, 260f.).

⁸³³

<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/europeaid/online-services/index.cfm?ADSSChck=1641470939683&do=publi.detPUB&searchtype=AS&zgeo=35582&debpub=&orderby=tit&orderbyad=Desc&nbPubliList=50&page=4&aoref=132864>

Cf. EuropeAid/132864/L/WKS/MA benefitting rehabilitation works for the creation of a Rif museum in al Hoceima.

⁸³⁴ Chabaa (2017).

A second line of conflict lies with the descendants of Abdul Karim Khattabi. In alliance with influential politicians like the former Amazigh activist Ilyas el Omari,⁸³⁵ one part of his family calls for reconciliation and cooperation with the central state involving the repatriation of the mortal remains of Abdul Karim Khattabi from Cairo, Egypt, to Ajdir in Morocco and the museumification of his house in Morocco. With the backing of former political prisoners and leftist activists and students, another more radical part of the family, in turn, considers any cooperation with the state as treason against Abdul Karim Khattabi's legacy. This shows how much the state and local elites struggle with and compete for the interpretation of this heritage and the right to appropriate it for political narratives. Again, these narratives either promote the universalist Moroccanness of Abdul Karim Khattabi's struggle for independence or support a local rebellious Riffian identity that rejects the Moroccan central state (Nahhass 2016, 261ff.). A third line of conflict opposes two diverging opinions on the value of local history. While the nature of the future museum in al Hoceima was slowed down and still controversially debated, another museum on marshal Mohamed ben Belkacem Azzahraoui Mezian, was inaugurated with royal support in May 2006 in Beni Ansar, 12 kilometres from Nador. This former officer of the Spanish army participated in the Rif war, which opposed him to 'Abd al-Krim and left him heavily wounded after the battle of Anoual of 1921. After the independence, he was called upon by King Mohammed V to organise the Royal Armed Forces (FAR) in 1956 before being deployed to participate in the repression of the Rif rebellion in 1958-1959 and being promoted to the highest-ever ranking officer of the Moroccan army by King Hassan II. The trajectory of this marshal of the Royal Army entailed a huge debate about the legitimacy of a museum dedicated to him and his role in Moroccan history. The antagonism with Abdul Karim Khattabi and his role in the repression of the Rif movement upset many human rights activists and local politicians, which eventually yielded the closure of the museum in 2009 in the wake of municipal elections and the installation of a new mayor (Nahhass 2016, 263ff.).

A fourth problem exists regarding the location of the future Rif Museum. State authorities like the CNDH or the mayor of al Hoceima plead for the former Pasha's headquarters in al Hoceima. At the same time, some civil society actors advocate for the former house of 'Abd al-Krim. Others again defend the city of Nador as a future location, considering the connection of this town with the first – yet rather local – rebellion against the Spanish under the leadership of

⁸³⁵ As mentioned above Ilyas el Omari used to be president of the *Association Rif pour le développement et la solidarité* (ARID) and was part of the IER. With his excellent network reaching into the highest parts of the royal palace including the king's advisor Fouad Ali el Himma, he became president of the regional council of Tanger-Tetouan-alHoceima (09/2015-09/2019) before even serving as secretary general of Fouad Ali el Himma's royalist party PAM (01/2016-05/2018).

Cherif Mohamed Amezian (1909-1912). While the latter's camp claims the anteriority of Amezian's movement, the other camp defends 'Abd al-Krim's success in rallying and uniting the Riffian tribes against the Spanish. As stressed by Nahhass (2017b, 23f.), today, „these tribal conflicts are reproduced in terms of tribal hegemony, and more specifically that of the hegemony of the Ait Ouriaghel, referring in particular to the role as relays and approved intermediaries of the government currently played by certain local figures such as Ilyas El Omari [*scil.* president regional council of the Tanger-Tetouan-Al Hoceima region between 2015-2019 and Secretary General of the royalist party PAM between 2016-2018]. These conflicts affect any constructed visions of an absolute, firm, united resistance on the part of the Riffians against the Spanish. They highlight the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of defining what it means to be Riffian and remind us of how the 'illusion of identity' is driven by political dynamics and relations of power that inevitably involve conflict.”

The moderation of this conflict, however, is itself an issue the state has masterfully delayed with the result that no result was achieved. The poor definition of the term „communitarian reparation” produced a fifth problem, located at the level of resource management and symbolic policies. Two coordination committees were established to carry out the communitarian reparation. They comprised the CCDH, local authorities, decentralised state services, and local NGOs. The selection of these NGOs, however, was very much contested as untransparent and discriminating, favouring groups that are either working in the economic development sector (instead of the heritage domain), are alien to the local context, lack local credibility or are on the Makhzen's payroll. Human rights or Amazigh associations that would privilege the preservation of local history were widely ignored (Nahhass 2016, 269ff., 2017a).

Besides pitching these different strands of civil society against each other, managing communitarian reparation in the cultural sector also yielded a conflict between different state institutions. The palace had made sure that authorities that represented the „royal path” would be part of the implementation agreement between the municipality of al Hoceima, the Taza-al Hoceima-Taounate region and the Advisory Council for Moroccans Living Abroad under the leadership of the CNDH. However, the Culture Ministry, i.e. the (admittedly underfinanced) depository of the governmental power, felt overruled. At the same time, the CNDH refused to engage in the management of the museum project on a local level, referring to the local responsibility within the decentralisation process. Considering the lack of implementation of the latter, the Municipality of al Hoceima, in turn, does not have sufficient financial or human resources to take care of the project on its own.

Finally, the untransparent implication of Ilyas el Omari and his brother in decision-making has entailed some protest against this problematic political intervention (Nahhass 2016, 271ff.). This shows how much identity construction is a matter of constant negotiation among state authorities and between the state and civil society. It is not only a competition for interpreting historical events but also about power relations and power distribution in a context where royal institutions coexist with the central government and local authorities. The fuzziness on different levels of the planning process perfectly illustrates the ambiguity with which the monarchy tends to manage marginality, especially concerning identity issues.

While reconciliation on an economic level has been a priority matter, the ambiguity in cultural affairs has enabled the monarchy to play a clock game that will most likely result in a disengagement of civil society with topics which the regime deems dangerous for the construction of a nationalist narrative of a unitary Moroccan identity. This dovetails with Maddy-Weitzman (2012, 141f.), who argued that the „state actively participates in the competition over Abdul Karim Khattabi’s memory as it seeks to control the pace of change and maintain political and social stability”. As we will see, the regime’s hesitant implementation of identity-related communitarian reparation projects proves useful in contexts of new social unrest. Paradoxically, while the reluctance of the state in the matter may ignite such new protests, it may at the same time create more opportunities for the king to present himself as the defender of the people’s will and warrantor of the democratic achievements of the IER recommendations and the 2011 reforms. It allows the monarchy to become active in the matter at moments of urgent need and „neutralize the potentially subversive impact of Abdul Karim Khattabi’s legacy by reframing and thus co-opting it after decades of willful neglect” (Maddy-Weitzman 2012, p. 142). As we have seen already, under the pretext of preserving the legacy of the 20 February Movement, these opportunities even allowed him to take back control from the government, which the monarchy had felt obliged to concede to the elected authorities in the wake of the 2011 uprisings.

Only after the uprisings in the Rif in 2016/2017 did the al Hoceima Museum project receive new attention. In 2019, new partnership agreements were concluded between the Council of the Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima region, the Culture Ministry and the Al Hoceima City Council to revive the project.⁸³⁶ For this purpose, a budget of 60,5 million Dirhams was allocated to finish the project, which englobes 1200 square metres on three floors. In September 2020, after a call for offers issued by the CNDH in August 2020, Abderrahim Kassou was selected as the new

⁸³⁶ MAP (2020c).

architect in-chief (along with scenographer Ahmed Ghazali and historian Ahmed Siraj), an experienced architect who had also realised the interpretation centre for the ancient Roman site of Volubilis and who committed himself to bringing the al Hoceima museum project to an end by 2022.⁸³⁷ In October 2020, in a joint meeting between the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Culture, and representatives of the City Council of al Hoceima and the Tangier-Tetouan-al Hoceima region at the CNDH headquarters in Rabat, CNDH president Amina Bouayach referred to the IER recommendations and echoed the reconciliatory tone of the royal message of 2011 formulating the ambition that the museum of al Hoceima becomes a model for other regions of Morocco.⁸³⁸

In the words of Bouayach, the museum of Hoceima is presented as a lighthouse project which paves the way for a new inclusive and patriotic contextualisation of Moroccan history as a vehicle to create a shared sense of belonging which shall inspire new national endeavours. In 2021, the CNDH launched a call worth 500.000 Dirhams to select an enterprise that could conduct the technical studies and ensure the follow-up on the museum works.⁸³⁹ This appreciation of the Rif region's contribution to Moroccan history was further emphasised when on 11 February 2022, Amina Bouayach, the President of the CNDH, wrote a guest article in *TelQuel* in which she pledged the support of the CNDH in recovering the archives of the Rif Khattabi, thus symbolically emphasising the state's multi-level approach in the reconciliation domain. She explained that it is the CNDH's inherent task to do everything possible to research and preserve the national memory and Moroccan history in all its elements. In her writing, she elevates Khattabi to a national and even international hero (not just one of the Imazighen or the Rif residents). She made the recovery of the archives of this national hero a state mission in the service of human rights and democracy, which have been on the rise in Morocco for some time, especially since the IER process.⁸⁴⁰ According to her, its goals must also be met by promoting the archives of great personalities of Moroccan history. She gave the readers hope that the efforts would be successful thanks to the good Franco-Moroccan efforts and the outstanding partnership importance of Morocco for France. By reviving an old suggestion of the National Archives of 2011,⁸⁴¹ she subtly praised the Moroccan regime and sought to invoke its external

⁸³⁷ Chabaa (2020).

⁸³⁸ O. Bennani (2020b). See also M. C. Alaoui (2020); Chamaly (2020a); Finance News Hebdo (2020); MAP (2020c).

⁸³⁹ Ketti (2021).

⁸⁴⁰ Note that archive work on the Rif crises is a complicated and often tedious issue since, until today, the former colonial powers of Spain and France only reluctantly admit researchers to their archives and actively curtail critical studies that are potentially embarrassing to their nations' honour. Cf. Pennell (2017).

⁸⁴¹ MAP (2011b).

legitimacy. She positioned these state efforts within the context of the planned opening of the Rif Museum in Hoceima, which would promote and preserve the region's intangible cultural heritage and national memory. This valorisation of Morocco's cultural diversity would, in turn, contribute to fostering national identity and social cohesion.⁸⁴² She thus recognised the role of this cultural policy measure for political stability. In the 2022 annual report of the CNDH, the museum building was reported to be entirely renovated and ready to host exhibitions „to contribute to the human development of the region by preserving and promoting cultural heritage resources, supporting historical research, disseminating knowledge related to tangible and intangible heritage, and promoting citizenship among various groups, especially youth.” (CNDH 2022a, p. 113).



Figure 53: The former Pashalik of al Hoceima destined to become the Rif Museum

Once more, the museum was presented here as a means to educate the Moroccan population and make them good citizens. From the discussion of the Moroccan education system (cf. chapter 6.4.5.), we know that the classical values of Moroccan citizenship involve the acceptance of the Moroccan monarchy.

As the author's visit to al Hoceima in May 2024 has shown, however, the Rif Museum has still not been inaugurated over 13 years after the king announced the museum and almost 18 years after the IER recommended the creation of a place commemorating the tormented history of the Rif. Quite the contrary is the case. Prominently situated in the heart of al Hoceima's city centre, the building is still abandoned, and no works are carried out within or around the former Pashalik. The structure still lacks essential components like windows and functioning doors. A

⁸⁴² Bouayach (2022).

construction fence secures the future museum. As an omnipresent token of the Rif people's ongoing alienation from the state, buildings in the whole city, including structures in front of the future museum, feature graffiti and tags that claim the independence of the Rif (Figure 53).⁸⁴³ Even with the COVID-19 crisis being accepted as a delaying factor, it cannot be said that the Moroccan regime manages to live up to its promises.

In fact, on other fronts, the state has managed to deliver quite impressively in the city. The panoramic terraces and open-air sports facilities on the cliffside of the Mediterranean Sea have been neatly executed and are well accepted by the population. Furthermore, like all over the country, oversized and publicly perceivable signs display the national slogan “Allah – al watan



Figure 54: Development projects and royal propaganda in al Hoceima

– al malik / God – Nation – King” (Figure 54). They appear in freshly painted letters and are strategically placed at the entrance and the very heart of al Hoceima. Unlike only a few years ago, the major streets leading to and from al Hoceima through the Rif mountains to other Rif cities like Nador and central Moroccan cities like Fès are freshly renovated and well-tarmacked. In turn, the museum, which is supposed to document the regime's complicated relationship with the Rif and al Hoceima in particular, is continuously delayed, testifying to a lack of political will. It seems like the regime may win its time game to make the population forget its grievances and turn the page over the delivery of other symbolic yet less problematic performances.⁸⁴⁴

⁸⁴³ On the challenge from the streets and the expression of collective memory through graffiti since 2011 see Aixelà-Cabré (2022, 208ff.).

⁸⁴⁴ In Interview, Human rights, 1 conducted with two representatives of the CNDH, this impression was confirmed. Willingly or not, among the elements of communitarian reparation to end marginalisation in the Rif cited with pride by the two officials, the museum was not mentioned at all. By contrast, the construction of roads and the creation of revenue-generating activities or even the creation of cultural centres. One official, herself from the Rif, was convinced that the more urgent demands of the *hirak* in the Rif were of a socioeconomic nature and about

6.5.2.1.3. Rif Archaeology Revisited: Tourism Promotion and Nation Building

While political differences delayed the implementation of the Rif Museum, the kingdom tried to advance on other cultural fronts in the Rif region. Here, the monarch's call for advancing the development of the country and the Rif region in particular was followed by actions. During his visit to al Hoceima in 2018, the king assembled the government cabinet to give instructions for implementing his provisions, as outlined in his speech.⁸⁴⁵ In preparation for his trip to al Hoceima, a delegation of two ministers, including the minister of health and the minister of culture, Mohamed Laâraj, had already been deployed to inspect the progress of the development projects executed under their responsibilities as parts of the *Al Hoceima - Manarat Al Moutawassit* programme. He claimed that the projects realised by his ministry „aimed at preserving the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the province of al Hoceima, and enhancing it to play its role as a pillar of overall socio-economic development”.⁸⁴⁶ By July 2018, the finalisation rate was 70% for the cultural projects worth a total budget of 82 million Dirhams within the al Hoceima development programme.⁸⁴⁷ In April 2019, it was already at 85%.

While Laâraj had emphasised the identity aspect and the economic advantages to be expected from the renovation of cultural heritage as a driver of tourism, all of the restoration projects (Figure 55) have strong story-telling potential since the show-cased histories of the heritage sites may contribute to fostering the impression that the monarchy is historically anchored in

human rights issues. At the same time, she boasted about the very moving use of the Amazigh language in the context of communitarian reparation.

⁸⁴⁵ Lourhzal (2018).

⁸⁴⁶ Maroc Hebdo (2018).

⁸⁴⁷ MAP (2018d).

the region and thus has a historical legitimacy to rule over the territory today.

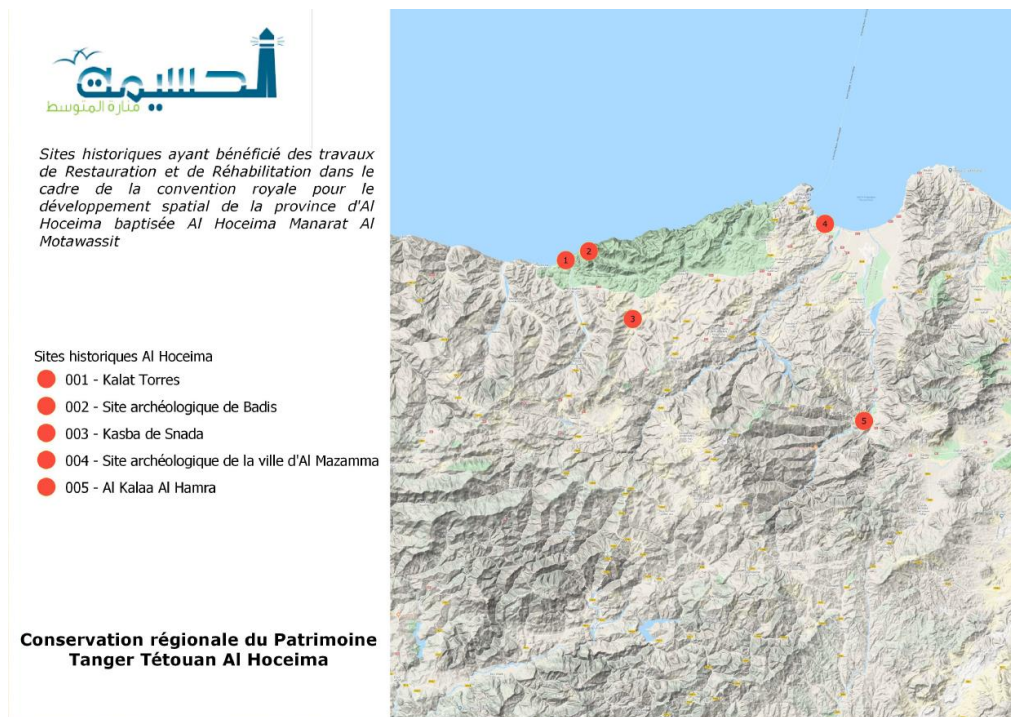


Figure 55: Historical sites to be renovated in the al Hoceima province⁸⁴⁸

According to an article by the national press agency MAP, the Kasbah of Snada was „built by the Saadians to be a fortress of defence and protection of the Rif coasts against Iberian greed, then restored under the reign of Sultan Moulay Ismail to serve as a military base for his armies, has regained its former glory, thanks to a vast operation of rehabilitation and restoration.”⁸⁴⁹ The MAP thus draws a direct line between the region’s glorious past under royal rule and the renaissance of a golden age under Mohammed VI, with the link between the eras being the royal renovation programme for the Rif region. Similarly, regarding the Bades site, the MAP emphasised that the „Almohad sultan Mohammed Ben Yacoub Ben Youssef played a significant role in the city’s prosperity. In the 12th century, he built a wall all around the city to protect it and commissioned the construction of several important components of the city, like the mosque, the kasbah, souks and quarters, in addition to the establishment of workshops dedicated to the manufacture of ships, an industry for which the city was known.” The MAP also quotes the responsible spokesperson at the Ministry of Culture that the ministry’s efforts

⁸⁴⁸ Ministère de la Culture and el Mesbahi (2020, p. 5)

⁸⁴⁹ Moumeni (2020b).

to preserve, protect and touristically promote the Bades site will help the monument to „fulfil its role as a lever for global economic and social development”.⁸⁵⁰

The same strategy is valid for the Kelaat Arbaa Taourirt, an ochre-coloured fortress which had been built in the 1940s by the Spanish colonial administration on a hill near Oued Nekkour and which has been restored for a global budget of around 12 million Dirhams since July 2019. Although the Red Tower Fortress had initially not been part of the cultural heritage file of *Al Hoceima Manarat al Motawassit*, it was added in 2018 by the Ministry of Culture. In the same year, the building was added to the national heritage list⁸⁵¹ to facilitate its preservation and valorisation and contribute to the Rif region’s touristic (hence economic) development.⁸⁵² Despite its colonial origins, it was chosen as „a centre of interest of great importance, both political and administrative, for the colonial administration as for the Moroccan Makhzen and the inhabitants of [the local] tribes to resolve their administrative and judicial problems. Ever since independence until now, this unique Kalaa has become a symbol of cultural identity, an element of the architectural heritage of the Rif and a marker of collective memory.” (Ministère de la Culture & el Mesbahi 2020, p. 46). Hence, once again, we see circumstantial evidence that economic interests are interwoven with the effort to perpetuate the narration of the close historical link between local tribes and the central power of the Makhzen.

As for the site of al Mazamma, the Ministry of Culture decided to classify the traces of the medieval city’s national heritage only in 2017. The town had grown important under the Almohads and Marinides through the commercial exchange with Andalusia. It was abandoned after the fall of the last Muslim empire on the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the 15th century. Later, it was destroyed by Moulay Rachid, sultan of the still-ruling Alaouite dynasty, in 1666 to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Spanish or pirates in the Mediterranean Sea. Of the port city, not much more than some parts of ramparts and bastion remained in an overall completely neglected area, which the inhabitants of Ajdir had ceded to the Spanish during the Spanish protectorate for 40 years to ensure the combat of desertification through the plantation of trees. Since 2003, after the closure of a holiday resort called Club Méditerranée, which had been built in the area in the 1960s, large parts of the local population have suffered from unemployment and lack of income. Many people were, therefore, very enthusiastic when the „Souani Méditerranée” tourism development project was announced in 2009. However, some citizens remained critical and organised in a committee of associations. By organising sit-ins

⁸⁵⁰ Moumeni (2020c).

⁸⁵¹ Faïssal (2019).

⁸⁵² MAP (2020g); Moumeni (2020a).

and publishing media reports, they jointly called upon the authorities to respect the city's inhabitants' ownership of the area and the historic value of the heritage site. In 2009, the civil society initiative eventually convinced the authorities and the project owners to follow their call. Financed by the public-private partnership of the *Compagnie Générale Immobilière* (CGI), the INSAP carried out its first archaeological works in 2010 (Nahhass 2015, p. 46). These works were budgeted for a total amount of almost 11,3 million Dirhams. They uncovered the ancient city walls and re-established the site's dimensions (Ministère de la Culture & el Mesbahi 2020, 33ff.). Renovation works took place then and were finished in 2021.⁸⁵³ They refurbished parts of the old ramparts, a city gate and several other elements of the town. It is curious that although hardly any trace had been left after the abandonment and demolition of the city under the (still ruling) Alaouite dynasty in the 17th century, it was now partly rebuilt under Mohammed VI as a testimony to Morocco's former glory under the Muslim dynasties of Andalusian times (Figure 56).⁸⁵⁴ Benefitting from the overall propitious momentum since the IER process and the renewed public pressure since the Rif protests in 2016/2017, the civil society organisations' confident self-organisation in favour of preserving their re-appropriated cultural heritage made the authorities yield to the public calls. It shows that inclusiveness and participation in public policy-making are possible in Morocco whenever the Moroccan state feels enough pressure



Figure 56: Fenced-off and closed Mazamma site near Ajdir

from local communities and national/international media.

Finally, the medieval fortress of Kalaat Torres, situated within the Natural Reserve of al Hoceima, underwent a first round of renovation in partnership with the European Union until 2017. In the second programme phase, worth ca. 1,8 million Dirhams, accessibility was

⁸⁵³ Yabiladi and MAP (2021a).

⁸⁵⁴ However, as the author's visit to Mazamma has yielded, the site still remains inaccessible for the public. To get there from the next major city of al Hoceima, visitors can take a public bus to the hill town of Ajdir. From there, visitors need to take a taxi or walk for almost an hour to descend to the shore plains where the archeological site is located. While theoretically the site would even feature pic-nic places to invite people to discover the site and shelter from the sun if need be, the area is shielded from the public by a fence and permanently closed gates. While just on the other side of the street, a brand-new luxury resort and apartments alongside a fun park have been constructed, the archeological area appears unused, and the few explanatory signs are already rendered unreadable by the sun as of May 2024. It remains to be seen whether the Moroccan state will manage to make it a lever to economic development in the region.

enhanced until 2019.⁸⁵⁵ In the third round of renovation, lasting until 2022, the site benefitted from cooperation between the Culture Ministry, the US embassy and the Moroccan association GEODE. According to a statement of David Greene, the Chargé d'affaires at the US embassy, published by the MAP, the new investment worth 170.000 USD „will not only help to preserve the heritage of the province of Al Hoceima and promote Amazigh culture and history throughout the world but will also contribute to the province's economic development, thanks to the creation of jobs in tourism and related services". Similarly, Larbi El Mesbahi, the regional heritage curator for Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima, noted that the final renovation project for this monument complements the restoration project for the same site, carried out as part of the „Al Hoceima, Manarat Al Moutawassit" development programme. For El Mesbahi, this project, which has substantial symbolic value for the local population, reinforces the social role of the kingdom's historical monuments and encourages the involvement of civil society in the various development projects, particularly those relating to the conservation of Morocco's archaeological and cultural heritage.⁸⁵⁶ In a US-organised conference on the importance of preserving cultural heritage such as Kalat Torres, the civil society actor GEODE emphasised that renovation of the site was essential to „inspire pride among Amazigh youth in the area". In this context, they regarded the exchange of experiences with the indigenous people of the US as crucial to support economic growth and sustainable development.⁸⁵⁷ This example shows that the regime uses national heritage preservation projects to leverage international cooperation for nation-building purposes. In a context of alienation between the central state and the local population, the implication of international actors like the USA is an important means to achieve economic and procedural co-optation of the local Amazigh communities, which would make them feel like a historical part of the Moroccan nation headed by the king.

Unfortunately, it was impossible for this study to collect sufficient proof to corroborate whether the sites were explicitly chosen for this legitimising purpose or if the choice came naturally since royal monuments can usually be more easily exploited for tourism and have the most significant economic potential. We cannot rule out with certainty that references to the royal/sultanic past of the monuments are just used to help underline their touristic potential and legitimise the allocation of renovation funds. Yet, this theory appears unlikely, given the intense focus on royal genealogy in the touristic presentation of the Hoceima region (Conseil Régional du Tourisme d'Al Hoceima 2016, 22f.). At any rate, there is always a direct reference to the

⁸⁵⁵ Ministère de la Culture and el Mesbahi (2020, pp. 8–14)

⁸⁵⁶ MAP (2021e).

⁸⁵⁷ Kasraoui (2022b); TelQuel (2022b).

royal development project in the Hoceima region, which is particularly important in a troubled protest region like the Rif. The execution of the royal development programme for the north is under the permanent surveillance of the king, who – if need be – demonstrates his determination to make the development programme a success story by taking extreme measures like firing high-ranking officials. By doing so, the monarchy ensures that it will be directly associated with a more integrative rewriting of Moroccan history and the economic renaissance of the Rif region. Deficits in implementing the plans to enhance the visibility of Rif heritage could be explained by the plans' focus, which is more on bolstering the Moroccan monarchy than actually fostering the position of Amazigh and Rif culture in Moroccan identity. To achieve the former, pretending to do the latter is certainly worthwhile. Yet, in times of short news lifespans, cleverly forged messages about initiating or reviving cultural projects are worth much more than a soundlessly running project that no one takes note of.

It appears that reports by the Court of Audit were then used to speed up the finalisation of the project within the development programme. At any rate, a few months after the king's visit to al Hoceima and over one year after firing several ministers from the cabinet and prohibiting former officials from taking public responsibility ever again, the Court of Audit announced another audit round this time concerning the projects under the responsibility of the municipalities and other public institutions „to determine the projects whose construction has not yet started or which have been interrupted due to certain malfunctions. The reasons for these delays and non-performance must be identified.”⁸⁵⁸ Also, newspapers questioned the excuses for the delays and suggested that new „heads could soon roll.”⁸⁵⁹ After the experience of the royal wrath a year before, this must indeed have been the impression and fear among many authorities. Although we cannot tell whether this new audit round was mandated by the king himself, we see nevertheless that the king's attention to the Rif has led the state to make the development programme for the north a priority and forced state institutions to follow up on the projects' progress more closely than before.

6.5.2.2. Divide et Impera: Engineering New Regional Identities in Morocco's North

The political will to use decentralisation to boost local development varies heavily across the country. It is a privileged tool in regions where geopolitical interest prevails over other political considerations. As we will see later, this is especially the case in Western Sahara, where a far-reaching autonomy plan is backed by a generous allocation of financial and human resources

⁸⁵⁸ Mounib (2018).

⁸⁵⁹ Mounib (2018).

as part of the strategy to win the support of the local population and to convince the international community of Morocco's rights to the territory (Bonte 2017; Naïmi 2016). To a far lesser extent, this is also true for the northern regions, especially the Tangier prefecture and some parts of the Oriental region, which had been systematically neglected under the late King Hassan II and which has a reputation for being a spring of social unrest. The following two chapters show how this plays out in the cultural sphere, bearing in mind that decentralisation in other countries is a preferred tool for maintaining territorial integrity while granting rights to self-administration to regions of strong (cultural) identity. Whereas highly symbolic projects in al Hoceima or Nador were delayed or curtailed, other cultural projects in Morocco's north were pushed. This is especially true for the cities of Tangier and Oujda. This is particularly interesting given that politically, the Rif has been divided several times in the past. From 1971 up to the regional reform of 2015, al Hoceima had been the capital of a province of her own, yet the city was now attributed to the province dominated by the international metropolis of Tangier. Other important cities in the eastern Rif, including Nador, were assigned to stay with the Oriental region, of which Oujda is the capital. This leads to a reshuffle of the political weight in the north, yielding an enhancement of the visibility of Oujda in the east and Tangier in the west. At the same time, the Rif is no longer visible politically and structurally. These reforms are supported and underpinned by a strong cultural promotion of Oujda and Tangier. It is likely that, with this kind of „Cultural Gerrymandering“, the cultural identity of the Rif people is intended to diminish to benefit the emergence of new artificial regional identities.

6.5.2.2.1. Tangier as Western Identity Reference in the Moroccan North

In Tangier, for instance, the state shows an entirely different and more coherent approach than in al Hoceima. Since the early years of his reign, in 2002, the king „materialized“ his „reconciliation“ with the Rif „by announcing his intention to boost socio-economic development in the northern region with the construction of ‘one of the largest ports and one of the major seaside resorts of the Mediterranean’“ (Bogaert 2018, p. 81). The new megaproject Tanger Med implemented until today includes the construction of a vast deepwater port to become the largest port in Africa with a shipping capacity of three million twenty-foot equivalent units and a giant passenger terminal capable of transporting over 7 million people a year, 2 million cars and 700.000 trucks. The project reaches deep into Tangier's hinterland, involving the installation of a Free Zone for exports from giant logistical and industrial areas comprising a huge automotive industry of international brands such as Renault (Bogaert 2018, 81f.). Beyond this industrial megaproject, the royal interest in the Mediterranean city also induced a coordinated cultural action of different state actors, including the Culture Ministry

and Mehdi Qotbi's FNM. It helped overcome situations like in al Hoceima where the diverging visions of a multitude of actors led to a complete halt of cultural projects like the Rif Museum (cf. chapter 6.5.2.1.2).

A prominent example is the Villa Harris in Tangier. Like the former Pashalik headquarters in al Hoceima, the Villa Harris had fallen victim to severe decay and became inhabited by homeless people. Still, it had been inscribed on the national heritage list in 2007.⁸⁶⁰ Also, like in the case of the Rif Museum, plans to transform the Villa Harris into an interpretation centre for Tangier's cultural heritage were not implemented. However, the project was revived when Omar Salhi, a gallerist of the Medina Art Gallery, convinced his friend El Khalil Belguench, a wealthy art collector from Tangier, to donate a large part of his collection to a public museum on the condition that the pieces did not leave Tangier. With his idea, Salhi managed to attract the attention of Rabat's MMVI director Abdelaziz el Idrissi, who launched the project together with Mehdi Qotbi's FNM, which recuperated the Villa Harris to implement the concept.⁸⁶¹ From this moment on, the state institutions, including the FNM, the Wilaya of the Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima region, the Agency for the Development of the North (APDN), and the Ministry of Culture worked jointly to implement a new plan which stipulated the transformation of the building into a museum of contemporary Moroccan art. In this context, the Ministry of Culture, with its minister Othman el Ferdaous, was almost limited to mere spectators and eulogists, given the prominence of the FNM and the trust placed in it by the king. El Ferdaous even generously praised the FNM. This event represents one of the first events where a new balance becomes visible in Morocco's cultural policy landscape. By ceding the active part to the FNM and by even actively supporting the FNM's gatekeeper role in the government council, el Ferdaous accepted the prominence of the new royally sponsored parallel structure. For this, he was therefore praised by Mehdi Qotbi as the first culture minister who did not delay the king's „museum revolution”.⁸⁶²

Visiting the new museum, Othman el Ferdaous welcomed the work carried out by the FNM to „arrange the encounter between a collection and a place, an encounter which clearly illustrates the dual function of heritage in Morocco”. From his point of view, the museum is a place of history and memory for the people of Tangier and the whole of Morocco. It is supposed to promote an exceptional place which had been abandoned and make it a component of the

⁸⁶⁰ Chraïbi (2021b).

⁸⁶¹ Salhi (2021).

⁸⁶² Taillandier (2021).

democratisation of culture.⁸⁶³ From this statement, we can deduce that cultural heritage promotion – although also being an end in itself – serves a more socio-political purpose, i.e. the preservation of memory by spreading – or „democratising” – the cultural object. From other statements pronounced around the inauguration of the new museum on 16 March 2021, we can assess the symbolic dimension attributed by the regime to the Villa Harris as a place of memory and the new exhibition it hosts: This dimension is of predominantly patriotic nature: For instance, Abdelaziz El Idrissi, director of the modern and contemporary art museum Mohammed VI in Rabat, made a claim on the historical significance of the exhibition’s contribution which contains a „dense, rich and diverse” journey. For him, the new museum „shows, on the one hand, the hospitality of Tangier and our Moroccan contribution to the genesis of the History of Art, but also that we, Moroccans, were marked by the passage of these artists, who rubbed shoulders with and influenced Moroccan artists.”⁸⁶⁴ It becomes clear that the regime is keen on situating Morocco and its culture within the concert of modern nations that significantly contributed to (Western) art history. For this, it uses the radiance of prominent modern painters like Delacroix, Frank Tapiro, Jacques Majorelle, Claudio Bravo, Edy-Legrand or Jacques Veyrassat to up-grade the importance of Morocco’s modern culture in both the eyes of domestic and international public.

This historicising argument became an important element within a teleological narrative claiming a culmination of Morocco’s civilisational achievements during the reign of King Mohammed VI. For Mehdi Qotbi, the new museum is a tangible outcome of King Mohammed VI’s reign in which culture is an important driver of the “modernisation and progress of the country”. Next to this development perspective, there is a comparative international dimension: „Thanks to this policy instilled by the Sovereign, Morocco is taken as an example in the world,” said Mehdi Qotbi, noting that „culture plays and will play an even more important role than before in the Kingdom’s tourism policy”.⁸⁶⁵ This statement is a telling example of the monarchy’s effort to use cultural policies as a means of regime promotion by combining ideological, international, and performance legitimisation traits. However, the ambition to become a cultural policy model is not limited to this very broad economic development discourse. Rather, it is tied to a clear ideological vision. At the peak of the COVID19-pandemic, Mehdi Qotbi declared that by opening this museum, Morocco was sending „a strong message, a message of hope,” [...] a message of light in a world where the pandemic has established a

⁸⁶³ Senoussi (2021).

⁸⁶⁴ Chraïbi (2021b).

⁸⁶⁵ H24Info with MAP (2021).

constant fear of tomorrow. [...] „Morocco is taken as an example by several countries: it was the only one to leave its museums open while respecting health measures.” Abdelaziz el Idrissi, director of the Mohammed VI Museum for Modern and Contemporary Art in Rabat, added to this that the inauguration of the museum also represented a „message of responsibility. [...] It is a way of saying that, during this period, as difficult as it is, we can visit a museum as if we were going shopping. We come for a moment of freedom, for a quest for beauty, while respecting all the necessary health measures. The permanent dimension of a museum is essential.”⁸⁶⁶ These statements underline that the inauguration of the Harris Villa was used in a situation of global distress and worldwide curfews and lockdowns to make a point about Morocco’s position in the world. The kingdom sees and positions itself – towards a national and international public – as a cultural flagship, as pioneers of responsibility and freedom that have come to understand and acknowledge the essentiality of culture to a decent human life. Adding to this essentialist discourse, another narrative incites citizens to patriotic emulation.⁸⁶⁷

Similarly, Mehdi Qotbi interpreted this donation as „an act of citizenship, altruism and patriotism demonstrated by Mr. El Khalil Belguench”.⁸⁶⁸ Once more, we thus perceive a pedagogic component in the cultural policy. Unlike in the case of the planned Rif Museum in al Hoceima, the Moroccan state did everything to make the new museum in Tangier a lighthouse project within the kingdom’s cultural policy dossier.

6.5.2.2.2. Oujda as Eastern Identity Reference in the Moroccan North

The situation between the Tangier-al Hoceima-couple in the centre-western part of the Rif is paralleled to that of the Oujda-Nador-couple in the eastern part. The kingdom massively invests in cultural policies in the capital of the Oriental region, Oujda, which has also been marginalised for a long time. Apart from huge development projects like the re-valorisation of the Marchica Bay in Nador (Nicolai 2023 (to be published), 258ff.), initiatives to strengthen the distinct Rif-identity of Nador are scarce. One case is particularly telling, namely the creation of the museum commemorating Mohammed ben Belkacem Azzahraoui Mezian, a military figure from the Rif who graduated from the prestigious military academy of Toledo and served under the Spanish in colonial times. On the Spanish side, he fought the upheavals in the Rif led by Mohammed Abd al-Krim and even saved Franco’s life in a battle, which later earned him the rank of captain general. After the Moroccan independence, King Mohammed V called him back to Morocco to help him organise the Royal Army and oppress the Rif revolts in 1958-59 before Hassan II in

⁸⁶⁶ Chraïbi (2021b).

⁸⁶⁷ O. Bennani (2021).

⁸⁶⁸ TelQuel (2021b).

1970 made him marshal of the Moroccan army, the highest grade ever awarded in Moroccan military history. In 2006, his daughter inaugurated a museum in the village of Beni Ansar, situated about 12 km outside of Nador, to commemorate her late father. The inauguration ceremony benefitted from the high royal patronage of King Mohammed VI. It occurred in the presence of the king's brother, Moulay Rachid, government members and the Spanish ambassador. Despite this initial sponsorship, however, the museum remained ephemeral. In 2009, Yahya Yahya, the new mayor of Beni Ansar, revoked the funding agreement, which, so far, had ensured the museum's existence and financed the seven civil servants who took care of it. The shut-down of the museum was explained by a unanimous vote of the municipal council, which regarded the commemoration of a collaborative figure like Mezian as a disrespect to other local heroes like Mohammed 'Abd al-Krim (Nahhass 2016, pp. 264–266).

In turn, one of the rare examples of relative continuity in Nador's cultural policy is the royal donations to the shorfas of the zaouia of Cherif Mohamed Ameziane in the Nador province. This Zaouia is linked to a mausoleum dedicated to this Riffian resistance fighter who was killed by the Spaniards in 1912 and later buried in Zeghanghan near Nador. Such donations were attributed by a royal commission and repeated under Mohammed VI at least four times, namely in 2008⁸⁶⁹, 2010,⁸⁷⁰ 2014,⁸⁷¹ and 2019.⁸⁷² Recently, these donations have often been associated with a commemoration ceremony for the late King Hassan II and have always come with public prayers for King Mohammed VI, his family, and his ancestors. These ceremonies are held in the presence of local authorities, politicians and spiritual dignitaries and always serve as an opportunity to reassure each other of each other's appreciation. While the king expressed his gratitude for the role of the shorfas in fighting for Morocco's independence, the shorfas publicly recognised the monarch's role as *amir al mouminine*. They reassured the monarch of their fidelity and loyalty, emphasising the king's legitimacy in the eyes of local elites and a larger public.

Apart from these moments, cultural policies take mainly place on a superior level, namely in the regional capital, Oujda. In July 2014, King Mohammed VI inaugurated a new theatre in Oujda with a capacity of 1,200 seats,⁸⁷³ which was built upon 6500 m² for a global budget of 80 million Dirhams. The project was the fruit of the Royal Initiative for the Development of the

⁸⁶⁹ Aujourd'hui le Maroc (2008a).

⁸⁷⁰ MAP (2010a).

⁸⁷¹ MAP (2014a); MAP Express (2014a).

⁸⁷² Hespress (2019b); I.L. (2019).

⁸⁷³ Groupe AL OMRANE (2014).

Oriental Region. It was carried out within the framework of a partnership agreement between the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Culture, the municipal council of Oujda, and the AlOmrane Group. The royal initiative prides itself on providing „the region with the basic facilities it needs and consolidating the age-old city of Oujda in its pioneering role as the region’s capital”. This shows that Oujda is supposed to fulfil a leading position in the region and that cultural initiatives like constructing the new theatre in Oujda are designed as lighthouse projects representing the rest of the region. It is also supposed to showcase the strong link between the people inhabiting the region and their king, who cares for their needs. Another quote of the MAP exemplifies this attempt at performance legitimization: „The new theatre, which the Sovereign has endowed with His august name, is an excellent socio-cultural space, and will undoubtedly improve access for the local population to cultural and artistic facilities, with all that this entails in terms of developing intellectual potential and creative abilities.”⁸⁷⁴ By emphasising the age of Oujda, the regime sends a signal of recognition to the local population, a signal of recognition for the status the city deserves and for the local cultural heritage. This act of appreciation is supposed to be read as a turning point in the relations between the region and the monarchy, breaking with the tradition of neglect and marginalisation that prevailed under the predecessors of King Mohammed VI: Within boundaries defined by the monarchy, the kingdom grants a right to local patriotism by saying that, with the theatre named after him, Mohammed VI is giving the city back the place it deserves due to its historical importance. This local patriotism has been nourished by similar narratives and enhanced by international comparisons since 2017.

On 30 November 2017, the Permanent Commission for Arab Culture of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALESCO) decided that Oujda would be the Arab Capital of Culture from 13 April 2018 to 29 March 2019. In this regard, Hussein Bouhssine, administrator of the Mohammed VI Theatre in Oujda and graduate of the Institut d’Art dramatique et d’animation culturelle, emphasised that „the Mohammed VI Theatre, the largest of its kind in Morocco, has nothing to envy the famous international theatres, adding that this building is a source of pride for the Oriental region in general and the town of Oujda in particular.”⁸⁷⁵ Once again, we see that the Oujda was presented as a representative for the whole Oriental region, which incorporates large parts of the Rif, and that a sense of local pride (*orgueil*) and patriotism was promoted by the state and its representatives. According to then-culture minister Mohammed Laâraj (himself from Nador) „the programme for this major event,

⁸⁷⁴ MAP (2014c).

⁸⁷⁵ Lqadey (2018).

which is being held under the banner of ‘Oujda, the thousand-year-old symbol of Arab culture’, aims more specifically to highlight the richness of Morocco’s cultural and civilisational heritage, through cultural activities of national, Arab and international scope, organised by the Ministry of Culture, ministerial departments and other institutions”. For him the „programme [...] provides an opportunity to pay tribute to the colossal investments and efforts made to strengthen the basic infrastructures, particularly cultural, in the Oriental region, and also to make the city of Oujda a preferred destination for Arab cultural action and the great figures of culture and art.”⁸⁷⁶ In this announcement, the diversity of Morocco’s culture and – more precisely, of the Oriental region – were described as almost unitary (or united) in concert with other nations’ cultural expressions. The identity of the Oriental region was defined as mainly Arab, and the strong Amazigh identity components dominant in the Riffian parts of the region are submerged. Of course, the monarchy did not miss this opportunity to capitalise on the international attention for its purposes.

The fact that Oujda and its theatre are supposed to become not only a national but international lighthouse for Moroccan culture aligns with the idea of branding the kingdom as a beacon of culturally informed modernity whose cultural infrastructure only mirrors the civilisational achievements of the king’s land. During the inauguration of the one-year programme in Oujda, Morocco’s culture minister Mohammed Laâraj, in the presence of national elite and international guests like the Director General of the ALESCO, Saud Hilal alHarbi, confirmed this interpretation. The MAP reported how he set the new infrastructure in context with Morocco’s civilisational values and cultural diplomacy efforts: According to Laâraj, openness, tolerance, and fraternal coexistence are all part of the kingdom’s cultural rationale to achieve “peace, stability, and development in the world”, promote social cohesion and combat extremism and exclusion, both in Morocco and around the world.⁸⁷⁷

This is most likely not aleatory. While it for sure aligns with the general image the kingdom loves to convey to the outside, it is also a signal of comfort to the people at home. To understand this, we have to recall the region’s history of marginalisation and the context of moving the Arab Capital of Culture to Oujda. Initially, after the Egyptian city of Luxor, the title for the Arab Capital of Culture was supposed to be attributed to Bessorah in Iraq, while Morocco would have had to wait until 2024. However, according to sources in the Moroccan Ministry of Culture, in 2017, the Moroccan representative at the ALESCO insisted on shifting the dates and crowning Oujda Arab Capital of Culture already in 2018. While Moroccan officials call this „a victory by itself”, the Culture Ministry was not left with more than two months to prepare a programme which was announced to host over 910 activities and welcome about 1200 intellectuals and artists.⁸⁷⁸ Hence, by the time of the event’s inauguration (and even weeks

⁸⁷⁶ MAP (2018b).

⁸⁷⁷ SB and MAP (2018).

⁸⁷⁸ MAP (2018b).

later), the programme was not even ready, let alone published.⁸⁷⁹ While no final evidence can be delivered to elucidate the motives behind the spontaneous initiative to have the Arab Capital of Culture move to Oujda, the decision coincides with the social unrest in the kingdom's northeastern territories. As we have already seen, the region of the north (especially the Rif) was shaken by the demonstrations of the *hirak* since the death of the fishmonger Mohsen Fikri. Also, the Oriental region was in turmoil these days. In November 2017, only a few days ahead of the kingdom's diplomatic initiative to move the Arab Capital of Culture to Oujda, Algerian media reported about thousands of mainly young demonstrators taking to the streets in Oujda to protest oppression and the state's failure to tackle unemployment, marginalisation and social misery. The demonstrations allegedly followed the murder of a motorcyclist killed by a regional notable that the authorities were said to protect from persecution.⁸⁸⁰ A few weeks later, in December 2017, the surroundings of Oujda were once more the stage of strong protests following the death of two miners who lost their lives in an illegal coal pit in Jerada, only a few kilometres from Oujda. By re-using the slogans employed by the protestors in the Rif, thousands of demonstrators denounced the marginalisation and injustice of their city.⁸⁸¹ Now, by putting the programme's inauguration ceremony under the king's patronage, the event enjoyed a special royal halo and a particularly official character. The king's representative, the wali of the Oriental region and governor of the Oujda-Angad prefecture, Mouad El Jamaï then, also praised the role of the king by stressing the profound transformation his region had undergone thanks to the royal development initiative that was started in 2003.

For his part, Mouad El Jamaï, Wali of the Oriental region and Governor of the Oujda-Angad prefecture, emphasised that the Oriental region has undergone a profound change in all areas **thanks to the Royal Initiative for the development of this region**, launched in 2003.

He added that the city of Oujda, which **boasts a wealth of cultural treasures and an immense intangible heritage**, is proud to contribute to the **promotion and influence of Arab culture** against the backdrop of the challenges dictated by globalisation, thanks to its geographical position as a **gateway to the Greater Maghreb, a bridge between Morocco and the Mediterranean basin, and a leading city on the African scale**.⁸⁸²

This quote shows how the image of Morocco as a civilised country within the concert of nations is strongly associated with the monarchy. The king is presented as the harbinger of development. By bringing up the transnational importance of the Oriental region, the wali not only referred to the context of his speech during the inauguration ceremony for the Arab Capital of Culture; instead, the wali's statement alluded to a royal speech in the Oriental region in 2003,

⁸⁷⁹ Chabaa (2018b).

⁸⁸⁰ S.S. (2017).

⁸⁸¹ Barzegar (2017); bladi (2017); Jeune Afrique with AFP (2017).

⁸⁸² MAP (2018b).

where the king announced that he would end the marginalisation of the region and promote its development through various projects. Like back then, the new initiative also appeared to be embedded in the effort to combat centrifugal forces and consolidate the country's social cohesion. As the following excerpt from the royal speech of 2003 shows, King Mohammed VI emphasised his strong connection and allegiance with the people of the oriental and, like nowadays, he aimed at strengthening their local patriotism within the broader picture of Moroccan nationalism. He attributed a geopolitical role to the people in the Oriental region, which the latter need to fulfil given their neighbourliness with Algeria:

As We met the driving forces of this region that is so dear to Us, We are delighted to tell its inhabitants **how touched We were by the warmth of the welcome and the loyalty of the allegiance they have shown Us. Their pride and patriotism have made this region an impregnable bulwark, providing the Moroccan State with protection and immunity throughout its glorious history.**

The fact that We were able to enquire about your situation on the spot gave Us a close-up view of your pressing needs and real concerns, which are at the heart of Our concerns and to which We are particularly attentive.

To give practical expression to Our great concern for this region, which has great potential and highly motivated, industrious human resources, **We have decided to launch a Royal Initiative for the development of the Oriental Region.** This four-pronged initiative aims to stimulate investment and encourage the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises by young people.

[...] We urge the region's driving forces to take a greater interest in promoting their region and to get involved in the collective effort of solidarity-based development that We are leading to **combat poverty, marginalisation and all hints of extremism**, which, incidentally, has no place in a society such as ours, which is distinguished by its **authenticity and its openness towards other civilisations.**

We are therefore counting on you to turn this initiative into a pact sealed between us, so that this region can rise to the place of choice to which We want to see it accede, in accordance with its vocation as a Maghreb pole, and **the role it deserves as a solid bridge of good neighbourliness and sincere fraternity with the brotherly Algerian people, to whom the ties of history, the challenges of the present and the aspirations of the future unite us**, and to whom we wish the greatest good.

Through these ambitious projects, We firmly intend to provide Our beloved homeland with an increased capacity to **consolidate its strength and immunity**. Indeed, these must remain at the heart of our concerns in a changing world fraught with risks and hazards. This is the path we must follow if we are to move forward resolutely in **building a Morocco that is united, advanced, democratic, supportive and better able to meet all challenges.**⁸⁸³

In this speech, *authenticity* is a powerful keyword. While at first glance, the royal speech might read very friendly vis-à-vis the Algerian neighbours, the notion of *authenticity* has to be understood in comparison or competition with the Algerian neighbours. Narratives of development and democratic governance advancements are supposed to distinguish Morocco from Algeria's autocratic and closed system. They are presented as part of an authentically Moroccan way of life, characterised by modernity and openness towards other civilisations under King Mohammed VI's leadership. The propagated „Moroccan" identity is thus not only

⁸⁸³ Mohammed VI (2013c).

evoked as a moral glue to enhance social cohesion, but they are a marker of political otherness (especially in the border area) compared to Morocco's adversary on the other side of the border. This interpretation of the king's and his wali's words is confirmed by the numerous incidents when both countries openly competed and where culture became the battleground. In recent years, this identitarian power struggle has become particularly obvious in the Western Sahara conflict. The cultural lines of this important conflict will be discussed in the following chapter.

6.5.2.3 On King's Mission: Making Western Sahara Moroccan

Messari (2001, p. 48) convincingly argued that „the Western Sahara has [...] played a crucial role in the survival and further legitimisation of the Moroccan monarchy. In the early to mid-1970s, the issue of the Western Sahara allowed King Hasan II to recover the legitimacy of his rule by adopting an issue that was crucial to the Moroccan nationalist movement, that is to say, the reconquest of the Western Sahara. In the 1980s and 1990s, the King became the almost unquestioned leader of Morocco in the so-called territorial integrity issue, in other words the Western Sahara issue. By the same token the monarch also became the unquestioned political leader of Morocco. The mainstream opposition parties became an opposition to the government rather than to the King's regime. Nevertheless, the price of the King's reformed legitimacy was his reliance on guaranteeing a favorable outcome for Morocco of the Western Sahara conflict. Any failure on his part in maintaining the Western Sahara in Morocco would thus be a threat to

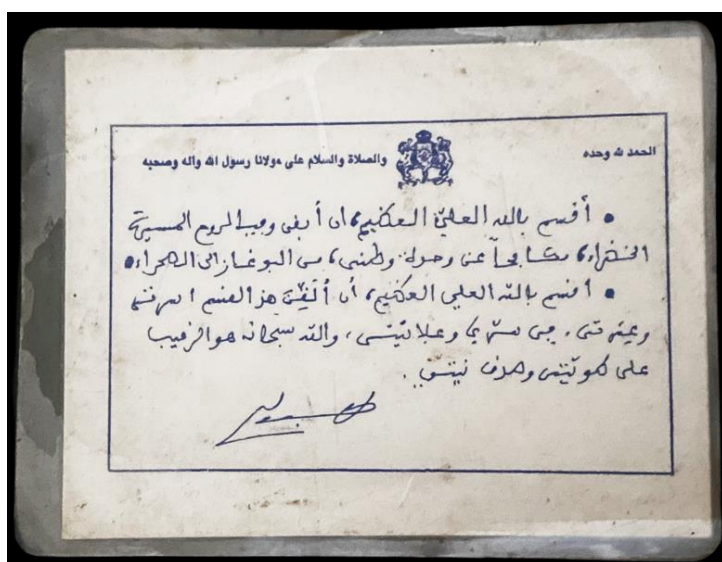


Figure 57: Post card featuring the oath in commemoration of the Green March

his survival as political leader. The legitimacy of the monarch relies to a large extent on the outcome of the Western Sahara conflict.” Ever since the Green March in 1975, the state has invested heavily in perpetuating the national narrative about national unity and territorial integrity, of which the king and his ancestors are the warrantors.⁸⁸⁴ To this purpose, on the anniversary of

⁸⁸⁴ According to sources analysed by Hibou and Tozy (2020, p. 346) the Western Sahara swallows 4,6 billion Dirhams of direct and indirect aid to fight poverty per year, i.e. 50% of the overall national budget, benefitting 34.000 individuals in the region. Also 33% of the national budget to fight unemployment goes to the Western Sahara although only 3% of the total Moroccan population live there. Civil servants in the region are overpaid by 25% to 75% as compared to the rest of the country. The investment budget allocated for the region exceeds the national average by 31%.

the Green March, the monarchy annually has pupils all over the country repeat King Hassan II's solemn oath of the Green March,⁸⁸⁵ which he had pronounced on the 3rd anniversary of the Green March and which had been distributed to every citizen to repeat the oath at home (Figure 57).⁸⁸⁶ It reads as follows:

„I swear on Allah, the Almighty, to stay faithful in the spirit of the Green March, fighting for the unity of my nation, from the Detroit to the Sahara. I swear on Allah, the Almighty, the all-powerful, to teach this oath to my family and my descendants and to make this a profession of faith. May Allah, the all-powerful, be the witness of the sincerity of my feelings and intentions.”

The oath commits every Moroccan citizen, i.e., all the king's subjects, to fight for the nation's territorial integrity from the Strait of Gibraltar down to Western Sahara. King Mohammed VI has always repeated his alignment with his father's legacy and his tireless efforts to continue what Hassan II had begun. While the intensity of actions on the ground has varied over the years, since Mohammed VI's rise to power, the Moroccan state has intensively used cultural policy to strengthen the Moroccan identity in Western Sahara.

6.5.2.3.1. Promoting Hassani Culture by Promoting Moroccan Identity

Mitre (2015, p. 49) rightly argued that the struggle over Sahraoui heritage has become a central element in the conflict about the sovereignty of Western Sahara. One indication of this is the Tan-Tan Festival – a modernised and folklorist version of an old *moussem*, which was initiated in 1963 as a festive gathering of over thirty tribes from southern Morocco and other parts of northwest Africa. Between 1979 and 2004, it was inactive due to security issues before it was resuscitated by the Moroccan state in collaboration with UNESCO.⁸⁸⁷ The resurrection of the festival was rendered possible also thanks to Kitín Muñoz, a Spaniard born in the Southern Moroccan city of Sidi Ifni who works as UNESCO goodwill ambassador and Morocco's honorary ambassador to Spain. Ahmed Skounti, a cultural heritage expert working for Morocco's archaeological institute INSAP, is behind several of Morocco's UNESCO applications. Skounti (2008, p. 87) argued that by 2004, i.e. a few months after the International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in October 2003, the Moroccan Ministry of Culture originally had mandated him with the preparation of a UNESCO application of another *Moussem* in the eastern high Atlas Mountains. According to Skounti, the decision was reversed in September 2004 within only a month following Muñoz's plaidoyer in favour of the Tan Tan *Moussem*.

⁸⁸⁵ See for instance: Groupe Scolaire Al Aoulama (2021).

⁸⁸⁶ This image shows a copy of the hand-written oath distributed by late King Hassan II to all Moroccan citizens. Cf. https://fr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Card_with_Hassan_II%27s_oath_to_the_Green_March.png

⁸⁸⁷ UNESCO (2008).

Skounti considered this policy change yet „another example of an outsider’s view, which met with a political will to reinvigorate a cultural manifestation that was dying out.”

While Skounti cryptically speaks of complicated reasons behind the reversal of the decision (Skounti 2008, p. 87), my analysis of the events yields that, from the outset, the inscription of the Tan Tan Moussem had a geostrategic purpose: Skounti (2008, p. 89) himself admitted that „[g]iven the political situation of the Saharan conflict, applying for the Moussem of Tan-Tan to be declared a masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage, was quite evidently a difficult task. Granted, the application was made well after the 1991 cease-fire, but it nevertheless led to protests by the Polisario and its supporters in Algeria, giving rise to a kind of politico-symbolic competition. UNESCO had to exercise great care when considering an application with an explicit political agenda.” Skounti thus openly stressed the political agenda behind the decision to revive the festival and even apply for a UNESCO label to support it. The Moroccan authorities were aware of the risk but accepted it to land a symbolic coup in the competition with Algeria.

While offering a lot of cultural activities around the 600 traditional tents on a surface of 10 hectares, the first edition of the resuscitated festival, performed in the presence of the king’s brother, Prince Moulay Rachid, also hosted round table discussions on how to develop the region and make „the Tan Tan province and the other recuperated provinces contribute to the national combat and the promotion of the territorial integrity of the Kingdom.”⁸⁸⁸ This implies that the reversal of the Moroccan government’s decision was most likely the result of an evaluation which attributed higher geopolitical potential to the Tan Tan in terms of advancing Morocco’s claims in Western Sahara. The high priority of the Moussem is also underlined by the fact that it was put under the royal patronage of King Mohammed VI.

In 2008, Morocco successfully managed to have the festival inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, which was established the same year, resulting from the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. During the 2010 edition of the Tan-Tan moussem, which was inaugurated in the presence of high-ranking officials of the United Nations as well as ambassadors of the EU delegation and of countries like Argentina, South Korea, China and Vietnam, the director of the Moussem, Ali Karmoun, even went as far as to claim that the participation in the Tan Tan festival of 32 tribes would testify to the attachment of the southern provinces’ population to

⁸⁸⁸ Aujourd’hui le Maroc (2004). See also le Matin (2004).

their Moroccan identity and the territorial integrity of their country.⁸⁸⁹ According to the then-minister of tourism, Yassir Zenagui, the festival would open a new branch of tourism, i.e. the cultural tourism sector, which would help create new jobs in the country.⁸⁹⁰ By then, the Moroccan regime seemed to have good experiences with cultural policies as a geopolitical and development tool in Western Sahara. Hence, later, these experiences seemed to serve as a model on a national scale. Against this backdrop, Mitatre (2018, p. 80) went as far as to insinuate that the Moussem might have been conceived explicitly to receive UNESCO's intangible heritage label and make it work in Morocco's favour.

I would even go one step further. Thomas M. Schmitt (2008) and Ahmed Skounti (2008) both demonstrate with first-hand material that, since the mid-1990s, the conception of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage itself is intrinsically linked to and inspired by a Moroccan case, namely Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo's idea to protect the immaterial cultural heritage of the Jamaa el Fna in Marrakesh. The convention has even been strongly influenced by Moroccan experts like Ahmed Skounti himself and partly developed on Moroccan grounds. Finally, late King Hassan II and „the authorities at the national level in Morocco [...] also contributed to what, at least in the short term, was a success story, by not blocking the UNESCO initiative for the protection of Jemaa el Fna, and even encouraging it. As an intergovernmental organisation, UNESCO could not have taken any action in respect of safeguarding Jemaa el Fna Square in Morocco without the agreement of the Moroccan government” and royal support (Schmitt 2008, p. 103). This means that, from the very launch of the new convention, the highest echelons of the Moroccan state were aware of the potential the new UNESCO convention would bear. This gave the regime the time to think about the convention's practical implications and even concrete next steps.

Against this backdrop, it is noteworthy that the reconciliation process under the IER started its work around the same time. It also investigated state crimes against Sahraoui activists and undertook reconciliation efforts with those parts of the Sahraoui population who had been victims of state violence and marginalisation under Hassan II. At least 13% of the victims heard during the Public Hearings were linked to the „Struggle for the Sahara” (Kingdom of Morocco -Equity and Reconciliation Commission 2010, p. 43). In total, 25% of all registered victims (or 2.256 individuals) came from the Laâyoune-Boujdour-Saqia El Hamra region, 7,3% (or 656 persons) from Guelmim-Es Smara region and 0,9% (or 83 individuals) from the Oued-Eddahab-

⁸⁸⁹ *le Matin* (2010); MAP (2010c).

⁸⁹⁰ ALBAYANE (2010b).

Lagouira region (Kingdom of Morocco -Equity and Reconciliation Commission 2009a, p. 57). While the IER had recommended establishing „a sociocultural centre for the benefit of the young people” in the Sahara region of Tan Tan (Kingdom of Morocco -Equity and Reconciliation Commission 2009a, p. 99), the implementation took very long.

Yet, the sudden policy change that created a small museum of Sahraoui culture in 2011 was no coincidence. It is the consequence of a series of serious confrontations between Moroccan security forces and Sahraoui activists. In September 2010, thousands of disillusioned and frustrated Sahraouis set up a protest camp, including on the outskirts of the Western Saharan city of Laâyoune in Gdeim Izik, calling for jobs and decent housing. Using tents, the protesters employed a textual expression of the Sahraoui culture anchored in nomadic traditions of free movement and political liberty. Since the independence struggle, the tent has become a symbol of dissident mobility against oppressive occupation. Dismantling a tent by force, for many Sahraouis, hence equals the violation of freedom of expression and free thinking (Bonte 2017, 424f.; Boulay 2017). Boulay (2017) shows that the Moroccan state perceived the tent as a synonym for state absence and political disorder. It has, therefore, repeatedly tried to depoliticise this element of Sahraoui culture by reducing it to a token of folklore, burning or destroying it when being used to contest Morocco’s claim on the territory and its narratives of democracy. In Gdeim Izik, the authorities initially tolerated the camp but monitored it closely. After violent riots between indigenous communities belonging to the camp and Moroccan parts of the population (Boukhars 2014, p. 202), the Moroccan forces brutally dismantled the camp on 8 November 2010, leaving dozens of people dead and arresting hundreds of others. While Moroccan authorities claimed a terrorist character of the protestors, the dismantlement became a trauma in younger Sahraoui history. The episode is today often considered the „prelude” (Castañeda 2015) or „a precursor of the Arab Spring” (A. R. Smith et al. 2016, p. 221). Upon international pressure, Morocco was forced to create „a parliamentary committee to investigate the facts, finally concluding with a report in which it discussed the need to review the state’s management of local entities and incorporate the local population both in economic and social terms, as well as to change the clientelistic system dominating the state’s relationship with the territory” (Ojeda-García & Suárez-Collado 2016, p. 195).

Before the commission’s recommendations and timid critique could yield any result, yet another round of violent confrontations flared up in Western Sahara. In February 2011, during the „Sea and Desert”-festival in the otherwise calm city of Dakhla, some young Sahraouis seized the opportunity of international media attention to make a statement of contestation by brandishing the POLISARIO flag. Against them, some patriotic Moroccans violently escalated

the situation. They considered the showcased solidarity with the enemy an affront against Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara since „the festival was intended to be a showcase of the city's pride in its accelerated development (the Moroccan government invested heavily in the city's infrastructure) and transformation into a hub of cultural tourism and aquatic sports. The festival was also meant to be a beacon of unity and nationalism” (Boukhars 2014, p. 189). While in Morocco's mainland, the protests of the 20th February Movement took to the streets to call for a reform of the Moroccan system, the Moroccan authorities finally stopped the festival, and the royal army intervened in the Dakhla to end the protests.⁸⁹¹ Knowing that the situation could escalate any time again, the new Moroccan constitution, therefore, not only made symbolic concessions by acknowledging the Hassani component of Moroccan identity (Boukhars 2014, p. 204); it also committed to a far-reaching regionalisation reform that would implement the ideas of an advanced decentralisation announced by the king on the 33rd anniversary of the Green March in November 2008, a year after the publication of Morocco's autonomy plan for its „Southern Provinces” (Zartman 2014, p. 68). Note that already Article II(A)(12) of this autonomy plan included the promise that the new Western Saharan region shall exercise authority over „cultural affairs, including promotion of the Saharan Hassani cultural heritage” (Spector 2014, p. 226).

Hence, as one of the first measures reacting on the social uprisings in Laâyoune and Dakhla, the CNDH organised a workshop in Dakhla under the high royal patronage of King Mohammed VI on the topic of «*Histoire, mémoire et patrimoine sahariens : recherche, préservation et muséalisation*» („History, memory and heritage of the Saharans: research, preservation and musealisation”). At the margins of the workshop, the creation of the „Small Museum of the Saharan Morocco” in Dakhla was decided.⁸⁹² The exposition facilities were founded within the Mediathèque de Dakhla to present the history of the „Moroccan Sahara”, documented with photos and artefacts showing Sahraoui traditions, living customs, clothing, art and music.⁸⁹³ According to the creators of the little museum, the exposition is supposed to provide „a guided itinerary, offering visitors the chance to plunge deep into the history of Saharan Morocco”.⁸⁹⁴ It narrates the early pre-historical phases, describes the opulence of the Middle Ages, passes by the times of European exploration and colonisation and puts a special emphasis on the victorious battles of the Resistance, the exploits of the Moroccan liberation army and the Green

⁸⁹¹ Desloire (2011).

⁸⁹² Laabid (2011).

⁸⁹³ For a detailed impression of the museum see: Bouaamoud, Souilme (with MAP) (2021); Nikos Lygeros (2019).

⁸⁹⁴ MAP (2011e).

March of 1975 and the relationship of the Sahraouis with King Mohammed VI. In an interview with MAP, Maghlaha Dlimi, director of the Dakhla Media Library and the Small Museum of Saharan Morocco, „the Small Museum of Saharan Morocco is a rich cultural showcase which highlights the civilisational dimension of the Dakhla-Oued Eddahab region and promotes its cultural heritage rooted in history”.⁸⁹⁵ While the museum thus propagates the image of the authentic Moroccan nature of the Sahraoui culture, it also claims to combat stereotypes about the Sahraoui art of living, which is not limited to nomadism and caravaning in a desertic area.⁸⁹⁶ This shows that the message of the small museum is not only supposed to travel beyond Moroccan borders to underpin Moroccan claims on Western Sahara but rather has an inherently domestic dimension: it aims at proving the monarchy’s willingness to embrace the full scale of Sahraoui diversity and cultural production as to recognise it as an integral part of Moroccan identity. This symbolic act followed the commitments of the regime in the preamble of the 2011 constitution, which acknowledged the Hassani component and contribution to Moroccan history and culture (Boukhars 2014, p. 204).⁸⁹⁷ Placing the little museum within the media centre of Dakhla was – although a pragmatic choice in the absence of the realisation of the „real” museum – a strategic decision. In an interview with *Le Matin*, Maghlaha Dlimi stressed that

„these rooms in the Médiathèque are designed to encourage young people to read. Each area meets the needs of pupils in relation to their age and school level. More than 23,000 books on a variety of subjects are available, as well as an area dedicated to manuscripts and a multimedia room offering CDs and other media. We also have computer rooms to help students with their research. What’s interesting is the fact that these young people are close to their ancestral heritage on a daily basis, through which they immerse themselves in their culture and civilisation [...] **The Little Museum brings together pieces in the pure Saharan ancestral tradition.** Each piece tells the story of the region, its customs and traditions. It’s a priceless treasure that reminds us of our identity, to which we remain very attached, despite our sedentary lifestyle and the modernism in which we live”.⁸⁹⁸

Combining a media centre, library and museum is meant to impregnate young people using these facilities from an early age with the Moroccan interpretation of the history of the Sahara and to perpetuate the monarchy’s narrative about the Moroccaness of the provinces.

This project, however, was not meant to remain an isolated case. In a royal speech on the occasion of the 37th anniversary of the Green March in 2012, the king mandated the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE) to prepare a development model for Morocco’s so-called “Southern Provinces” in order to “implement advanced regionalization” while “making

⁸⁹⁵ Le Collimateur and MAP (2021).

⁸⁹⁶ Semlali (2014).

⁸⁹⁷ For the original text of the constitution see Kingdom of Morocco (2011).

⁸⁹⁸ O. Bennani (2018).

sure” that the “Southern Provinces are given priority in this process.”⁸⁹⁹ Hardly a year later, in October 2013, the CESE published a report in which it took stock of the advancements and deficits in Western Sahara and sketched its vision for a development programme for Morocco’s so-called south. Among other things, the CESE’s report highlighted an

„absence of a specific cultural strategy that takes into account the potential of Hassani culture and the needs of the citizens in this area; the absence of such a strategy can be explained by the lack of a regulatory framework governing the management of cultural heritage; the inadequacy of the funds allocated to the promotion of culture - Hassani culture in particular; the multitude of bodies involved in the management of this heritage; the lack of dedicated qualified human resources; the lack of involvement of the media and cultural associations in raising awareness and publicising the components of this heritage; the lack of specialised events and meetings on the Hassani cultural heritage; the low interest in craftwork, which is perceived as being limited to a particular social category; and finally the marginalisation of women, whose role is central to Saharan culture.”⁹⁰⁰

The stock-taking of CESE thus provided the Moroccan state with a devastating summary of Morocco’s cultural sector. Above all, the Hassani culture was presented as completely marginalised and inadequately promoted or integrated and protected - contrary to the provisions of the new constitution and despite its great potential. It was also noted that, except for major festivals and UNESCO-protected sites in the Southern Provinces (yet outside Western Sahara), huge tourist and, therefore, economic potential remains unexploited. As a result, the CESE designed a development model that sees culture primarily as an economic driver and as a way of satisfying citizens’ needs in leisure activities. In the years following the royal speech and the CESE stock-taking, we find several projects focusing on the southern provinces’ cultural sector. However, as we will see, these projects follow a logic that goes beyond ambitions of economic growth and state performance. Instead, they align with the idea of using cultural policies to pass on values and beliefs that the regime deems vital for the maintenance of the traditional order of the Moroccan state.

As an example, we shall have a look at the additional development programme which was implemented between 2015 and 2021: In November 2015, during the ceremony celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Green March and only a few weeks after the adoption of the laws re-organising the Moroccan territory into new regions, King Mohammed VI visited the Western Saharan city of Laayoune and launched a new development model for „the southern provinces” which drew upon the proposal made by the CESE two years before. In his speech in front of invited national and regional dignitaries and sheikhs of Western Sahara who demonstrated their

⁸⁹⁹ Mohammed VI (2012).

⁹⁰⁰ Conseil Economique, Social et Environnemental - La Commission ad’hoc chargée d’élaborer un nouveau modèle de développement pour les provinces du Sud (2013, p. 36). Translation by the author.

loyalty to the throne,⁹⁰¹ the king declared that the new development model would seek „to seal these provinces’ integration into the unified homeland and to enhance the influence of the Sahara region as an economic hub and a crucial link between Morocco and its African roots”. In his speech, he also stressed that by „starting to implement advanced regionalisation and adopting a development model, Morocco wishes to increase the chances of finding a lasting solution to the artificial dispute over our territorial integrity”. This shows that geopolitical considerations well lurk beneath the re-design of Morocco’s regional model. By emphasising the role of Morocco’s „true Sahrawis, the genuine patriots who have remained committed to the bond of allegiance which has always existed between their forefathers and Moroccan monarchs” the king made also clear that he considers all the policy benefits granted to the regions as an incentive and distinction for loyalty with the crown. Hence, development is to be understood as the legitimate result of the commitment to national unity under royal leadership. In contrast, underdevelopment and marginalisation should only be regarded as self-inflicted misery due to a lack of allegiance to the monarchy. In the case of Western Sahara, the distinction is mainly between the lands occupied and de facto administered by the kingdom and the territories held by POLISARIO and the refugees remaining in the Algerian camp of Tindouf. Therefore, here again, Morocco’s approach to development through regionalisation is conceived as a geopolitical tool that is supposed to antagonise POLISARIO and Algeria and prove them wrong:

Dear Citizens,

When Morocco promises something, it delivers in both word and deed. Our country makes no commitment it cannot honor.

Therefore, we wish to send out a message to the world: **Unlike others, we, in Morocco, use no empty slogans nor do we sell illusions.** When we commit to something, we honor our commitment, and we **implement things on the ground.** [...]

On the other hand, the people in Tindouf, in Algeria, continue to suffer from poverty, despair, deprivation and the systematic violation of their basic rights. So, I believe it is only fair to ask:

Where have the millions of dollars of humanitarian aid gone - more than 60 million Euros a year - not to mention the billions of Euros spent on armament for the separatists and on their propaganda and apparatus of repression?

[...] **Why does Algeria - which has spent billions on its military and diplomatic war against Morocco** - let the Tindouf inhabitants live in such appalling, inhuman conditions?

History is going to judge those who have turned the free, respectable sons and daughters of the Sahara into beggars of humanitarian aid.

[...] **I ask the people in the Tindouf camps: Are you satisfied with the awful conditions you live in?** Do women in the camps accept the sense of despair and frustration prevailing among their sons and daughters, who have no horizon or future to look forward to?

I personally believe you deserve better than these inhuman conditions. Should you put up with them, however, you would only have yourselves to blame. Meanwhile, you can see that Morocco is

⁹⁰¹ MAP (2015h).

pressing ahead with the development of its southern provinces, making sure the inhabitants of those provinces enjoy a free, dignified life.”⁹⁰²

In the king’s eyes, freedom, dignity and development can only be granted with allegiance to him. Freedom, dignity and development are supposed to be delivered through advanced regionalisation, which hence becomes a symbol and signal to the world that bolsters „Morocco’s credibility and shows our country honours its commitments.” The visible performances of the Moroccan monarchy in the (southern) regions are supposed to be regarded by all Sahrawis and the international community of the Moroccan as legitimating and affirmative of Morocco’s approach to development under the caring and visionary leadership of King Mohammed VI. In this struggle to prove POLISARIO and Algeria wrong, the monarch has identified cultural policy as one of the most important instruments of development:

„Dear Citizens, To me, what matters most is to make sure the dignity of our fellow citizens in the Sahara is safeguarded - particularly that of younger generations - and to strengthen their love for their country and their attachment to their homeland. Accordingly, [...], considering the special place the Hassani culture has in the hearts and minds of Saharan people, I am keen to strengthen the mechanisms needed for the preservation and promotion of the Saharan heritage, particularly by building theatres, museums and cultural centers in the southern part of the country.”⁹⁰³

To show his commitment to his promises, on 8 February 2016, King Mohammed VI personally launched the development programme for the „southern provinces” in the Dakhla-Oued Eddahab and Guelmim-Ouen Noun regions. This new programme is part of the development plan for the southern provinces, which aimed at mobilising 77 billion Dirhams and is based on four main axes: the creation of a new development and employment dynamic based on competitive regional hubs, the achievement of comprehensive development and the enhancement of the cultural dimension, the consecration of responsible governance, the promotion of sustainable development and the improvement of the national and international connectivity of the southern provinces.”⁹⁰⁴ Concerning the cultural dimension in the Dakhla-Oued Eddahab region, the programme consecrated 100 million Dirhams to the creation of „a museum dedicated to the valorisation of the cultural heritage of the Southern Provinces” Guelmim-Oued Noun region, 71 million Dirhams were designated for the promotion of (traditional) craftsmanship as well as social and solidary economy while another 132 million Dirhams were to be provided for the valorisation of the immaterial heritage in the region.⁹⁰⁵ As a result, numerous projects have been initiated within this framework. After the adoption of a new regionalisation plan in 2015, the state intensified its actions regarding the use of culture to

⁹⁰² Mohammed VI (2015c).

⁹⁰³ Mohammed VI (2015c).

⁹⁰⁴ *le Matin* (2016).

⁹⁰⁵ *le Matin* (2016).

nationalise Sahraoui heritage. The Culture Ministry decided to make the three-day-long National Festival of Hassani Song and Poetry in Dakhla (a festival which had already been established in 2005) an annual meeting of poets and artists coming from all the southern provinces to have them contribute to the advancement of regionalisation and a Moroccan nationalist narrative (Boum 2007, p. 225). Carried by the regional direction of the Culture Ministry in collaboration with the Wilaya of the Dakhla-Oued Eddahab Region, the regional and municipal council in Dakhla, the organisers want to support local immaterial heritage, „which is an integral part of Moroccan heritage”. According to media reports, these and following editions of the festival aim „to immerse the public in the world of the Hassani, through a variety of shows and activities drawn from the cultural heritage of the people of the South. [...] This edition is supposed to be an opportunity to help promote the Hassani heritage as an essential component of Moroccan identity and an important factor in strengthening the national unity and preserving the collective memory”.⁹⁰⁶ In 2021, the 15th edition was even organised under the motto of „Hassani culture: a pillar of territorial integrity” and the regional director of ministry of culture, Mamoune el Boukhari even emphasised that by enjoying the sounds and rhythms of Hassani music, the audience would „relive memory and consolidate the bonds of national unity.”⁹⁰⁷ For the Moroccan state, it is thus essential to preserve Hassani heritage not only for the sake of safeguarding precious cultural material but also to ensure the intergenerational transmission of Moroccan nationalist values.

For the same purpose, in 2019, the Ministry of Culture founded the *Regional Festival of Beduin-Hassani poetry* in the neighbouring region, namely the Western Saharan city of Laâyoune. As a component of the king’s development model for the Southern Provinces, it is organised to fulfil an agreement between the regional council and the Ministry of Culture.⁹⁰⁸ For El Bachir Belkacem, president of the Commission of Culture and the Protection of Cultural Heritage of the Laâyoune-Sakia el Hamra Region, the promotion of local culture is important to make it a lever of sustainable development and preserve Hassani culture as an integral part of Morocco’s united cultural identity as provided by the Moroccan constitution of 2011.⁹⁰⁹ This importance for the Moroccan government cannot be overestimated. The festival was maintained during the COVID-19 pandemic as one of only a few cultural gatherings. At its third edition in 2021, the festival even took place under the generic motto „Hassani poetry in the service of the

⁹⁰⁶ Abou Dihaj (2019); Laabid (2015).

⁹⁰⁷ Le Reporter and MAP (2021); MAP Express (2021c); Quid (2021b).

⁹⁰⁸ Hespress (2019a).

⁹⁰⁹ le Matin (2019a).

Kingdom's territorial integrity". In this regard, regional director of culture Lahcen Chorfi told the MAP that by restoring the Bedouin-Hassani poem to its rightful place on the national cultural scene, the Moroccan state aims to highlight „the role it plays in the service of national causes, in particular the question of the Moroccan Sahara, and to encourage young creators and strengthen communication between the different generations so that they can contribute to the preservation of this precious cultural heritage.”⁹¹⁰ Once again, the intergenerational transmission of Morocco's patriotic values appears to be a priority goal of the kingdom's cultural approach in Western Sahara. Of course, both sides instrumentalise musical production and poetry to bolster allegiance to their cause among the population (Deubel 2017). Yet, it appears that the Moroccan authorities use their superior financial and technical means to deploy this tool more aggressively. They promote the creation of Moroccan-Sahraoui bands „to neutralise the international impact of the music groups from the refugee camps, turning music and culture into a new battlefield in the Western Sahara conflict” (Posada 2017, p. 115). In the case of the Western Sahara conflict, the term „battlefield” needs to be understood quite literally. Like in every war, preserving, improving and extending infrastructure is vital to the success of both conflict parties. Hence, the Moroccan state also invests heavily in new cultural infrastructure. For this, it also concludes international agreements. In January 2019 for instance, Moroccan and Canadian economic operators sealed a deal in Dakhla for the construction of an open-air theatre with a capacity of 5.000 to 10.000 seats, „capable of hosting tours and concerts by world-renowned artists.” In the same vein, the construction of an Institute of Music and Choreographic Arts was started for 14,43 million dirhams and with a total surface area of 2.060 m² as to „support the artistic movement and fill the infrastructure gap”. According to the MAP, all these activities and investments help „the public of Dakhla to quench their cultural and literary thirst. They have also allowed them to become intoxicated with Hassani melodies and poetry, as well as national and international songs, both classical and modern, in a harmony that illustrates diversity, within a community of solid foundations and profound principles.”⁹¹¹

By providing these festivals and cultural infrastructure in the context of the royal development programme for the southern provinces, the Moroccan monarchy thus claims to fulfil a public demand. The effect of these actions has been assessed to be limited in terms of enhancing the representativity of Sahraoui culture and strengthening the hegemony of Sahraoui culture (Bonte 2017, p. 475). Others criticise that they contribute to the museumification of culture, which does not consider the innovative character of local living culture and the risk of producing

⁹¹⁰ Yara and MAP (2021).

⁹¹¹ Abou Dihaj (2019).

undue competition between the logic of experts of culture and local actors of culture (Naïmi 2016, p. 338). Such criticism, however, ignores that the folklorisation or mummification of culture can be a goal in its own right. Morocco's measures also constitute an attempt to legitimise the given power structure dominated by the Moroccan central state. Rather than contributing to a free and creative cultural production, they use a codified idea of Sahraoui culture, which can be controlled and manipulated. The promotion of these cultural elements, then, has a strong ideological touch since the festivals and cultural infrastructure are supposed to function as echo chambers where the principles of the kingdom and nationalist narratives of unity and territorial integrity in diversity are reproduced and transmitted to future generations. By addressing all people living in the southern provinces within the new regions (not Western Sahara), the monarchy clarifies that its authority claims are not limited to the UN-defined borders of the former Spanish colonies. Ojeda-García and Suárez-Collado (2016, p. 191) convincingly argued that regionalisation „has been a central policy in the Moroccan state's form of governance for different political reasons. On the one hand, it has often been considered a solution to the state's problems regarding the Western Sahara conflict, European political demands and the internal crisis of elites [...]. On the other, it has also had great political significance insofar as it has been rhetorically used by the monarchy as an instrument for its legitimization as a promoter of change and modernization when the regime has needed to regenerate. However, contrary to its official purpose, the regionalization policy has never led to significant changes in the state's power structure.” The kingdom's struggle over the Sahraouis' self-determination in the 2000s and the social uprisings in Morocco and Western Sahara since 2010 constitute such a period of relative weakness when the monarchy needed to regenerate. Western Sahara is – while seemingly on the periphery – the very symbolic centre of the monarchy's regeneration (Hibou & Tozy 2020, p. 344). Therefore, the advanced regionalisation project and all cultural measures emanating from it must be considered a result of the regime's efforts to reestablish the monarchy at the frontline of the country's nationalist struggle for sovereignty over Western Sahara and the king's installation as an integrative symbol of national unity. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the goals of the regionalisation reform have not been achieved so far, at least not in terms of the officially communicated objectives regarding autonomy, good governance and human rights improvements. Cultural policy actions appear to be a fig leaf for the otherwise non-sufficiently implemented reform promises.

To support the monarchy's claim and mainstream its narrative, in 2019, Mustapha el Khalfi, Morocco's former Communication Minister and then-delegate Minister for Relations with the

Parliament and Civil Society as well as Spokesman of the Government published a booklet on „Realities and Counter-truths” in the Western-Sahara-question (el Khalfi 2019). This guide for an „efficient plea” about the „Moroccanness of the Sahara” provides the reader with state-sanctioned arguments on how to argue against what the regime would classify as lies, errors, allegations, illusions or „counter-truths” on the Sahara question. The 15 allegedly false facts addressed in the booklet deal with topics as diverse as the legal status of Western Sahara, the exploitation of natural resources, the human development in the region, the human rights situation, the role of POLISARIO and Algeria, the situation of Sahraoui refugees in Tindouf, the sand wall, the referendum, or the UN-mission MINURSO. The last big chapter also argues against the „counter-truth” that the Moroccan authorities would destroy the cultural heritage of the Sahraouis. In this chapter, the minister claimed that the Hassani culture was actively protected by the Moroccan constitution and the state’s cultural investments through the organisation of festivals, the introduction of Hassani media, the creation of a museum, the promotion of scientific research and film productions (el Khalfi 2019, pp. 113–115). The difference in attitude and tone between the CESE’s report mentioned above and this guideline outlet underlines the evolution of intensity in cultural actions in Western Sahara under Mohammed VI. It demonstrates a shift from a relatively great share of transparency at a moment of relative weakness around 2012/2013 towards a more self-confident, propagandistic approach where the Western Sahara issue is central to the monarchy’s legitimating self-portrayal.

6.5.2.3.2. The High Commissariat for Former Resistance Fighters and Former Members of the Liberation Army: Mainstreaming the Memory of the Green March and Moroccan Independence

Indoctrination is most effective if beginning at an early age. Another level of combining classical propaganda through historical museums/expositions and multimedia education can be seen in the activities of the High Commissariat for Former Resistance Fighters and Former Members of the Liberation Army.⁹¹² The commissariat was founded by Dahir n°1-73-250 dated 15 June 1973. It was based on the King’s interest in „‘providing former resistance fighters and former members of the liberation army with regulations of a social and national nature, enabling them to be represented, to propose improvements to their situation, from a material and moral point of view, and to suggest, where appropriate, ways in which they can participate collectively in the national effort’, and to defend their rights and interests with the relevant authorities.” (Royaume du Maroc 2019, p. 4). Besides financial compensations and subsidies as well as support to find employment, the state has also entrusted the commissariat with „adopting all

⁹¹² Henceforth called “the commissariat”.

measures and initiatives to highlight and enrich the historical heritage of the epics of freedom and independence to preserve the national memory” (Royaume du Maroc 2019, p. 5). As of 2023, the annual budget has reached a total amount of over 160 million Dirhams. Since 2007, the state has steadily increased the commissariat’s budget (Figure 58) to strengthen the relationship of „proximity” between the crown and the people.⁹¹³

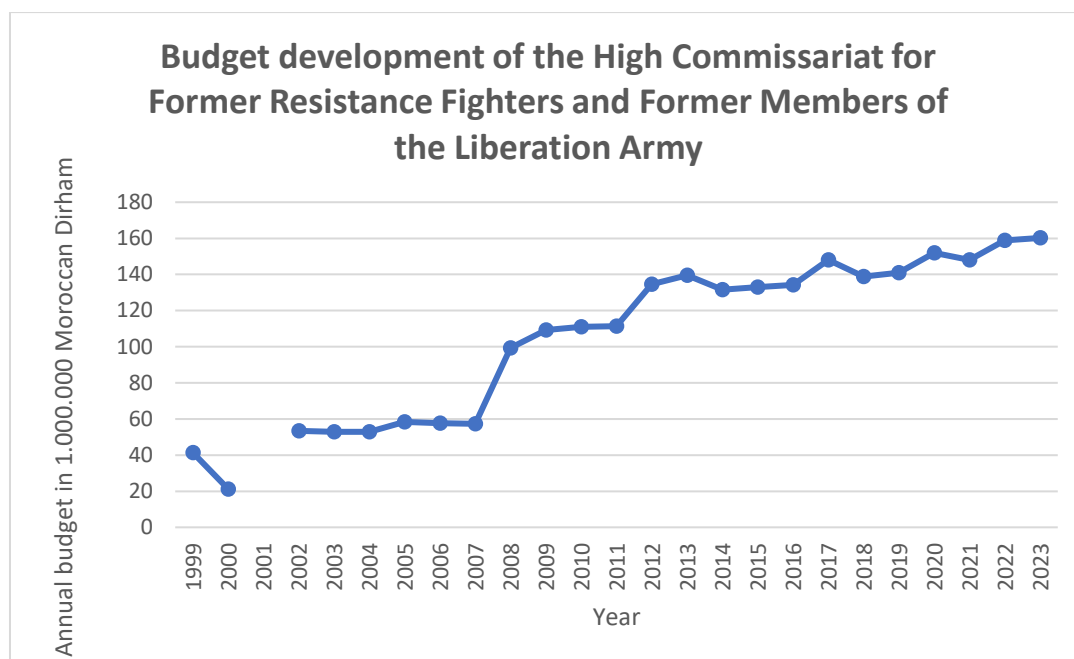


Figure 58: Development of the annual budget of the High Commissariat for Former Resistance Fighters and Former Members of the Liberation Army in Million Moroccan Dirhams ⁹¹⁴

For this purpose, the commissariat started to implement a decentralisation strategy which aims at constructing local museums and multimedia spaces that preserve the memory of and spread the „national epic of the struggle waged by the throne and the people to regain independence and national unity” (cited in Jelidi 2013, p. 60). By employing the word „epic”, the regime acknowledged that the transported story about Morocco’s struggle for independence is only a mythicised interpretation of the historical facts. This national epic thus propagates the official narrative of 350.000 people who peacefully marched into the former Spanish colony of Western Sahara, only armed with copies of the Holy Quran, Moroccan flags and their courage to free the land from Spanish occupation.

Since the first museums dedicated to the success of Morocco’s Liberation Army and the king’s involvement in the independence struggle were created in Rabat in 1997, 2001 and 2005, similar

⁹¹³ Cour des Comptes (2019b, 491f.)

⁹¹⁴ Own graphical analysis of data compiled from the Finance Laws of the years 1999 to 2023 (data lacking for 2001).

museum spaces to commemorate the liberation of the Moroccan territory have been created all over the country (Errazzouki 2015; Jelidi 2013, p. 59). In 2007, a new national programme was initiated. In 2013, Mustapha El Ktiri, High Commissioner for Former Resistance Fighters and Former Members of the Liberation Army, announced the goal of reaching 107 memorials.⁹¹⁵ In fact, despite criticism of inefficient usage of allocated funds and a lack of accountability,⁹¹⁶ ten years after the creation of the first liberation museum, over 75 museums had already opened their doors. By July 2023, the number had climbed up to 104, often inaugurated around symbolic dates such as the anniversary of the Revolution of the King and the People in summer, the anniversary of the Green March in November or the anniversary of the publication of the independence manifesto in January.⁹¹⁷

Most of the time, the costs for the projects, which, for most of the more significant projects, range between 800.000 Dirhams and 5,6 million Dirhams per facility, are covered by a consortium of actors including the commissariat itself, the INDH, the regional councils, the provincial councils and the municipalities. In al Hoceima, the Agency for the Development of the North was also involved with a contribution of 900.000 Dirhams. In the southern municipality of Bir Gandouz, the Agence du Sud was among the donors. The analysed memorials typically cover between 250 and 500 m² and usually include a museum about Morocco's struggle for independence and the monarchy's involvement in this struggle, as well as offices, libraries and rooms for exposition, multimedia activities, teaching, conferences, meetings, research and receptions. The high commissioner and his state partners pride themselves on providing material about Morocco's independence struggle to people of every age and capacity. This includes providing documents, affordable comics (purchasable at 5 Dirhams) and books (between 35 and 120 Dirhams), as well as audio and video material, which facilitate the appropriation of this part of Moroccan history for everyone.⁹¹⁸

Drury (2024) criticises that, in reality, the commissariat controls the interpretation of historical facts and access to the relevant archives. Its „historiography remains subject to state security prerogatives“ (Drury 2024, p. 247). As we can see in the museum created in Marrakesh, the commissariat's memorials feature photographs, documents, and artefacts from the time of independence, establishing a clear causal link between the independence fight and the monarchy. They also draw a picture of continuity between Morocco on the eve of independence

⁹¹⁵ le Matin (2013b).

⁹¹⁶ Cour des Comptes (2019b, pp. 482–502)

⁹¹⁷ For an overview of the memorials created by the Commissariat see the tables in appendix 9.9.

⁹¹⁸ Ben Amar (2023).

and the Morocco of King Mohammed VI. Besides images of King Mohammed V and King Hassan II in their qualities of proponents of Moroccan independence, the memorials also feature photos of King Mohammed VI as preserver of the oath, which binds both the palace and the people to the defence of the country. In the independence memorial in Marrakesh, for instance, we find a copy of the oath next to a ceremonial image of King Mohammed VI (Figure 59).⁹¹⁹



Figure 59: Images of King Mohammed VI and his father's Green March Oath at the entrance of the liberation memorial in Marrakesh

According to the high-commissioner Mustapha el Ktiri, like all the other museums and multimedia spaces, the creation of this socio-pedagogical structure „aims to preserve the national and local historical memory of the Resistance and the Liberation Army, and to make it a space for disseminating the values of the culture of patriotism and citizenship among the rising generations.” It is also intended to „enable citizens and visitors to the Ochre City to learn about the history of the Moroccan resistance and the great sacrifices made by former resistance fighters and members of the liberation army alongside the hero of liberation and independence, the late HM Mohammed V, and the Alaouite Cherif family for the recovery of independence.”⁹²⁰ In another context, el Ktiri stated that remembering the older generations’

⁹¹⁹ See the presentation of the exposition on the museum’s youtube channel: Emrhl Marrakech (2018).

⁹²⁰ LesEco.ma (2019a). Similar quotes can be retrieved from Ktiri’s speeches held during the inauguration ceremonies of all the other memorials all across the country.

fight for independence is a civilian duty for emerging generations to take up their service for the nation.⁹²¹ By celebrating historic battles against the former colonial powers, the Moroccan people are supposed to remember „the epic of the national resistance and to instil in future generations the lessons learned from this struggle, the love of the homeland and the sense of pride in belonging to Morocco, to continue the march of the present and the future, under the enlightened leadership of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, for the building of a modern and democratic Morocco and the promotion of sustainable development, solidarity and social cohesion.” In this context, the high commissioner also reiterated „the unshakeable determination of the Moroccan people, the resistance family, former members of the Liberation Army and all components of society, as well as their continued mobilisation and total support for the consolidation of national constants and the defence of Morocco’s territorial integrity, under the aegis of HM King Mohammed VI.”⁹²² Hence, Jelidi (2013, p. 60) argued that the museums celebrate the monarchy as the manufacturer of Moroccan nationalism and warrantor of social cohesion.

I go one step further. In the museums’ scenography and the commissioner’s framing efforts, we perceive the monarchy’s strategy to use history and politics of remembrance as a tool to mobilise the citizens to renew their allegiance to the king, achieve indisputable sovereignty, ensure territorial integrity and guarantee the stability of the Moroccan state. The monarchy is framed as a crystallisation point of Moroccan patriotism and national pride. All civilian duty is hence directed to maintaining and protecting this alliance in the country’s defence. In this context, the older generations, including former resistance fighters and members of the liberation army, are presented as role models that younger people must emulate for their own benefit and that of the whole nation. Analysing the scenography of the commissariat’s museum on the Moroccan Liberation Army (MLA) in Rabat, Errazzouki (2015) even concluded that the museum

„is far more the state’s project of upholding a national identity that hinges upon the centrality of the monarchy in the nationalist struggle that drove the construction of the MLA museum, rather than the other way around. The MLA museum was about building a *lieux de mémoire* for a living and contentious memory intended to fit into a nationalist history constructed against a colonialist history; a history reactively defined by its *moments* instead of its *movements*. As such, the MLA museum as a *lieu de mémoire* is useful for the state when the landscape of that *mémoire* is one constructed around a nationalist history—when the MLA exerted its energy toward fighting against colonialism. This sheds light on why the museum ends its periodization at 1956, along with the memoirs published by the HCAR [*scil.* the commissariat]. Remembering the MLA beyond 1956 would undermine the state’s official narrative that places the monarchy as the central force around which all nationalist movements rallied. It would also highlight the extent to which the monarchy cooperated with the French and Spanish colonial regimes to centralize its authority at the expense of eliminating the MLA. In reality, establishing the HCAR was

⁹²¹ Ben Amar (2023).

⁹²² MAP (2020b).

much less about the MLA as it was about painting the monarchy with the stroke of nationalist resistance at a time when its nationalist character was enduring threats and attacks spanning from the highest echelons of the army to the urban student movements.”

Hence, until today, disloyal behaviour vis-à-vis the king is implicitly associated with betrayal of the elders’ legacy, treason of the state’s highest goals and jeopardy of the country’s stability. By 2019, the memorials had already attracted almost 527.000 visitors. By 2022, the commissariat aimed at raising the number to over 700.000 visitors per year (Royaume du Maroc 2019, p. 5). This hints at the stabilisation potential the new museums and multimedia spaces bear. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the monarchy uses this potential in moments of crisis and achievement. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, the high commissioner used the independence „epic” to call the people to align themselves with the king’s struggle to face the challenges.⁹²³ In a similar vein, since 2020, he has been trying to capitalise on some African countries’ and the USA’s recognition of Morocco’s claims on Western Sahara by picturing this diplomatic success as proof of the king’s unwavering efforts to promote Morocco’s sovereignty over the contested territory and bring Algeria and the POLISARIO to discredit.⁹²⁴

6.5.2.3.3. The Western Sahara Conflict Between Hard and Soft Power

Whereas the High Commissioner is both a civil servant and lobbyist for the community of former resistance fighters and former members of the liberation army, the monarchy is also instrumentalising civilians such as foreign „researchers” to push their claims to Western Sahara. For instance, they invited Spanish photographer and writer Gonzalo Sanchez Alvarez-Castellanos to represent Morocco at the UN General Assembly on 5 October 2017 and speak in favour of the Moroccanness of Western Sahara while denouncing all unfavourable narratives about Morocco as ungrounded and pure lies made up by POLISARIO, Spain and Algeria.⁹²⁵ In 2019, he published an illustrated book⁹²⁶ on cultural tourism in Western Sahara, which he presented on 28 January 2022 at the Madrid International Tourism Fair (FITUR) on behalf of the Moroccan Tourism Office. There, he told the MAP that the archaeological discoveries in the region, which have been preserved and catalogued by the Moroccan state since 2019, testify to the Moroccanness of Western Sahara and that he considered (cultural) tourism to be an effective way „to unveil facts about Morocco’s southern provinces and correct the lingering false narratives regarding the region”, especially for a Spanish public.⁹²⁷ Hibou and Tozy (2020,

⁹²³ MAP (2020b).

⁹²⁴ Infomediaire (2020); MAP (2020h).

⁹²⁵ El-Katab (2017).

⁹²⁶ Álvarez-Castellanos (2019).

⁹²⁷ Latrech (2022); MAP (2022b); Maroc Diplomatie and MAP (2022); Peña (2022).

p. 338) demonstrated that books like the one by Gonzalo Sanchez Alvarez-Castellanos are by no means an exceptional case.

To demonstrate the historical links between the regions and the central state, the agencies that manage the development projects in the Moroccan regions routinely publish and promote similar „beaux livres”. Mitatre (2018, pp. 80–84) analysed the aesthetics of these illustrated volumes, which are often presented in a bilingual format and tend to feature folklorised and staged images corresponding to a stereotypical fake reality. Mitatre concluded that the books treat seemingly uncontroversial topics such as archaeology or flora and fauna in Morocco’s „Southern Provinces” or depict elements of Sahraoui culture such as the Sahraoui tent, tea, music, women’s clothing, culinary traditions or architecture. Therefore, the books avoid all references to problematic issues in Western Sahara, giving priority to nice pictures. Just like Anglo-Saxon coffee-table books, they are supposed to be browsed in a relaxed atmosphere and starkly contrast with the image of a conflicted region presented by the POLISARIO Front and generally purported in the West.

The POLISARIO Front, in turn, is not abandoning the cause and soon started to counter Morocco’s appropriation and monopolisation of the cultural sector. For instance, in 2005, the POLISARIO’s Ministry of Culture mandated a team of international archaeologists around Margaret Raffin and Nick Brooks to conduct research on the funerary site vestiges in the „Free Zone”. According to the researchers’ project outline, the ministry is „acutely aware of the importance of heritage for building a sustainable society. In the fragile conditions in which they live (in refugee camps where connection with the past can be all too easily lost, the SADR see their cultural heritage as important to affirming their cultural rights to Western Sahara”. Hence, the archaeologists’ work ultimately served „not just to reveal the prehistory of the region, but also to strengthen the links between SADR and the cultural heritage of a landscape from which the population it represents has been largely forcibly removed” (Clarke & Brooks 2018, p. 5). It is interesting to note how the tone of academics like Nick Brooks has changed over the years. While in the 2018 publication, he sounds quite fond of the POLISARIO authorities, he appeared much more critical and balanced in earlier years. In 2005, he analysed POLISARIO’s archaeology investments. He concluded that in „facilitating archaeological work that leads to a deeper understanding of their ‘national’ heritage, the Polisario is no different to other governments. Engagement with the international scientific community and with foreign institutions also represents a contribution to the normalisation of the status of the Polisario as the legitimate sovereign power in Western Sahara, and of the political entity and putative state which is the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic or SADR. Identification with the archaeology

record and with the prehistoric populations associated with it emphasises the continuity of human occupation of Western Sahara, and links the modern Saharawi with the distant past, reinforcing their identification with the land” (Brooks 2005, p. 429). At the same time, Brooks also convincingly criticised the „inconsistencies, questionable claims, and archaeologically dubious statements” of alleged archaeological discoveries funded by Moroccan authorities and associated claims about Amazigh origins of prehistoric ruins in Western Sahara with propaganda within the cultural competition with POLISARIO (Brooks 2005, p. 432). The change in Brooks’ writing tone is evidence of his co-option by the POLISARIO. It also proves his findings about an ongoing propaganda war using international research on cultural heritage in Western Sahara.⁹²⁸ However, compared to other sectors such as sports and arts, POLISARIO’s investment in cultural heritage remains of minor importance (Mitatre 2018, p. 91).

This clearly shows that the co-option of international researchers and the promotion of cultural tourism fulfil legitimising purposes on both conflict sides and multiple levels: towards their supporters and the outside world. Domestically, it is about developing a discourse about development and nation-building through cultural policies. On the international level, both regimes want their claims to be confirmed and recognised by foreign governments, civil publics, and international organisations. For this, they boast about their caring efforts to strengthen and preserve local heritage while pointing out the failures of the other side in providing good governance and development. Yet, as we will see in more detail later, the ongoing trend of international recognition for Morocco’s claims has put additional pressure on the POLISARIO Front since 2019.

According to political observers,⁹²⁹ the independence movement has been confronted with the growing frustration of the population living under their control for some time already. The foundational myth of the independence struggle against the Spanish and Moroccan occupation upon which POLISARIO has built its legitimacy claim fails to convince an increasing number of young people looking for opportunities and an improvement of their situation. The new failure to garner and uphold international support for their political claims was yet another reason for the POLISARIO to act. Hence, since September 2020, the leaders of POLISARIO have been calling upon their supporters to show force in the demilitarised area including the buffer zone between the Mauritanian border and the Western Saharan territory controlled by

⁹²⁸ Beyond archaeology, Mitatre (2018, 93f.) also mentions POLISARIO’s use of anthropological research to boost its claim on the Western Sahara.

⁹²⁹ F. Iraqi (2020b); Kozłowski (2021).

Morocco. In late October 2020, an important meeting of the UN Security Council was expected to adopt a report of the UN Secretary-General that would be rather favourable to the Moroccan position on the Western Sahara issue. Only one week ahead of the meeting, on 21 October 2020, armed forces of the POLISARIO entered the zone near the tiny border village el Guerguerate to disturb and interrupt all traffic and trade between Senegal and Morocco via Nouakchott. Despite calls to reason issued by the UN secretary general and the UN mission MINURSO, the POLISARIO fighters did not give up on their blockade. As a reaction to the situation, in his Speech to the Nation on the 45th Anniversary of the Green March delivered on 8 November 2020, King Mohammed VI declared that he would not tolerate that POLISARIO undermines “the security and stability” of Morocco’s “southern provinces”.⁹³⁰

Another ten days after the king’s announcement of a firm response, on Friday, 13 November, the royal army deployed armed forces to re-install order in the area where the POLISARIO militias had set up about 20 tents and a control post. Without any exchange of shots and without any resistance, the POLISARIO fighters fled the site and backed off to the east after setting fire to their camp. The blockade was ended (Figure 60).⁹³¹

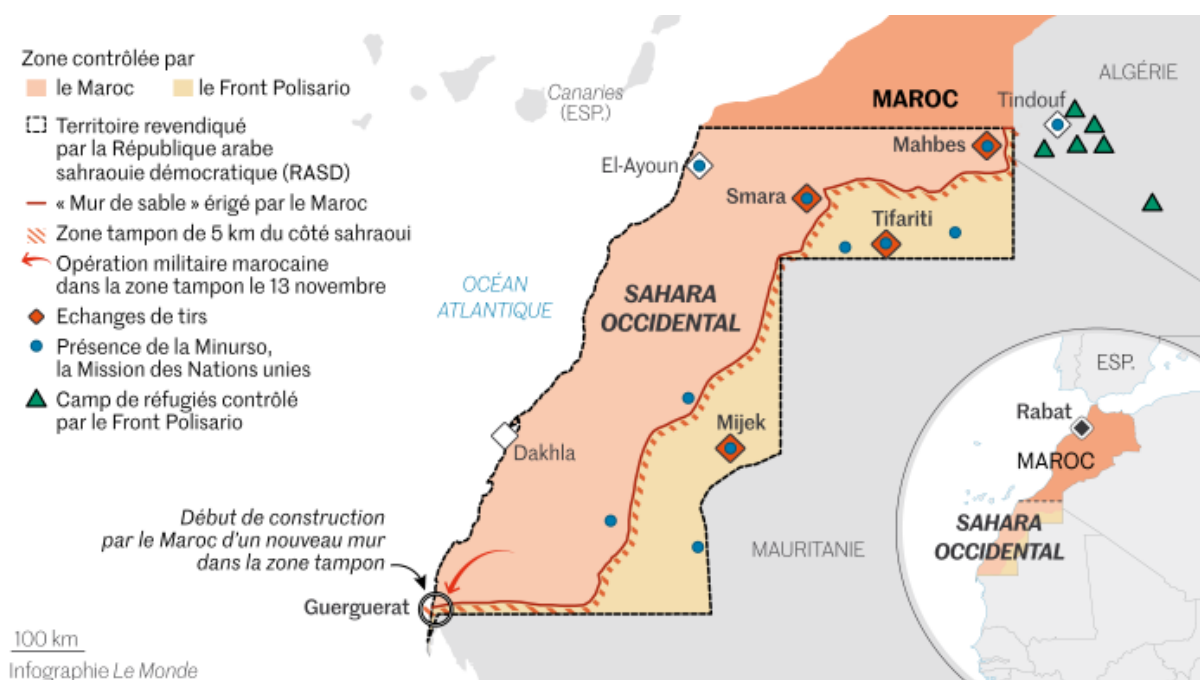


Figure 60: Map showing the frontline between POLISARIO and Moroccan forces in Western Sahara, including refugee camps and zones of clashes⁹³²

As an immediate policy reaction to this military escalation in Guerguerat, the Moroccan government, only five days after the successful operation of the royal army on the 65th

⁹³⁰ Mohammed VI (2020).

⁹³¹ Soudan (2020).

⁹³² Bobin (2020) in Le Monde.

anniversary of the Kingdom's independence, announced the construction of a new huge mosque in Guerguerat. For this new religious facility, which covers 3.767 square meters and offers space for 500 believers, the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs allocated a budget of 8,8 million Dirhams.⁹³³ The local delegate of the ministry declared that the new mosque would aim at providing the local population and travellers/truckers alike with an opportunity to perform their religious duties in good conditions and at supporting the dynamics of urban development experienced by the frontal poste and the neighbouring municipality of Bir Guendouz.⁹³⁴ However, there is more to the new mosque than the mere attempt to satisfy the local and travelling population's religious needs and obtain performance legitimacy. Considering that up to 200 lorries pass Guerguerate daily, the very official MAP underlined the geostrategic importance of the Guerguerate as the main border crossing enabling the continental trade between Morocco and West Africa.⁹³⁵ A lot of Moroccan media covered the laying of the founding stone⁹³⁶ and the mosque's inauguration three years later.⁹³⁷ They often implied that the construction of the Guerguerate mosque has to be read against the backdrop of the recent military events along the border. According to Khalid Chegraoui, Senior fellow at the Moroccan think tank Policy Center for the New South in Rabat and vice dean of the Faculty of Governance, Economics and Social Sciences (FGSES) at the prestigious and royally supported elite university Mohammed VI Polytechnic University, the construction plan was a „genius idea”: „Building a mosque in Guerguerate is stronger than a military base. Tomorrow, we'll be holding Friday prayers in the name of the King of Morocco“. The Moroccan newspaper Hespress agreed with him, stating that „holding Friday prayers in Guerguerate in the name of the King, *Amir al mounnine*, is the greatest expression of the Kingdom's sovereignty over these lands.”⁹³⁸ And indeed, on 22 March 2023, the new mosque was inaugurated with the first

⁹³³ Royaume du Maroc - Ministère des Habous et des Affaires Islamiques (2023).

⁹³⁴ Le Reporter Express (2020). This claim was repeated by the ministry in 2023 when the mosque was inaugurated. According to an official statement, the construction of the Guerguerate mosque aims “at strengthening the infrastructure of religious facilities and responding to the needs of the large number of urban and rural residents regarding places designated for performing the rituals of the Islamic religion”. Cf. Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques (2023b).

⁹³⁵ MAP (2020d).

⁹³⁶ Baba (2020); Deychillaoui (2020); El Ghit Boussif (2020); I.L. (2020); Le Reporter Express (2020).

⁹³⁷ Hespress (2023a); Kerdouss (2023); L.A. (2023); Medi1TV Afrique (2023).

⁹³⁸ El Ghit Boussif (2020).

Tarawih prayer beginning Ramadan performed in the name of King Mohammed VI, *Amir al mouminine*, an event even broadcasted by the national television⁹³⁹ (Figure 61⁹⁴⁰).

The decision to build a mosque at the spot of prior military escalation, the decision to announce this plan on the very anniversary of the kingdom's independence, and the decision to officially inaugurate the mosque with the first Tarawih prayer in Ramadan underline the high symbolic value the regime attaches to the new mosque. More than a performance act of satisfying the religious needs of local and passing believers, we are to perceive the king's statement of power over the territory. We must understand that this authority claim transcends the immediate world to include the spiritual realm. The regime's message is clear: While POLISARIO only brings violence and instability by jeopardising the trans-border traffic and trade, the Moroccan king delivers his promises of peace and development in both worlds, the immediate and the spiritual. This is mirrored in the ministry's delegate who asserted in November 2020 that the mosque would „be built in accordance with the architectural norms of Islam following the instructions of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, *Amir al mouminine*”.⁹⁴¹ Clearer than ever, we perceive that cultural policies enlarge the scope of performance claims by adding an ideological component. This dovetails with Daadaoui (2023, p. 96), who argued that also under the rule of Mohammed VI, the Western Sahara issue works as „a lynchpin for Moroccan foreign policy”, which has helped the regime „to remain, for now, immune from any substantive challenge to its enduring status in Moroccan politics.” This lynchpin effect becomes particularly visible when examining the regime's efforts to make the Western Sahara issue a matter of domestic politics in terms of regional diversity within a broader narrative of national identity. In this regard, it is interesting to note that even flagrant human rights infringements do not undermine



Figure 61: New mosque in Guerguerate

Morocco's claims on the strip of land (Daadaoui 2023, p. 92).

⁹³⁹ MEDI1 TV (2023); Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques (2023a).

⁹⁴⁰ Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques (2023a).

⁹⁴¹ MAP (2020d).

6.6. Internationalisation of Culture

6.6.1. Mobilising the Heritage Police: UNESCO and Other Institutions

The UNESCO World Heritage Committee meetings used to be rather „European events”. This started to change in the 1990s. Towards the end of the 1990s, however, the countries of the global south grew increasingly aware of the opportunities UNESCO provided. Although Morocco had already presided over the UNESCO executive council between 1964 and 1966, it appears that it was also not before the late 1990s that the kingdom allocated significantly higher resources for a stronger presence in UNESCO. Ever since, Morocco has been among the nations contributing to a reduction of European influence. In 1999/2000, Morocco sent a permanent delegate (délégué permanent) to UNESCO and even presided over the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in 1999. Some years before, Abdelaziz Touri had created the new Cultural Heritage Directorate within the Ministry of Culture. Aware that the kingdom’s policy towards UNESCO had so far not been in line with Morocco’s ambition, he started to build a stronger position within the institution. Although not entirely new at the time, this UNESCO trend was reinforced by the coronation of King Mohammed VI (Schmitt 2011, 219f.). Schmitt (2008) showed that, around the same time, the Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo, who occasionally lived in Marrakesh, started an initiative to protect the intangible cultural heritage of the Jamaa el Fna in Marrakesh as he perceived to be endangered by urban development projects. This initiative was adopted by UNESCO and extended to become later the UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, under which masterpieces of intangible heritage worldwide can be protected. By supporting the protection of the Jamaa el Fna and by not opposing the elaboration and adoption of the new UNESCO convention in 2003, the royal palace and the Moroccan government contributed to the development of the UNESCO frameworks. From 2001 to 2003, Morocco again presided over the UNESCO Executive Council and has ever since been very active in the different committees and sub-committees.

Then, in October 2017, Morocco watched Audrey Azoulay become director general of UNESCO, certainly not without satisfaction. While Audrey Azoulay, who still holds office as of 2024, was elected in her capacity as former culture minister of the French Republic, she is also the daughter of the Moroccan king’s advisor, André Azoulay. Although UNESCO officials blame a mere coincidence⁹⁴² and Moroccan officials claim that the kingdom does not benefit from this special relationship, we can still observe that, since about the same time, the kingdom’s UNESCO activities have intensified. While studies have shown that Morocco and

⁹⁴² Interview, UNESCO, 1.

Algeria occasionally worked together at UNESCO in 2006 and 2007, putting aside their geopolitical differences (Schmitt 2009, p. 117, 2011, 178 and 184), UNESCO has nowadays become a new international battlefield between the two countries.

This concurs with Schmitt (2011, pp. 230–232), who claimed that, in Morocco, there is no dominating trend to any nationalist instrumentalisation of the World Heritage concept. I agree with Schmitt that there are some officials whose sincerity about Morocco’s cultural heritage is beyond doubt and who have completely internalised the UNESCO universal (i.e. not patriotic) World Heritage concept.⁹⁴³ Yet, I hold that, on the national level of decision-makers, nationalist considerations are very present and even programmatic. Schmitt is right to claim that the old/classical trend of nation-building by strengthening the normativity of certain traits of majority culture to the detriment of minorities has been reversed – at least to some extent (Schmitt 2011, p. 233). The national identity discourse has, indeed, become more inclusive, e.g. with regard to the integration of Amazigh, African or Jewish heritage. While this trend is, in fact, inward bound to obtain social reconciliation and cohesion, the identity discourse still has a strong competitive component providing opportunities for othering.

At first glance, also more recent data seem to support Schmitt’s thesis of inter-Maghrebian solidarity in cultural heritage matters. In 2016, for instance, Algerian officials announced that a joint application was underway to have the popular dish couscous inscribed on the UNESCO list for intangible cultural heritage as a shared cultural heritage of the Maghreb countries



Figure 62: Traditional Moroccan couscous, Intangible World Heritage shared between Maghreb countries

⁹⁴³ Judging by my interviews, this is especially true for the technocrats at the Culture Ministry, like the delegate conservationists in some regions like Fès, or Morocco’s most prominent heritage expert and UNESCO consultant working for the INSAP Ahmed Skounti. Skounti also contributed to the drafting of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and works as a facilitator of the UNESCO Global Network of Facilitators to support capacity building for the implementation of the Convention. He was a member of the Evaluation Body of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2015-2017) and Chair of this Body in 2015 and 2017. He is a member of the Scientific Board of the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*. Cf. SDG Academy (2021).

(Figure 62).⁹⁴⁴ While Moroccans claim the paternity of the traditional Friday dish usually made from wheat or barley semolina,⁹⁴⁵ the kingdom still supported the shared application together with its neighbours Algeria, Mauretania, and Tunisia. The joint request to inscribe „The knowledge, know-how and practices related to the production and consumption of couscous” was eventually deposited in 2019. The UNESCO member states approved the application in December 2020,⁹⁴⁶ acknowledging that the preparation of couscous „contributes greatly to the construction” of the four countries’ „identity” and that the dish is „replete with symbols, meanings and social and cultural dimensions all linked to solidarity, conviviality, sharing meals and togetherness.”⁹⁴⁷ This event was widely praised by national and international press as a moment of cultural solidarity between the Maghreb countries which are notoriously divided by political conflicts.⁹⁴⁸ Also, Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, hailed the joined registration as “a great achievement. It is a strong sign of cultural recognition, and it is also a real diplomatic success, on a subject that is so important and symbolic for the peoples of this entire region and far beyond. This consensus shows that cultural heritage can be both personal and exceptional, and transcend borders.”⁹⁴⁹ The solidary character of the joint application is underlined by the application’s text. It asserted that the idea to inscribe couscous on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was pushed by „experts of the four countries through informal exchanges at various UNESCO statutory meetings, in particular during sessions of the Intergovernmental Committee since 2010, and has been materialized through a series of meetings organized in Algiers in May and December 2018 and in Nouakchott in March 2019”.

However, this image cannot be generalised. To the contrary, the following data shows that the overall political atmosphere of conflict between Algeria and Morocco is both mirrored in and exacerbated by the public discussions about paternity of cultural goods. Each time, the monarch either personally intervened in the conflict or was referred to by state representatives. Either way, we observe that the monarchy is positioned as a bulwark against cultural appropriation in the prolonged struggle for independence or against foreign aggression/occupation, be it

⁹⁴⁴ Ndiaye (2016).

⁹⁴⁵ Some Moroccan media contested the unified approach by echoing nationalist claims on the paternity of couscous. See for instance Z. Alami (2016b).

⁹⁴⁶ The adoption on 17 December 2020 happened only one week after the tripartite deal between Morocco, Israel and the USA concerning the Western Sahara and the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the kingdom and the Jewish state on 10 December 2020.

⁹⁴⁷ UNESCO (2020a) and UNESCO (2020d).

⁹⁴⁸ Cf. for example Hemme (2019) and Chabba (2020).

⁹⁴⁹ UNESCO (2020c).

physical or intellectual. Concerning the couscous file, a diplomatic escalation could just so be avoided by preparing a shared application carried by four countries, including Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Mauretania. Yet, the tides had turned by the end of 2020. The situation was considerably aggravated ever since the relationship between Alger and Rabat worsened following the tripartite deal between Morocco, Israel and the USA concerning Western Sahara and the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the kingdom and the Jewish state on 10 December 2020.⁹⁵⁰ Another factor for the rise in uncooperative behaviour may reside in the sudden death of Mustapha Nami, who had been the head of the intangible heritage section of the Moroccan Ministry of Culture's directorate for cultural heritage before he passed away on 4 February 2020. He had very much internalised the humanitarian and universal side of the UNESCO lists and had been behind several UNESCO applications of Morocco, including the joint couscous application (Mohib 2020).

Furthermore, the change of ministers had a visible impact on international cultural relations. With Mohammed Mehdi Bensaid's appointment as cultural minister within Akhannouch's government in the wake of the September 2021 parliamentary elections, the tone of the ministry vis-à-vis international partners harshened considerably. While this may be in line with Morocco's overall rise in confidence ever since the tripartite deal, the change surely also has to do with Bensaid's personality. In his youth, Bensaid had been part of an activist group called *Cercle des jeunes démocrates marocains*. As founding president of the association, he participated in deploying a Moroccan flag of 60.409,70 square meters in the Western Saharan city of Dakhla, thereby earning an inscription to the book of Guinness World Records in 2010.⁹⁵¹ Around the same time, he joined the ranks of the royalist *Authenticity and Modernity Party* (PAM) and was elected to the Moroccan parliament for the first time in 2011 at the age of hardly 27. From 2014, he presided over the committee of Foreign Affairs, National Defence and Islamic Affairs at the House of Representatives, hence becoming the youngest Moroccan to have ever occupied such a high position.⁹⁵²

As the new culture minister since 2021, his profile is thus very much in line with the official narrative on Western Sahara, showing a strong awareness of the importance of international relations for Morocco's national cause. This might also explain why, only a few weeks after his nomination, he started an initiative to create a „Label Maroc” and to submit to UNESCO a

⁹⁵⁰ Middle East Eye (2021).

⁹⁵¹ Mokhliss (2010).

⁹⁵² Jeune Afrique (2015).

repertory/register of cultural goods that the kingdom considers authentically Moroccan.⁹⁵³ According to Bensaid, this initiative, which arrived hardly half a year after he was appointed minister, „first and foremost” represents „a desire to recognise our heritage, both tangible and intangible, with the introduction of a kind of national label for our know-how. This will be accompanied by legal mechanisms for recognising this heritage, both nationally and internationally (at UNESCO, for example), as well as the digitisation of all this knowledge to enable it to be promoted and made accessible to as many people as possible”. In an interview with *Jeune Afrique*, Bensaid denies any desire to counter any foreign offensive by claiming: „It’s not a question of ‘racifying’ culture, but of highlighting Moroccan history and know-how, in the same way, that French, Italian, Japanese or Chinese know-how is recognised. The aim of preserving culture is not to close ourselves off from others, to turn in on ourselves, but on the contrary, to learn more about our own history so that we can move forward. And this work must be done independently of any political vicissitudes.”⁹⁵⁴

Unlike these defensive assertions vis-à-vis an international news outlet, Bensaid’s domestic rhetoric shows another reality. Also, being minister of communication, he declared that he wanted to „work alongside foreign journalists accredited in Morocco and international journalists to promote our country’s image internationally and defend our first national cause, by adopting a communication policy that is not limited to mobilising the national media but also opens up to the foreign media”.⁹⁵⁵ In line with this new media strategy, the Moroccan newspaper *TelQuel* received diverging information on the true purpose of the „Label Maroc”, clearly targeting the patriotic feelings of a Moroccan audience. According to their source close to the file in the culture ministry, this „label will be registered internationally. [...] Once registered, it will enable legal action to be taken against individuals, organisations or companies that plunder or appropriate any component of Moroccan heritage”.⁹⁵⁶ Even more official, *Medias24* obtained an interview with Mohamed Mehdi Bensaid in which the minister explained at length the considerations behind his decision:

„Before my arrival at the Ministry, my predecessor had initiated a huge project, which is still underway, to digitise all our cultural monuments. I have now asked the Director of the Heritage Department to start compiling an inventory of all our physical and, in particular, intangible heritage. [...] This inventory will be based on legal formulas, which are currently being drawn up, **to eventually establish a Moroccan label that will be recognised internationally, in particular by UNESCO, which certifies the historical origin of physical monuments, as well as a country’s knowledge, know-how and practices.** With its many physical monuments, such as the Hassan Tower, the Koutubia, the Chellah and the site of Volubilis, which are known and recognised throughout the world, Morocco has no problem gaining

⁹⁵³ Bouanani (2021a) and 2MTV (2021).

⁹⁵⁴ Fadwa Islah (2021b).

⁹⁵⁵ Quid (2021a).

⁹⁵⁶ Chraïbi (2022b).

international recognition for its architectural expertise, which goes back more than a thousand years. [...] On the other hand, the same cannot be said of **our intangible heritage, which has been the subject of covetousness and even disputes over its origins. Knowing that there have been several debates between neighbouring countries about certain skills, the authorship** of which is disputed by all, we felt it was our duty to list all the practices linked to our culture”, explains Bensaid, citing the controversies over the origin of couscous or the caftan. According to the Minister, the next step will be to submit them **to UNESCO to prove their Moroccan origin, and put an end to foreign temptations to appropriate part of Morocco’s intangible heritage.** „Indeed, this Moroccan touch, which is part of living human treasures, needs to be formalised through **specific legal provisions if it is to be recognised once and for all on a global scale.** At the end of the inventory process, we will finally be able to put a figure on the components of our intangible heritage, which encompasses culinary traditions (couscous, etc.), artistic traditions (Gnaouas, etc.), craft traditions (embroidery, woodwork, etc.) and so many other areas specific to our country’s culture [...] By listing the national heritage, the State aims to label the intangible treasures of the country’s twelve regions in order to obtain irrefutable international recognition of its local know-how and savoir-vivre.”⁹⁵⁷

While avoiding blaming any nation specifically, the minister emphasised that his initiative is indeed a measure to counter foreign attempts to appropriation. This cultural trademark would certify what the Moroccan state considers to be authentically Moroccan cultural goods. It is to be underpinned by legal reforms still under elaboration, which are supposed to hold any perpetrators accountable. It remains his secret, though, how he plans to prove the authenticity of intangible heritage on an international scale in conflicts with other states that also claim the cultural elements’ paternity. What appears very clear, however, is that he plans to instrumentalise UNESCO as both a police office and tribunal. With this idea, Bensaid purposefully followed a global trend which considers UNESCO as an enforcement agency for nationalist claims upon cultural goods and which takes the universal heritage lists as labels of national excellence, useful to formulate a unique selling point in a national economic development strategy. For example, in an interview with the author, a Moroccan heritage official working on the kingdom’s Jewish heritage noted the following with disappointment:

„There are **two realities [in Morocco]: there is the façade that we show to the world, and there is the reality on the ground.** In the showcase, we show that we take care of the heritage and that we are interested in it, and we follow the rules of the art when, in reality, we don’t! [...] You know, the people here, the officials, **they see UNESCO as heritage police which is there to watch with its machine gun that everything is in order, but no!** They don’t understand that the real heritage police should be themselves. UNESCO is just an international institution. The predicate they attribute to monuments is a distinction of nobility for monuments whose memory and values we Moroccans and the civilizations of the world want to share with everyone because they have a universal value for all humanity. While the people here, the officials, they only think in terms of how many tourists this World Heritage label is going to attract. The problem is that in Morocco, there are two kinds of people: one consists of intellectuals who are open to the world, who travel and who are sensitive to questions of culture and civilizations, and there are those who know nothing about it but the latter are also found among heritage managers.”⁹⁵⁸

⁹⁵⁷ El Ouardighi (2021c).

⁹⁵⁸ Interview, Cultural heritage, 2. Cf. also Desplanques (2015). This partly contradicts the impression gained by UNESCO. In a conversation with the author, a high-ranking UNESCO representative in Morocco affirmed that Morocco, despite having no real national cultural policy strategy that would unite all aesthetic, economic and social aspects of culture, is a good partner in cultural heritage matters. The collaboration with Moroccan authorities within the framework of the UNESCO conventions is reported to be smooth and professional. However, when it

It is likely that political and economic considerations may gain even more weight in the elaboration of UNESCO applications and the choice of cultural goods to protect and promote. Mohamed Mehdi Bensaid himself delivered a first pre-taste of this. In his interviews with Moroccan media (including the one cited above), he explicitly enumerated couscous among the elements of authentically Moroccan heritage, which, according to him, had been victim to foreign cultural appropriation or even looting of cultural heritage. Yet, at the moment of the joint application to inscribe couscous as shared immaterial heritage of North African countries, including Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Mauritania, any claim on paternity had been ruled out. As a prerequisite to the application, UNESCO demands the inscription as national heritage. The corresponding Moroccan dossier from 2019 explicitly declares that couscous „constitutes an element of the intangible cultural heritage characteristic of all communities of Morocco and the countries of North Africa” and that „theories about the origin of couscous and the date of its appearance in North Africa vary, but they generally date it back to the dawn of history”. Hence, the Moroccan state, back then, had recognised the non-national, but regional character of couscous and had not claimed any paternity.⁹⁵⁹ Bensaid’s attempt to (at least rhetorically) re-open the file was far from being unanimously supported by the entire ministry. According to MiddleEastEye, a source at the ministry involved in the 2019 application process for the couscous file criticised the minister by saying: „It’s populism [...] The group tasked with preparing the application for the label is the same one that prepared the joint application with Algeria, Tunisia and Mauritania in 2018 and 2019.”⁹⁶⁰ While this critique is not entirely correct,⁹⁶¹ the minister’s initiative mirrors a rising trend within the Moroccan public which tends to present Morocco under the royal leadership of Mohammed VI as the spearhead of positive developments on all levels on the African continent and even beyond. The tendency to nationalise cultural heritage is only one symptom of this development.

In March 2021, half a year before the parliamentary elections and the appointment of a new government under Prime Minister Aziz Akhannouch and with Mohamed Mehdi Bensaid as the new culture minister, a cultural scandal made headlines in Moroccan media. Said el Miftahi, an artist and researcher on the Malhun musical traditions, claimed that he noticed a case of

comes to non-material aspects of culture pertaining to sensitive issues like religion or the promotion of minority culture, UNESCO noted that, beyond the very progressive authorities’ official discourse, there are huge societal barriers that prevent fundamental change, especially outside the major cities. Cf. Interview, UNESCO, 1.

⁹⁵⁹ Royaume du Maroc - Ministère de la Culture (2019, pp. 3–4)

⁹⁶⁰ Bouanani (2021b).

⁹⁶¹ As explained above, Mustapha Nami, head of the intangible heritage section of the Moroccan Cultural Ministry’s directory for cultural heritage and responsible for the couscous application in 2019, passed away on 4 February 2020.

cultural looting. According to him, some actors close to the Algerian regime, in complicity with the Algerian generals, appropriated Moroccan Malhun by modifying texts, references and the names of their authors. In a joint statement with his colleague Abdelmajid Fennich to the journal *Assabah*, he declared having started a petition accusing the Algerian regime of illicit behaviour and announced legal steps against the perpetrators, including an appeal to the International Organisation for the Protection of Intellectual Property. They also called upon the Moroccan Ministry of Culture – still headed by Othman el Ferdaous by then – to take action to protect Morocco's intangible heritage and promote it by organising cultural activities and festivals.⁹⁶² Whereas the Moroccan government, namely the Ministry of Culture, was, by then, already preparing an application to have Malhun inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the public pressure exerted on the government to protect Morocco's cultural identity may have been one factor that pushed Bensaid to start his mandate with the announcement to introduce a national heritage label that would certify the authenticity of cultural goods (allegedly) originating from Morocco.

At any rate, under Culture Minister Bensaid, the plans did not remain merely ink on paper. After he had proposed, at the beginning of his tenure in 2021, the introduction of a „Label Maroc” and a repertory for Moroccan cultural goods as a means to combat what Morocco considers foreign looting of Moroccan heritage, Bensaid has passed to action. On 18 April 2022, during the highly symbolic Ramadan month, the culture minister launched the *Label Moroccan Heritage* at an inter-ministerial signing ceremony with, among others, Ghita Mezzour, minister delegate for Digital Transition and Administration Reform, and Salim M. Al Malik, Director General of the ICESCO.⁹⁶³ The warnings tied to this nationalisation strategy were made real, for the first time in 2022 during the run-up to the prestigious FIFA Football World Cup in Qatar. Morocco is very concerned with the strategic shaping of its nation brand. On the one hand, the kingdom is trying to diversify the image that other states and their populations have of Morocco, and on the other hand, the regime strives to make this brand recognisable. Moroccan arts and crafts play a very important role in this. When Adidas, the sportswear supplier of the Algerian national football team, presented the new jersey of the Algerian selection in October 2022, this led to a real political dispute about cultural authenticity. The new Algerian jersey featured Andalusian-Moorish patterns like those commonly used for tiles in North Africa and Andalusia. Fès and the region around Fès are particularly known to produce such and similar ceramic patterns. Hence, they are claimed by the kingdom to be typically Moroccan in origin and are

⁹⁶² A. (2021) and Younsi (2021).

⁹⁶³ *le 360* (2022).

considered part of the nation's cultural identity. Minister of Culture Bensaid, hence, personally intervened with Adidas and demanded the withdrawal of the jersey design. After legal discussions, Adidas finally issued a statement saying that it had never intended to insult or offend Moroccan artists.⁹⁶⁴ This affair may seem ridiculous and meaningless, but Morocco is serious about such actions.

Another UNESCO application showcases even better that, behind the nationalisation strategy for heritage goods, the Moroccan monarchy pulls the strings. In August 2015, at the margins of the 9th edition of the *Festival International du Raï d'Oujda* (FIRO), the civil society organisation Association Oujda Arts announced that they worked at having the Raï folk music as it is played across the Maghreb countries inscribed on the UNESCO *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*.⁹⁶⁵ The Moroccan state, however, did not take up this idea but was taken by surprise when, in March 2016, the Algerian government announced that they had handed in a request to UNESCO to inscribe the „Raï, popular folk song of Algeria”.⁹⁶⁶ While the Algerian government claimed Algerian origins for the genre, Moroccan media went on the rampage against what they considered to be cultural appropriation, claiming that the true origins of this particular type of music were in the Moroccan border city of Oujda, which also annually hosts the above mentioned Raï festival.⁹⁶⁷ Algeria's announcement even made the headlines in international media,⁹⁶⁸ but the Moroccan regime continued to remain surprisingly silent, even after the official recognition by UNESCO during the 17th session of the *Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* in November 2022. One reason for this may be that, before the diplomatic escalation between Algeria and Morocco in 2021 following the tripartite between Morocco, Israel and the USA, the responsible decision-makers in the respective Moroccan ministries did not care enough to contest Algeria's claim. As shown above, until 2020, the responsible ministry staff at the culture ministry did not incline towards nationalisation and up-held the original idea of the universality of cultural heritage. As we have seen, Moroccan media and civil society actors alike have criticised this passive, non-patriotic approach towards UNESCO. This explanation, however, tells us nothing about the time after the start of the diplomatic crisis in 2021. To understand the modest reaction of the Moroccan state, we need to take the political context into account, which involves opportunities for political manoeuvring at the international level. As written above,

⁹⁶⁴ Juillard (2022), AFP (2022), Helali (2022), Le Figaro (with AFP) (2022b) and with AFP (2022a).

⁹⁶⁵ *le Matin* (2015) and Dragičević Šešić (2015).

⁹⁶⁶ UNESCO (2022).

⁹⁶⁷ Cf. for instance Z. Alami (2016a).

⁹⁶⁸ Saspotas (2016) and Lafitte (2016) and Guibert (2016).

Algeria's application in 2022 was adopted during the 17th session of the UNESCO *Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. This event took place in the Moroccan capital Rabat between 28 November and 3 December, chaired by Morocco's Ambassador and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, Samir Addahre.⁹⁶⁹ It is very likely that, on that occasion, Morocco did not want to provoke any scandal but rather deemed it more useful for the national cause to present itself as a good, generous and neutral host of a major international event. This argument seems even more convincing since the kingdom advanced a file itself during the same session, namely a joint application on „Date palm, knowledge, skills, traditions and practices”, which Morocco supported together with other Arab countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen. This reading is also backed by sources of the Moroccan newspaper *le360*, which quotes officials close to the file saying that, given the recent cases of cultural appropriation, the kingdom „deliberately chose to avoid feeling sorry for the serious moral and material damage suffered by countries that are ‘victims of this type of piracy’”.⁹⁷⁰

From an international perspective, at first glance, Morocco's reaction may have seemed modest. On second glance, however, Morocco's reaction was far more polemic. The king's opening remarks to the 17th session of the UNESCO *Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* in Rabat, read out on behalf of the sovereign by government Secretary General Mohamed Hajoui, recalled that the UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage was originally designed to preserve, promote and valorise immaterial heritage. The king, therefore, called to combat any „attempt to the illicit appropriation of the cultural and civilisational heritage of another country” since „in a rapidly changing world, it is important to emphasise that a country's intangible heritage contributes to its influence [*rayonnement*] and that it must therefore be protected by a clearly defined system that is fully in line with the objectives of the Convention.”⁹⁷¹ The king also announced the creation of a centre that would consolidate Morocco's achievements in protecting and promoting its cultural heritage both on the national and international stage. Although the king avoided being any more concrete than would be appropriate in this high-level diplomatic context, the subtext of the royal speech was clear – at least to Moroccan media, which, even without any country being explicitly accused, read a warning towards the Algerian neighbours

⁹⁶⁹ UNESCO (28 November to 2022).

⁹⁷⁰ M. C. Alaoui (2022).

⁹⁷¹ Mohammed VI (2022b).

into the king's words.⁹⁷² Rightly so, since the speech echoed the developments in the cultural field ever since Mohamed Mehdi Bensaid came into office as culture minister. The royal statement shows that Bensaid's discourse about a Moroccan heritage label is shared (if not crafted) at the highest political level. He has appropriated the approach to nationalise cultural heritage using the international stage. The UNESCO session in his own country provided an opportunity to promote himself as a defender of both international law and national identity. Hence, the implicit royal warning at the Morocco-hosted UNESCO session in Rabat shows that, for the monarchy, cultural heritage has become a battlefield where a war over national sovereignty and authenticity of national identity is fought out, with UNESCO being the ultimate judge and with the king and his government being the advocates of the Moroccan people compiling evidence and making their cases in defence of the national cause.

This is also proven by another incident that again opposed Morocco and Algeria a few months later in the summer of 2023. While the kingdom prepares to have the female caftan, a popular traditional dress with varying patterns, inscribed with UNESCO as an intangible heritage by 2025,⁹⁷³ the Algerian state attempts a similar undertaking. In March 2023, Morocco's eastern neighbours deposited an application with UNESCO entitled „Le costume féminin de cérémonie dans le Grand Est de l'Algérie: savoir-faire associés à la confection et à la parure de la „Gandoura“ et de la „Melehfa““.⁹⁷⁴ While this application for the inscription of traditional female dresses from Algeria to the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity did not in itself cause any objections from Morocco, the official dia show that was supposed to support Algeria's application provoked a scandal in Morocco. Algeria's preparation team slipped a photo into the slides featuring a model who showed a dress whose tailoring and pattern allegedly



Figure 63: Female clothing contested for its national attribution

⁹⁷² Kasraoui (2022c).

⁹⁷³ M. C. Alaoui (2023).

⁹⁷⁴ UNESCO (2024)

represented a Moroccan caftan from Fès, Morocco (Figure 63).⁹⁷⁵

Moroccan media⁹⁷⁶ and civil society⁹⁷⁷ decried cultural appropriation and theft whereas the Moroccan government declared that the Ministry of Culture „has contacted the permanent delegation of the Kingdom of Morocco to UNESCO to lodge a complaint with UNESCO’s evaluation committee”. This complaint, the same source continued, „will only concern the photo (of the caftan in question) and its description. [...] These steps are being taken via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Permanent Delegation of the Kingdom of Morocco to UNESCO, in consultation with Mehdi Bensaïd, Minister of Culture, and the Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the Kingdom of Morocco to UNESCO, Samir Addahre.”

While also ruling out any possibility of supporting a joint application for the caftan, the ministry continued by declaring that based on historical research carried out by experts in the field „the Ministry of Culture considers that the caftan is Moroccan. [...] UNESCO has an intergovernmental committee for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, evaluation mechanisms and committees, and experts who make the final decision. Morocco, for its part, is playing its part by submitting an application and defending its heritage. This was the case with Adidas; it is the case with the caftan, and it will be the case tomorrow with other cases. This is Morocco’s firm position“.⁹⁷⁸

While, according to UNESCO rules, every country may only present one application to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity every two years, Culture Minister Bensaïd announced to push for a reform of this rule to allow an annual registration of several elements at once.⁹⁷⁹ Whereas it is unlikely that this reform will take place any time soon, this swift and firm reaction of the Moroccan authorities expresses the attempt to respond to the public demands to defend national identity against foreign usurpers.⁹⁸⁰ It echoes public discussions in social and classical media that seem to mirror the Moroccan population’s rising awareness of the kingdom’s position in the world as a self-conscious and proud nation under the leadership of Mohammed VI.⁹⁸¹ This pride is mirrored in a public statement made by the

⁹⁷⁵ UNESCO (2023c) and Ibnouzahir (2023).

⁹⁷⁶ Ibnouzahir (2023) and Rahhou (2023).

⁹⁷⁷ Cf. for instance the association “My Moroccan heritage” published a petition calling upon UNESCO to withdraw the image from the dia show: Association My Moroccan Heritage (2023) and Kasraoui (2023).

⁹⁷⁸ Ibnouzahir (2023).

⁹⁷⁹ Ibnouzahir (2023), Hespress (2023d) and Elkhodari (2023).

⁹⁸⁰ In the context of the paternity of caftan, for instance, social media debates between Moroccan and Algerian users have been spreading about the same time in spring 2023: S. N. Guessous (2023) or Elkhodari (2023).

⁹⁸¹ For academic works on Morocco’s soft power, see, for instance, Hmimnat (2018a); Qaissi (2019); Régragui (2013); Wüst and Nicolai (2022) Amiar (2022); Belhaj (2009); Fernandez Molina (2016). See also media articles

culture ministry boasting that, with the inscription of the „Malhun, a popular poetic and musical art” to the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Heritage Morocco during UNESCO’s session in Botswana in December 2023,⁹⁸² Morocco would remain the avant-garde of African countries with regards to the number of „elements inscribed on the prestigious list of the UNESCO”. The ministry prides itself on counting 13 elements on the list ahead of Mali and Algeria (8 each), Malawi (6), Zambia, Nigeria, Egypt (5 each), Ethiopia (4), Ivory Coast and Mauritania (3 each).⁹⁸³ While the Ministry of Culture (especially ever since Mohamed Mehdi Bensaid took office) has every reason to claim this success for itself, this accomplishment is attributed to the monarchy under the leadership of King Mohammed VI. According to a statement from the Ministry of Culture, this inscription success equals „an international recognition of an authentic Moroccan heritage which constitutes one of Morocco’s rich artistic sources and a reference component of the ancient Moroccan cultural identity”. Furthermore, adding Malhun to the representative list „is also a consolidation of the efforts made by Morocco, under the enlightened leadership of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, in the field of preservation and conservation of the Moroccan cultural heritage.”

During the 2023 session of the *Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, the secretary general of Morocco’s culture ministry, Samira Malizi, also expressed its gratitude towards the Intergovernmental Committee⁹⁸⁴ as well as the evaluation committee for making the inscription of Malhun possible. According to her, Morocco considers Malhun „a fundamental symbol of the country’s cultural heritage” and „its consecration as a cultural heritage of humanity is recognition of its human and humanist significance, as well as of the efforts made by the Kingdom of Morocco, under the wise leadership of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, to preserve its intangible cultural heritage, in accordance with the provisions of the 2003 Convention.”⁹⁸⁵ By emphasising that the UNESCO inscription recognised the Malhun as „authentic Moroccan heritage” the kingdom not only recalled the requirement of UNESCO in the sense that the cultural good should not be fake or artificial. Rather, the formulation implicitly referred to conflict with Algeria, which, in Morocco’s perception, had contested Morocco’s paternity of the Malhun two and a half years before. However, these statements also show that the heritagisation of cultural goods not only

like Abou El Farah (2023); Achachi (2021); EcoActu (2022); A. Iraqi (2019c); MAP (2021c, 2022e); Rahhou (2024a); Sembène (2023); TelQuel (2022c).

⁹⁸² UNESCO (2023b).

⁹⁸³ MAP (2023g); Yabiladi and MAP (2023).

⁹⁸⁴ Le Maroc à l'UNESCO (2023).

⁹⁸⁵ Le Desk (2023); MAP (2023f); Zaoui (2023).

serves the underpinning of patriotic feelings in terms of nation-building or the creation of national identity. Morocco's international engagement on the UNESCO level rather has a very strong legitimating function following the purpose of promoting the king's image as a defender and preserver of the nation and its indivisible identity in all its components. As the example of the Bouregreg Valley discussed above has shown at length, rare are the occasions when the monarchy's ambitions are internationally criticised. These occasions were very telling about the monarchy's reasoning and can help assess the sincerity of its intentions behind its otherwise ostentatious support of UNESCO. In this regard, I embrace Claire Cécile Mitatre's argument that, in times when, elsewhere in the world, cultural heritage is under threat or even destroyed by extremists (e.g. the Bouddahs of Bamiyan in 2001, the clay mosques in Timbuctoo in 2012 or the ruins of Palmyra in 2015), Morocco's apparent efforts to valorise cultural heritage are unlikely to raise international criticism and may even engender wide appraisal given the commonly accepted supreme value of cultural notions even though Morocco's promotion of certain cultural traits is characterised by competition and even enmity (Mitatre 2018, p. 75).

6.6.2. *Amir al Mouminine* Goes Global: Morocco's International Religious Co-option

Synchronously to several other Arab States (Albrecht & Schlumberger 2004), Morocco has used the global war on terrorism to strengthen its position internationally ever since the 9/11 terror attacks. The resilience of the Moroccan political system in the wake of the 2011 Arab Uprisings provided the regime and religious model an advance in credibility on the national and international scale. This credibility is an asset in the bazaar of ideologies that competitors such as the Saudi Wahabi doctrine have not been able to claim ever since the rise of international Islamist terrorism from 2001 onward (Hmimnat 2018a). Accordingly - Morocco's religious diplomacy has become one of the most important resources for the kingdom's soft power. It builds on Mohammed VI's constitutionally anchored role and his strong religious authority as Commander of the Faithful (*amir al mouminine*) to claim regional religious leadership and „use a moderate discourse of Islam to help build new economic and political ties” (Tadlaoui 2015, p. 2).⁹⁸⁶ It allows Morocco and its king to propagate a Moroccan brand of Islam that is both reform-oriented and tolerant (Boussouf, 2018; del Sordi & Dalmasso, 2018). As we have seen above, after the Casablanca bombings of 2003, the religious vision of the king received new impetus. It was framed as a strategy of 'spiritual security', building on the Sunni-Maliki jurisprudence, Ashaari rite and Sufi mysticism. Especially Sufism has become a bulwark in

⁹⁸⁶ See also Wüst and Nicolai (2022); Abouzzohour and Tomé-Alonso (2019); Hmimnat (2018a, 2018b); A. Iraqi (2019a); Régragui (2013).

countering the spreading of extremist ideology, which presents a common threat to many states of northern and sub-Saharan Africa (Wainscott 2017).⁹⁸⁷

Morocco's long-standing historical connections to Sufi orders in North and West Africa, such as the Tariqa Tijaniya, have regularly been used as channels of influence on these countries' societies, where these orders of Moroccan heritage are very popular and have pledged allegiance to King Mohammed VI as their spiritual authority (Abourabi 2020, 250ff.; Belhaj 2009, 193ff.; Wainscott 2017, 207ff.). Through (new) institutions of national education and research (e.g. the Rabita Mohammadia of Moroccan Oulema, the Mohammed VI Institute for Qur'anic Lectures and Studies or the Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams Murshidin and Murshidat, the Mohammed VI Foundation for African Oulema) as well as national and international broadcasting via TV (e.g. Assadissa/N° 6; founded in 2006)⁹⁸⁸ and radio channels (e.g. Mohammed VI Radio of Holy Qur'an; founded in 2004), the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs keeps close control of Moroccan religious life, while it sees to the promotion of the royal vision of Moroccan Islam beyond the kingdom's borders (Wainscott, 2017).⁹⁸⁹

Moroccan officials like to stress that the fight against terror is an obligation that concerns the whole world and the region of North and West Africa in particular. One interlocutor working in the international propagation of the Moroccan religious model relates the kingdom's intervention abroad to the common challenge of extremism, which Morocco has successfully learned to tackle, an experience his country now feels the moral obligation to share. He said:

„There's also the **Sufi factor**. You know that the tariqas, the Sufi ways, uhh practically, in Africa, they're all from Morocco. The Tijania, for example, the Shadhiliyya, they all came from Fès, they all came from Morocco. So there's an impregnation, and you feel there's a closeness. There's a closeness with the Africans that's been established now because there's a threat today that we didn't have before. Perhaps there were military or political threats or other threats. **But today there's a threat to faith, there's a threat to belief, and today it can compromise the political, economic, social and cultural stability of the WHOLE region, and I would even say the whole world.** Because today when we talk about extremism, when we talk about terrorism, terrorism has no nationality, has no identity, has no colour, and respects no borders because it can cross, it can pierce, it can go beyond any border without a passport, without a visa and GO and deploy these poisons, go and deploy these viruses like the COVID-19 today which has recognised no border and has pierced them all. And today, it has left Wuhan in China and is now found in the United States, Canada, Latin America, the whole of Europe, Asia and Africa, that's how it is. **I see extremists, terrorism, identity-based or extremist thinking - I'd put it that way - as viruses.** And when we're in situations like that, with a disaster or a pandemic, we have to pull together, we have to work together to confront the invasion, to confront the threat, to confront the PANDEMIC. And it's exactly in the same way that today, if Morocco has offered to help African countries deal with COVID-

⁹⁸⁷ Interview, Religious policies, 9.

⁹⁸⁸ According to Abourabi (2020, p. 203) this channel - which can be received in Europe, the Mediterranean area, and the Middle East - was created to counter extremism that damages the image of Islam.

⁹⁸⁹ Through the finance law project 2020, the Habous Ministry announced to spend 107 Million Dirhams (~ 10,7 million Euros) for the propagation of the Moroccan Islamic model abroad and another 100 Million Dirhams (~ 10 million Euros) for the *Mohammed VI Foundation for African Oulema* to combat extremist views.

19 with masks and respirators, well it's been doing it for two or three decades now to deal with an extremist ideology, **a terrorist ideology that THREATENED the stability of Africa and that also THREATENED the stability of Morocco**. And we have a duty, an obligation to FACE it together and, I would say, to counteract this trend, and it cannot be counteracted by security alone, because it can be overcome. And the best way to counteract it and the best way to face up to it is to **EDUCATE people, to TRAIN people, to MAKE people AWARE and that's the best way to IMMUNE them**, in other words, to give them IMMUNITY against ANY spirit, against ANY ideology, against ANY EXTREMIST current. That way they can reject it in the same way and NEVER accept it because it goes AGAINST reason, it goes against divine recommendations.”⁹⁹⁰

My interlocutor emphasised that Morocco's outreach to Africa looks back on a long tradition that builds upon the strong connections of Sufi brotherhoods from Morocco with Western African. Scholars like Werenfels (2014) highlighted that the international Sufi connections were also mobilised by the Moroccan monarchy to sideline Algeria in the Western Sahara question. My interlocutor, in turn, framed his argument in terms of the global threat of terrorism to which Morocco is able to provide an adequate answer. He made sure that his argument resonated within a global context and an international audience like myself. He compared terrorism to a virus like COVID-19 that spreads in a pandemic manner and which the countries concerned need to immunise themselves against through educative measures which Morocco can provide. The offer to help out beyond its own borders, therefore, is not born from mere altruism but is also self-oriented insofar as Morocco's stability and security depend on the stability and security of its southern neighbours. This was also pointed out by Ahmed Toufiq, the Minister of religious affairs himself, during the 43rd Session of the Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco on the Relations between Morocco and the Countries of West Africa in December 2015: „Throughout its history, Morocco has tried to protect itself and the countries around its sub-Saharan rim from the same dangers that now threaten it from its southern flank.”⁹⁹¹

Among the most well-known features of Moroccan religious diplomacy is Morocco's cooperation with Mali after the military coup in 2012. When, in 2013, the then newly elected Malian president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was sworn in, King Mohammed VI attended the ceremony and offered help for the reconstruction of the country – especially concerning the healing of the moral and cultural wounds. Mohammed VI proclaimed,

Any concerted international action that does not give due consideration to the spiritual and cultural dimension will therefore be doomed to failure. The partnership the Kingdom of Morocco wishes to propose for the tangible and intangible reconstruction of Mali is fully in line with this philosophy. It is absolutely necessary to repair the material damage suffered and to treat symbolic wounds through the

⁹⁹⁰ Interview, Religious policies, 9. The capital letters are added by the author to highlight the interlocutor's emphatic speech.

⁹⁹¹ Ahmed Toufiq (2015). It is an interesting side note that Ahmed Toufiq, a historian by training, served as director of the Institute of African Studies at the University Mohammed V and Director of the National Library in Rabat before he was nominated minister of religious affairs in 2002. It might, therefore, not be a coincidence that it is under his aegis that Morocco turned itself towards its African neighbours.

rehabilitation of mausoleums, the restoration and preservation of manuscripts and the achievement of socio-cultural revival.⁹⁹²

The King thereafter announced to train 500 Malian imams in the Moroccan capital Rabat and provide them with the moderate and tolerant Islamic values that “the Kingdom had been propagating for centuries”.⁹⁹³ To manage the influx of foreign students and enable cultural



Figure 64: Main entrance to Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, Murshidin and Murshidat

capacity building, the Moroccan Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs opened the *Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, Murshidin and Murshidat* to people from all nations, men and women alike, who wish to become imams or preachers (Figure 64). The institute offers theological lessons accompanied by courses in science, language, intercultural dialogue and

vocational training in an array of different professions such as electrician or tailor (Figure 65), which allows the future imam or preacher to make a living separate from his religious mission (Royaume du Maroc - Ministère des Habous et des Affaires Islamiques 2019a).

⁹⁹² Mohammed VI (2013a), cf. also Wainscott (2017, p. 207)

⁹⁹³ Since 2017 Morocco additionally participates in the physical reconstruction of cultural heritage destroyed by terrorists during the Malian civil war. With a contribution of 1,5 million USD, the kingdom has joined the International Alliance for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Zones of Conflict (ALIPH), which strives to protect and reconstruct endangered cultural artefacts all over the world (ALIPH, 2020; Cot, 2019).



Figure 65: Vocational training rooms for electric and sewing jobs at the Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, Murshidin and Murshidat

This additional possibility ensures that the students are less likely to be recruited by extremist organisations that capitalise on their lack of economic alternatives. The above-mentioned Moroccan official familiar with the training and education of foreign preachers and imams described the program as a vaccine to the virus of Wahhabi extremism: “[We] will vaccinate these people, which will give them immunity, it is the [strategy] of placing good people who are well trained according to our standards, our principles, and our religious constants.”⁹⁹⁴ According to the interlocutor, the resonance to the programme has been vastly positive, with officials from numerous countries from Africa, Asia, and America requesting Moroccan expertise.⁹⁹⁵

The institute has become a point of attraction and influence even outside the immediate region. Almost 1715 students from sub-Saharan countries, 37 students from Tunisia, 52 students from France, 21 students from the United Kingdom and six students from Thailand have been trained in Rabat as of February 2020.⁹⁹⁶ During their studies in Rabat, the students receive a monthly stipend of 2000 Dirhams (~ 200 Euros), free board and accommodation as well as access to

⁹⁹⁴ Interview, Religious policies, 9.

⁹⁹⁵ This view is confirmed, for instance, by the former Malian minister of foreign affairs, for whom the training of Malian imams in Morocco is part of a counter-terrorism strategy Tilouine (2013).

⁹⁹⁶ The data stem from an internal document received from a Moroccan government official. Cf. Interview, Cultural Diplomacy, 1.

sports activities. The program has become a successful flagship of the kingdom's new nation brand;⁹⁹⁷ the combination of cultural capacity building and educational exchange constitutes a classical approach to generating soft power attraction (Cull 2019).

I personally experienced the degree to which the institute is used as a soft power resource. Organising a delegation visit to Morocco for a German political foundation, upon an official request with both the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Habous Ministry, I was invited by the institute to visit the facility on a Friday afternoon in May 2024. There, we were welcomed by an official who guided us through the whole complex, showing us the assembly hall, praying spaces and the classrooms for vocational training. All of them were empty of people – apparently, classes had already stopped in the afternoon due to prayer time or (what rather seemed to be the case given the very clean and tidy appearance) had not been in use for some time. After the visit, we were invited for lunch. In a splendidly decorated dining hall, staff members served us traditional Moroccan Friday couscous and buttermilk as a main dish and fresh fruits for dessert. Upon our departure, the Secretary General presented our whole organisation team, including myself, with a medal, normally meant for awarding graduates of the institute. This experience perfectly illustrates the efforts the Moroccan state makes to co-opt foreign target groups that can potentially work as multipliers of their legitimacy claims involving the narrative of hospitality, religious moderation, tolerance and interfaith dialogue.

Against this backdrop, it is important to note that there are several problems regarding the imam training, including irregularities and a lack of transparency in the admission process of new students or issues with last-minute curricula changes and course cancellations due to a lack of students and staff. These issues concern mostly the non-theological courses, which are at the core of Morocco's claim of addressing country-specific cultural and socio-economic realities (Hmimnat 2019b). With regards to the theological parts, one of my interlocutors from Mali who was trained at the institute claimed that there was nothing special about the training in Rabat. While this view might not be representative, it nevertheless contradicts the official narrative diffused over national and international media which portrays the training programme among the avant-garde of Islamic education in the world. Despite these flaws, however, my personal impression of the officials I had the opportunity to speak with was one of sincere and honest engagement for interfaith dialogue and religious moderation. I also felt that they tried their best to stay true to the mission they were entrusted with by their superiors and the kingdom's decision-makers. To me, they often seemed to be busy finding a pragmatic way of dealing with

⁹⁹⁷ Even beyond the religious policy field of student exchange, migration policy has become an asset to Morocco's geostrategic ambitions as has been shown by S. Benjelloun (2021).

financial constraints and limits in human resources as well as organisational problems. Yet, it is this very lack of funding and human resources that prevents Morocco from keeping up with its promises and claims. Eventually, the flaws cast doubt on the sincerity of the regime's efforts to engage in a meaningful interfaith dialogue. They rather make them appear like window-dressing for international regime legitimization purposes.

A corresponding observation can be made for the Mohammed VI Foundation for African Oulema, dedicated to the intra-African exchange of experiences in the religious field, which takes on an increasingly prominent role in Morocco's foreign religious diplomacy. In his inauguration speech in 2016, King Mohammed VI explicitly stated that the initiative serves to link the people of Sub-Saharan Africa to himself as Commander of the Faithful. Through its 32 branches, the work of the foundation aims to foster support for Morocco among religious and political elites in Sub-Saharan African countries and expand the country's cultural and religious influence (Hmimnat 2020; Royaume du Maroc 2015).

The Moroccan contribution to the regional and global combat against Islamist terror, especially through the Institut Mohammed VI for the training of Imams, Murshidin and Murshidat as well as the Rabita Mohammedia, is regularly emphasized during official visits of foreign delegations to Morocco and the organisation of international conferences. In 2016, the Moroccan king hosted an international conference drafting the Marrakesh Declaration, which was supposed to respond to the so-called Islamic State's horrors targeting non-Muslim minorities. It called upon religious experts to develop a legal orientation that „merges the Prophet Muhammad's original conception of a community (*'umma'*) with the more modern contractual idea of citizenship as a means of counteracting discrimination against minorities" (Gottreich 2020, p. 179). In concrete terms, the signatories „highlighted that the objectives of this charter provide a suitable framework for constitutionally including modern international norms enshrined in the United Nations documents, particularly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (Pektas 2019, p. 201). Given its universal character, the charter attracted huge international attention and even earned Morocco an acknowledging remark from US President Barack Obama (Sheline 2018, p. 231). The regime made sure, that King Mohammed VI would explicitly be mentioned by the declaration made „in Marrakech in the Sherrefian Kingdom of Morocco, and under the auspices of His Majesty, King Mohammed VI of Morocco – this country, which was and remains an inspiring model of protecting religious minorities and a caretaker of historical heritage, rich in tolerance, coexistence, and blending between Muslims and others, who belong to the same

country, and those who have migrated to it, fearful of religious oppression or social injustice”.⁹⁹⁸

This portrayal of the king defending peaceful coexistence and interfaith dialogue in the direct continuity of the prophet Mohammed gained yet another dimension in the spring of 2019. On 30-31 March 2019, Mohammed VI received Pope Francis for a two-day visit in Rabat. During this worldwide broadcast visit, Morocco’s claim to international religious leadership became clear. In his speech, which took place in front of the Mohammed V mausoleum in Rabat on the esplanade of the Tour Hassan, an emblematic heritage site of the Moroccan kingdom,⁹⁹⁹ the king, in his position as *amir al mousline*, reminded the audience that he personally guarantees free cultic practice for all book religions, i.e. the three Abrahamic religions Islam, Christianity and Judaism.¹⁰⁰⁰ He presented Morocco as „an embodiment of openness, passage and cross-cultural fertilization” and „a symbol of balance and harmony”. Furthermore, he elevated himself at equal footing with Pope Francis claiming leadership in countering extremist thought and equipping the world with the values of religion, a concept he called „*spiritualité agissante* – active spirituality”, i.e. a spirituality that takes action for a world of justice, tolerance, peace and understanding between the peoples against all forms of radical thought and a human treatment of migrants and the weak in society.¹⁰⁰¹ The king also invited Pope Francis to the *Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, Murshidin and Murshidat* in Rabat where the institute was promoted as an outstanding token of tolerant religious education. There they met imam students and spiritual guides from all over the world and attended a concert featuring the arrangement „les Religions à l’Unisson” with three prominent religious chants, i.e. the Muslim call for prayer, the Christian Ave Maria and the Jewish Adonai.¹⁰⁰² Furthermore, King Mohammed VI and Pope Francis signed a document dubbed „Al-Quds Call” emphasising the holy status of Jerusalem for all three book religions and calling for free access to the respective

⁹⁹⁸ Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques (2016b)

⁹⁹⁹ Calderwood (2018, 291f.) skilfully describes the symbolic significance of this place: Upon his return from exile on the eve of independence, Mohammed V led a prayer in front of a huge crowd on the square in front of this unfinished 12th-century-masterpiece from the Almohad dynasty when Morocco’s political and civilisational power was at its pinnacle spreading from North Africa across the Mediterranean Sea to the Iberian Peninsula. After Mohammed V’s death, his son Hassan II created a “modern revival of Morocco’s Andalusí identity” by constructing a mausoleum for his late father on this esplanade, which “symbolised Morocco’s past glory, its cultural connections with the Iberian Peninsula, and its recent fight for independence”.

¹⁰⁰⁰ It is noteworthy that the king explicitly spoke about Muslims and Moroccan Jews as well as foreign Christians. The emphasis on non-Moroccan Christians is most likely due to the official narrative about Morocco being a Muslim country with an endemic Jewish minority. This excludes other authentically Moroccan confessions. As seen above, apostasy and proselytism are still officially punished in the kingdom.

¹⁰⁰¹ Mohammed VI (2019a). See also KTO TV (2019a) and MEDII TV (2019b).

¹⁰⁰² Kasraoui (2019) and KTO TV (2019b).

holy sites.¹⁰⁰³ One and a half years later, this joint statement would become one of the key references put forward by the regime in its negotiations with the USA regarding the normalisation of diplomatic relations with Israel in exchange for their recognition of Morocco's claims on Western Sahara.¹⁰⁰⁴ Commenting on these carefully arranged and highly symbolic images, the Moroccan media presented Mohammed VI in the continuity of the prophet Mohammed himself as the representative not only of the faithful in Morocco but of all Muslims worldwide, who, together with the Pope as the second great intellectual and spiritual leader of the world's major religions, will assume responsibility and „leadership”, build bridges and promote interreligious dialogue against obscurantism.¹⁰⁰⁵

Such activities seek to promote Morocco as a central player in finding a solution against Islamist terrorism.¹⁰⁰⁶ While the impact of activities like the Imam training program remains difficult to measure and certainly has its flaws, the reported appreciation of the recipient countries is the currency relevant to assessing soft power gains. Mali, for instance, has relinquished its historical support for the POLISARIO Front. Doubtlessly, there are multiple reasons for this shift in policy, but Morocco's readiness to assist Mali during its worst recent crisis, despite the countries' long-time dissent over the status of Western Sahara, has certainly not been to the kingdom's disadvantage (cf. Waincott, 2017, p. 210).¹⁰⁰⁷ Most of my interlocutors explained the relations with African states in terms of historical continuity of trans-Sahara exchange, former Moroccan hegemony in West Africa and religious linkages through Sufi brotherhoods.¹⁰⁰⁸ One high-ranking official of Morocco's religious institutions explained his country's outreach to other African countries in terms of geopolitical considerations in the context of the Western Sahara issue, „which has been mistreated by many African countries which have exploited Algerian financial aid at a certain time. And now Morocco finds itself obliged to relaunch its relations with African countries.” For him, this relaunch of diplomatic relations with the African continent by both religious and economic means was a logical step following other nations like China, Turkey and the former colonial powers, which had extended their networks for quite some time already.¹⁰⁰⁹ This yet is another telling example of

¹⁰⁰³ Morocco World News (2019).

¹⁰⁰⁴ Cabinet Royal (2020).

¹⁰⁰⁵ Taoufik El Bouchtaoui (2019); Taoufik El Bouchtaoui (2019); MED11 TV (2019a, 2019c).

¹⁰⁰⁶ Interview, Religious policies, 9.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Belhaj (2009) described the Western Sahara conflict as the most important obstacle in Morocco's foreign policy approach toward Africa. While, at the time of his writing, Morocco's occupation of Western Sahara was criticized as a colonial act by a majority of African countries, many nations have since relativized their stance.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Cf. for instance Interview, Museums, 1; Interview, Religious policies, 9 + 10.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Interview, Religious policies, 10.

authoritarian learning and autocratic diffusion. It is evidence that the regime observes other autocracies in the world to get inspiration for its own conceptual policy planning.

The king himself plays an active role in propagating the Moroccan model while fostering his position as a religious leader by inaugurating new mosques abroad or donating tens of thousands of Qurans to foreign countries during his official visits (Hmimnat 2018a, 27–30; A. Iraqi 2019a, 897ff.). For the time between 2011–2016 alone, i.e. the period immediately preceding Morocco's reintegration into the African Union, Hmimnat (2018a, p. 29) counts 142.600 copies of the Qur'an distributed in Africa by the Moroccan state. The Moroccan foundation responsible for the printing of the copies to be distributed by the king, is controlled by the monarchy. The copies feature Moroccan-style calligraphy (Wainscott 2017, 113f.). One of the foundation's main goals consists of „producing annually one million copies of the Quran to disseminate inside and outside the country. The Quran printed by this foundation embodies the purity of Islamic identity and its continuity in the Sherifian kingdom. According to a Tunisian scholar, the Moroccan Quranic script is ‘the closest to the ancient, original one and the last [in the Islamic world] that preserved its authentic origins’” (Hmimnat 2018a, p. 29). During a visit to the Tanzanian capital Dar Essalam in 2016, Mohammed VI launched the construction of a 7.400 square meters mosque, including a prayer room for more than 5.000 worshipers, a library, and a conference hall,¹⁰¹⁰ worth 115 million Dirham¹⁰¹¹ Tanzania traditionally has not been favourable towards the Moroccan claim on Western Sahara, but has since toned down its formerly hostile discourse. After the king's visit, the Tanzanian president Jon Pombe Joseph Magufuli urged the United Nations to find a fair and just solution to the Sahara issue and expressed support for Morocco's decision to reintegrate into the African Union. It was a promise that the country kept a year later when it voted in favour of Morocco's return to the African Union, a fact that media close to the Moroccan regime interpret as proof of the success of Morocco's foreign religious activities.¹⁰¹² This favourable result was no coincidence. A high-ranking employee of a cultural organization working on Moroccan Jewish heritage under the king's patronage highlighted the strategic considerations behind Morocco's choice to put Sub-Saharan Africa on top of the foreign policy agenda:

You are surely aware of the concept of Soft Power conceived in the 1990s. Morocco was one of the first countries in Africa [...] to use the concept of Soft Power based on culture, especially in international relations. [...] In this context, concerning the strategic priorities, especially in the case of religious and

¹⁰¹⁰ Morocco World News (2016a, 2016b).

¹⁰¹¹ Royaume du Maroc - Ministère des Habous et des Affaires Islamiques (2019b, p. 19). The document mentions similar projects in Conakry in Guinee (worth 130 million Dirhams), in Abidjan in Ivory Coast (120 million Dirhams), in Nouakchott in Mauritania (18 million Dirhams).

¹⁰¹² Benslimane (2016); Morocco World News (2017b)

cultural diplomacy in Africa, we see that Sub-Sahara Africa is at the centre of the kingdom's strategic space. [...] For centuries, Morocco has had very good relations with Mali and Senegal. [...] But **Morocco goes beyond this old zone of influence [...] and today even among countries in the East [of Africa], some of which are hostile to the question of the Sahara** as being part of Morocco, even among these countries **Morocco tries to broaden its support base** and tries to convince them to support its primary national cause. All **this is accomplished through that beautiful culture, an Islam of openness, Maliki Islam** that revolves around public interest and engenders flexibility and not the rigidity characteristic of other Muslim streams.¹⁰¹³

This quote from an official working for a Jewish institution further exemplifies the palace's efforts to propagate an image of credible religious tolerance by giving new visibility to the Moroccan Jewish community.¹⁰¹⁴ The use of academic concepts like Joseph Nye's „soft power“ is yet another telling example of authoritarian learning and is evidence that the regime observes new trends in the world for its own conceptual policy planning.

6.6.3. Morocco's Jewish Heritage and Donald Trump's Deal of the Century

While the public promotion of Jewish heritage before 2016 was part of a general strategy to improve Morocco's image on the international level,¹⁰¹⁵ it has become pivotal to Moroccan foreign policy since the US presidency of Donald Trump. The Trump administration placed the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at the top of his political agenda and charged Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, to broker the questionable 'Peace to Prosperity' plan for the Israel-Palestine conflict that included the recognition of Israel by Arab states. This turned the promotion of the Jewish community in Morocco into a door-opener, and political activities in this area had been multiplied even further, culminating in symbolically loaded actions such as the creation of Bayt Dakira in Essaouira which I discussed in more detail above in chapter 6.2.1.3.3.

De facto, diplomatic relations between Morocco and Israel have long been closer and more cordial than between Israel and most other Arab states, not least due to the large number of Israelis with Moroccan backgrounds. But the king, as patron of all religions in Morocco, cannot go too far in the propagation of the interfaith dialogue and the opening of Moroccan Islam in order not to jeopardize the sensitive balance of forces in the Moroccan political and societal game, despite his reformist eagerness (Maghraoui 2009).¹⁰¹⁶ Accordingly, there had thus far been a political reluctance to advance the official normalisation of the diplomatic relations so as not to risk igniting resistance against the ruling elite's promotion of the 'Zionist cause' among

¹⁰¹³ Interview, Jewish heritage, 5.

¹⁰¹⁴ In contrast to other Arab states, the Moroccan regime has supported the opening of public institutions dedicated to Moroccan Jewish heritage. For example, Bayt Dakira, a research centre on Jewish law and Judaism in Moroccan history, was introduced in the school curriculum of the CE6 history classes (cf. MAP 2020; Lamlili 2017).

¹⁰¹⁵ Interview, Jewish heritage, 5.

¹⁰¹⁶ Interview, Religious policies, 1.

the Moroccan population, which is historically supportive of the Palestinian cause and considers Israel a major threat for peace in the region (Brakel & Barak 2020).¹⁰¹⁷

The monarchy seems to have understood that the international community (and the USA, Israel and the West in particular) are sensible to topics relating to the worldwide promotion of religious freedom (Wainscott 2017, p. 91) and the protection of the so-long discriminated Jewish communities in particular. Two Moroccan personalities of Jewish faith represent the regime's co-option of the Jewish community like no other. In 1991, the former political activist from Essaouira and high-ranking banker at BNP Paribas Paris, André Azoulay was appointed royal advisor. In November 1993, Serge Berdugo, the secretary general of the Conseil des Communautés Israélites du Maroc (CCIM), became Minister of Tourism only weeks after the signing of the Oslo Declaration of Principles. In March 2006, King Mohammed VI appointed Serge Berdugo, roaming ambassador of the king, to obtain the USA's recognition of Morocco's claims on Western Sahara (Amiar 2022, p. 265).¹⁰¹⁸ In the spring of 2007, the official national airline Royal Air Maroc featured a lengthy article in its magazine about the Jewish Museum of Casablanca as „a testimony of national tolerance and Jewish-Muslim coexistence in Morocco” (Boum 2013a, p. 126). Furthermore, André Azoulay and Serge Berdugo undertook several journeys to Israel to prepare a request at the Shoah Memorial Yad Vashem to recognise the current king's grandfather, Mohammed V, as „Righteous among the nations” for his efforts to protect his Jewish subjects from the persecution of France's pro-Nazi Vichy-regime.¹⁰¹⁹ Taken together, Morocco's Jewish top officials Serge Berdugo and André Azoulay have made extensive experiences with the marketing potential of Jewish heritage as a driver for (economic) development and international cooperation. Extrapolating from these experiences and up-scaling them to a nationwide strategy was a process that is closely linked to these personalities, their access to the king and their influence on government decisions. Especially André Azoulay has worked as an indefatigable lobbyist in Morocco and abroad to make the kingdom's narrative about a diverse, tolerant and moderate society heard and acknowledged. A few weeks before the official agreement between the USA, Israel and Morocco, which would stipulate the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the Jewish state and the kingdom in exchange for the USA's recognition of Morocco's claims on Western Sahara, Azoulay published a statement which perfectly summarises his role in promoting Morocco's image:

¹⁰¹⁷ Ahren (2020a, 2020b).

¹⁰¹⁸ According to an interview with the French daily *le Monde* of 12 February 2021, Serge Berdugo made his first steps in parallel diplomacy in the 1970s when he explained Morocco's position on the Western Sahara issue to Jewish leaders in the USA and Europe (Amiar (2022, p. 265)).

¹⁰¹⁹ Boukhari and Hamdani (2007) and Perelman (2007).

„It is definitely a lack of humility to tell you how proud I am as a Moroccan Jewish citizen, to belong to a worldwide very selective and snubish [sic] Club.

-Selective being Consellor [sic] of H.M the King Mohammed VI, direct descendant of the prophet Mohammed and Commander of all our Faiths, we Peoples of the Holy and Sacred Books.
-Snubish [sic] due to the fact that in this period of denial, clashes and collective regression, I feel deeply gifted as a citizen of a Moslem country who, by its Constitution, refers to Judaism as one of its founding pillars. Doing so, Morocco mirrors in direction of the world community of Nations the resilience and the art of being and living together with our differences and making this diversity as the central engine of the modernity of our society.“¹⁰²⁰

In this statement, Azoulay emphasised his prominent position as a Jew at the service of a Muslim ruler and stressed all non-Muslim communities' recognition of his political and spiritual authority. This contributes to an image of Moroccan exceptionalism and paints this composition as a role model for peaceful coexistence in the world. This dovetails with Réragui, who emphasised that the transmitter of the messages becomes almost as important as the message itself (Réragui 2013, 85ff.).

In July 2018, Mehdi Qotbi, president of Morocco's National Museum Foundation, announced the creation of a new museum on Moroccan Judaism in Fès alongside a museum on Islamic Art which shall be launched and opened at the same time as a symbol of religious tolerance.¹⁰²¹ After allocating a project budget of 10 million Dirhams (~924 000 euros) as part of the Fès urban refurbishing programme, this idea took form in the following years.¹⁰²² In the wake of the project launch in April 2019 and only a few days after the worldwide televised visit of Pope Francis to Morocco, Mehdi Qotbi gave the following declaration to the national and international media:

„Morocco is sending a strong message to the world that coexistence between Moroccans and all other religions is a reality. After the message of peace which was the visit of the pope, Morocco, under the leadership of the king, is launching a message to the world because we need this message for the spread of peace and love between beings and between cultures.“¹⁰²³

This brilliantly shows that, apart from underlining to the domestic public the different components of the Moroccan identity, the museum has a clear mission which goes far beyond the Moroccan borders. The project was conceived to have (in the words of Serge Berdugo) a „very big value to the outside world“.¹⁰²⁴

In 2020, the role model image was further nurtured in awareness of the international community watching. Before this special year, Moroccan schoolbooks had presented Jews mainly as members of the state of Israel, the latter being the Palestinians' antagonists in their strife for a

¹⁰²⁰ Association Mimouna (2020a).

¹⁰²¹ Berset (2018); TelQuel (2018); Times of Israel (2018).

¹⁰²² El Ouardighi (2019); Elafrite (2019a).

¹⁰²³ Times of Israel (2019); Yabiladi and MAP (2019).

¹⁰²⁴ A. (2019).

state of their own. Unlike the Amazigh identity component, which had made it into the textbooks since the creation of the IRCAM in the early 2000s, the Jewish contribution to Moroccan history and the Holocaust had continued to be left out entirely of the Moroccan school curriculum. Instead, Moroccan pupils were held to observe and draw conclusions from images depicting the maps of the Middle East with „seized/occupied/annexed” territories or Palestinians throwing stones or pointing firearms against Israeli settlements (Maye-Saidi 2018).

Despite being a long-time demand of different civil society groups, including the Jewish community and the royal advisor André Azoulay, as well as other imminent Jewish figures like Simon Lévy,¹⁰²⁵ it was only a few weeks ahead of the normalisation of relations between Morocco and Israel, brokered by the USA, that Moroccan Jewish heritage was announced to be soon integrated into the kingdom’s education system. As if to seize a closing window of opportunity, the first announcement concerned the reform of the CE6 history classes, i.e. the last year of primary school for children around 11 years to be followed by an adaption of the secondary school courses. Curiously, it was not the Moroccan government that announced the textbook reform, but a Moroccan civil society group called *Association Mimouna*, whose honorary president is royal advisor André Azoulay. On 6 November 2020, they celebrated via Facebook in English and Arabic, saying that „[a]fter almost 14 years of hard work, determination and perseverance, Moroccan Judaism has finally made it to the Moroccan educational system. The course, which is taught in primary school, focuses on the Hebraic/Jewish cultural component enshrined in the constitution, the historical royal visit to Bayt Dakira and a short glimpse of the history of Moroccan Jews. The introduction of Moroccan Judaism into Moroccan schools has been the dream of the late Mr. Simon Levy, Mr. Andre Azoulay, the Museum of Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca and every single member of Mimouna Association ...this dream was realised.”¹⁰²⁶

The peculiar circumstance of seeing Moroccan officials not exploit what was sure to become an international scoop can be explained by two considerations: Either the monarchy, by silently introducing the new chapters, had attempted to avoid any public accusations from anti-Israeli or anti-Jewish civil society actors in Morocco that it would indoctrinate young children with „Zionist” ideas. This option seems unlikely, though, since the government must have been aware that at some point in time, this news would spread, and the clandestine introduction would be even more scandalised.

¹⁰²⁵ Ahdani (2020c) and Burshashen (2020).

¹⁰²⁶ Association Mimouna (2020b).

The second consideration suggests that the announcement was left to civil society on purpose to create the very praises it did, that the kingdom acted by its own will without any external pressure and without seeking international recognition for actions that it deemed utterly natural. Against Morocco's recent efforts to promote Jewish heritage domestically and abroad, the latter explication appears more likely. In fact, before being confirmed by any Moroccan official or being reported by any Moroccan news, the information was picked up a few days later on November 12th by leading figures of two US civil society groups, namely Jason Guberman, executive director of the *American Sephardi Federation* and himself part of the advisory board of Association Mimouna, and Malcolm Hoenlein, then Vice-president of the *Conference of Major American Jewish Organizations*. Enthusiastic about the reform, their joint statement rejoices that „[t]ellingly the curriculum was released without outside prompting or fanfare in the Western press, a testament to this development being a genuine expression of Moroccan values”.¹⁰²⁷ The positive international echo thus seems to be a calculated one. Even more so, since the two mentioned US organisations admit in their joint statement that they had been working closely with the Moroccan government – thereby hinting, at least implicitly, that coordination of whatsoever kind had taken place. The two high-ranking American representatives of Jewish associations who issued the statement must be considered influential Jewish lobbyists in the US with access to the White House. Alongside the US delegation led by US ambassador at large for international religious freedom Sam Brownback, Jason Guberman had attended the *First Regional Conference for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage for Religious Communities* in Rabat as a panellist back in 2019. He was invited to the royal dinner offered by King Mohammed VI in the wake of his inauguration of Bayt Dakira in Essaouira.¹⁰²⁸ Malcolm Hoenlein, in turn, had been appointed to accompany two successive US presidents on official missions to Israel and had been awarded the *Alawite Wissam order of top officer rank* by King Mohammed VI in 2013.¹⁰²⁹

This shows once more how strategically the Moroccan monarchy chooses national and (most importantly) international actors from politics and civil society according to their potential to work as international multipliers for the kingdom's interests. The national and international media echo was considerable, often citing the US civil society groups as the first to report the news.¹⁰³⁰ However, an official confirmation of the information was not issued until the 21st of

¹⁰²⁷ American Sephardi Federation (ASF) (2020).

¹⁰²⁸ Cultural heritage (2020) and Elafrite (2020).

¹⁰²⁹ MAP (2013c).

¹⁰³⁰ AFP (2020b, 2020d, 2020c); Ahdani (2020c); El Ghit Boussif (2021); Hekking (2020); Ibnouzahir (2020); Ibriz (2020); Ketti (2020b); Le Desk (2020); MAP (2020e); Maroc Diplomatie (2020); The Algemeiner (2020).

November 2020. On this day, at Bayt Dakira, André Azoulay, in his function as a royal advisor and founder of the Association Essaouira Mogador, sealed an agreement with the Moroccan Ministry of Education, the *Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Abraham Zagouri sur le droit hébraïque au Maroc* and the Wali of the region which stipulates future cooperation between the three parties to spread the values of tolerance and pluralism. To do so, the signatories agreed to create „Clubs of Tolerance and Co-existence in Diversity” at schools under the tutelage of the Ministry of Education to promote the knowledge about the Jewish component of Moroccan culture, history and identity at school and to deepen research and teaching of these matters at university. Meanwhile, the Association Essaouira Mogador shall organise guided tours and pedagogic activities for school classes and university courses at Bayt Dakira and Dar Souira, i.e., the association's headquarters.¹⁰³¹ At the margin of the signing ceremony, André Azoulay praised the

„exceptional creativity and didactic talent of the teams of the Ministry of National Education who developed in the school curriculum as of this school year textbooks which tell our children the depth and the place of Moroccan Judaism in the long history of our country“. **„The momentum you have spurred and the innovative partnership you are setting up today** with the Essaouira-Mogador Association and the Center for Studies and Research on the Hebrew Law in Morocco, which is based in Bayt Dakira, will be a **milestone in our history**“, underlined the Advisor to HM the King, speaking to Saaid Amzazi, Minister of National Education, Vocational Training, Higher Education and Scientific Research. Highlighting the impressive impact, enthusiasm and unanimity of reactions around the world to laud „the **pioneering, proactive and inclusive approach of the Kingdom** of Morocco as well as **the exemplary nature of its philosophical, moral and civic choices**, Azoulay expressed „all his pride in seeing Essaouira, strengthened by its partnership with the Ministry of National Education, once again **at the forefront, to share and tell as many people as possible about the richness and sustainability of all our diversities** which are **more than ever at the heart of the modernity of our society**“.¹⁰³²

Once again, we see that Moroccan officials are well aware of the effect they are about to create for the image of their country. They want their nation to be acknowledged as a historical example and an outstanding exception of modernity in terms of its civilisational achievements. For them, the schoolbook reform is supposed to prove that their kingdom's efforts to promote religious diversity and tolerance are credible. By pretending not to push for international mediatization, they try to underline that their actions do not primarily target the outside world, but effectively change the domestic identity structure. At any rate, the monarchy's expectations concerning the reforms were high. For instance, Serge Berdugo commented on the new pages in Moroccan school books: „It's the rustle of a butterfly's wing, but it's going to be a media tsunami.”¹⁰³³ We are well advised to believe in the sincerity and truthfulness of André Azoulay's (and other imminent Moroccan figures') political and social efforts to promote

¹⁰³¹ le Matin (2020b).

¹⁰³² MAP (2020f).

¹⁰³³ Ahdani (2020c).

pluralism in Morocco. We might even expect some political impetus by the fact that, in September 2021, the president of the Association Essaouira Mogador and member of the government party *Rassemblement National des indépendants* (RNI), Tarik Ottmani, was elected mayor of Essaouira (Amiar 2022, p. 277). Yet, we should also be aware that in Morocco's case, good intentions are seldom conquered by opportunism and pragmatism.

Already in 2014, the king had commanded a reform of schoolbooks, an order which had remained without real consequence until 2020. On September 28 2018, King Mohammed VI harshly fustigated - by way of a royal message read out by Morocco's then Prime Minister Saadedine al Othmani at a high-level round table of the United Nations in New York – all expressions of antisemitism and shared with the international community his conviction that education of humanity's glorious and disastrous moments in history alone was a helpful remedy against intolerance and hatred¹⁰³⁴, this message had been (mis-)interpreted by national¹⁰³⁵ and international (primarily Israeli) media¹⁰³⁶ as an announcement to reform the Moroccan school curricula as to include lessons on the Holocaust and the Jewish component of Moroccan identity. At any rate, it took the kingdom another two years to make this reform project become a reality. It appears that in the meantime, Moroccan state officials like Moroccan minister of education Saaïd Amzazi and the king's advisor André Azoulay consulted national and international civil society activists like professor Chafik Chraïbi and the French-Moroccan Léa Benchetrit.¹⁰³⁷ While the latter also addressed a letter to King Mohammed VI asking for integrating the Jewish component of Moroccan identity into the school books, she claimed to have realised that she needed not to preach to people who were already convinced. Already in August 2020, i.e. three months before the actual announcement, Benchetrit was informed by Amzazi about the king's decision and his commitment to introduce elements of the Jewish history of Morocco into the schoolbooks. Some sources explain that the final impetus to adapt the content of the history classes was given by the king's visit to Bayt Dakira in January 2020. This shows that, while the kingdom had had plenty of opportunities to carry out the long-expected changes, it waited until the maximum media echo could be created. As the glorifying praises of the king by Benchetrit and other national and international (Jewish) leaders suggest, the policy gave legitimacy and visibility to Moroccan Jewry. It represented an intelligent move to boost the monarchy's image worldwide.

¹⁰³⁴ Royaume du Maroc - Le Chef du Gouvernement (2018).

¹⁰³⁵ Filali (2018).

¹⁰³⁶ Bar (2018); Hamid (2018); Helmhold (2018).

¹⁰³⁷ Ahdani (2020c); Lankaoui (2020).

Yet also, at the domestic level, the reform has the potential to work in a regime-fostering manner. The new schoolbook texts contextualise the general discourse of tolerance and openness towards the world by linking it to the monarchy (Figure 66): According to the courses' introduction, the pupils are led to „discover the city of Essaouira as the capital of Morocco open towards its environment and the plurality of the era of Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah”, and they learn to „connect their past to the present time to understand the continuity of the city's openness”. In a document attached to the schoolbook chapter, the authors explain that the sultan „insisted a lot on the respect for the monotheist religions and that the old Kasbah [of Essaouira] from the beginning used to be the centre of living for a variety of groups of people of different origins and faiths who were linked by both friendship and interest”. This claim is illustrated by a photo from the Portuguese church built under the reign of Sultan Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah, a member of the Alaouite dynasty still in power today and, hence, an ancestor of the current King Mohammed VI. Departing from a correspondence between the sultan and the Spanish King in 1690 as well as from a commercial treaty with the French King Louis XV in 1767, the children are supposed to explain to which extent „Essaouira can be called a small society where diversity and difference reigned”.

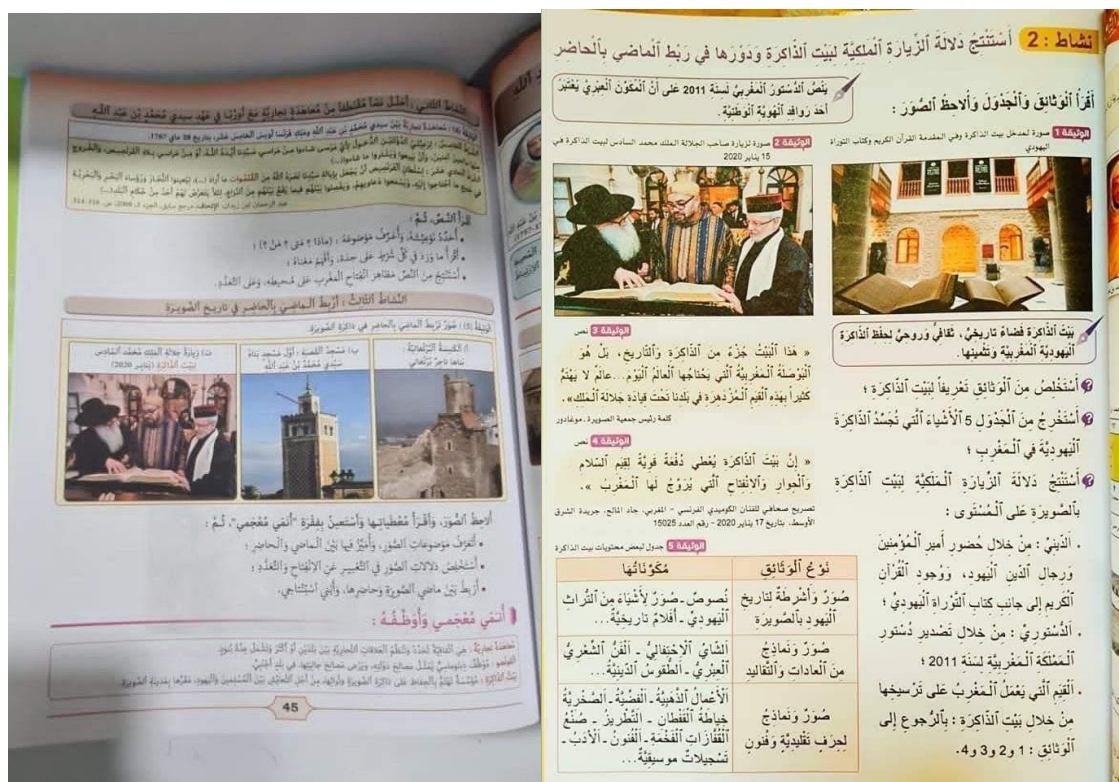


Figure 66: Moroccan textbooks showing lessons on the protection of Jewish heritage by referring to King Mohammed VI inaugurating Bayt Dakira. Copyright: TelQuel (2020).

To allow the pupils to bridge the gap between past and present times, the new schoolbooks then take the modern Gnawa festival and photos from King Mohammed VI's inauguration ceremony

of Bayt Dakira to illustrate the persistence of Jewish heritage in Essaouira and the actuality of the spirit of tolerance and openness in Morocco.¹⁰³⁸

Furthermore, the chapters mention the simultaneous renovation of Bayt Dakira, the Portuguese church, and a mosque in Essaouira, all of which were launched under King Mohammed VI. An analysis of the texts, documents and exercises provided by the schoolbooks leads to the following interpretation: The pupils from a very early age on, by way of the example of historic and modern Essaouira, are not only supposed to learn a lesson about tolerance and peaceful co-existence of Muslims, Jews and Christians in the past but they are also led to make a connection between modern international values of peace and plurality on the one side and the Moroccan monarchy on the other side, incorporated by King Mohammed VI. This link is legitimated by a historical continuity since Sultan Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah and by the kingdom's international entanglement at the crossroads of different nations and cultures. The pupils learn how this historical and local exceptionalism of peaceful coexistence was directly linked to the sultanic rule, just like Morocco's stability and peaceful situation today is only warranted by the monarchy personified in King Mohammed VI and his royal orientations of the country towards values of tolerance and plurality. However, the Jewish heritage theme (so far) only turns up once in the Moroccan school curriculum, at such an early stage that the children will hardly be able to properly seize the significance of the highly historical and political matter. This need not be a mistake since it is never too early to sensitise people to tolerance and intercultural dialogue themes.

Yet, school manuals at an advanced level of school education, where the pupils are developing critical thinking and where critical discussions about the country's sociocultural legacy could be raised, spare the topic altogether. It remains to be seen whether these shortcomings will be addressed in future educational reforms. Furthermore, thorny issues like the deathly pogroms against Jews that happened in Jerada and Oujda in 1948 or the ones from Petitjean and Fès in 1954 or the sinking of the Jewish migrants' boat *Egoz* are entirely left out in the history manuals. This raises eyebrows as to whether the Moroccan monarchy is ready to critically analyse its own history if this could potentially lead to compromising the meticulously engineered image of time-honoured tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

While these regime-fostering aspects of the new schoolbooks are widely overlooked in the public debate, the integration of Morocco's Jewish heritage into the manuals was widely applauded by both Moroccan civil society and media as well as by the international community

¹⁰³⁸ Ahdani (2020c); Toumi (2020).

as a great leap forward in recognising the diversity of Moroccan identity. However, as informal conversations with Moroccans of different societal strands showed me, many people doubt the reform's effect. Some fear primary school is far too early for pupils to grasp diversity in abstract terms. Furthermore, they claim that the rather political topic of the schoolbook exercises is not likely to be understood by 11-year-olds. Suppose we believe media reports about comments on various teachers' social media pages. In that case, these pedagogical considerations are supplemented by many instructors' reluctance to teach „useless matters”, assist in the „normalisation” of diplomatic relations or support what they perceive as the „Zionist conspiracy”. At the same time, the Palestinians „suffer and are colonised by Jews”.¹⁰³⁹ Furthermore, history classes in Morocco are known to be notoriously short of time, which enhances the risk of teachers skipping the matter to prioritise other topics they deem more relevant. Of course, this is not sure to happen, nor can it be generalised from our database. But these considerations based on various personal discussions and media reports give a pre-taste of the enforcement problems the reform might encounter, which might eventually make it a dead-born child that has only served to foster the international image of the monarchy while ultimately remaining without any impact domestically.

At any rate, the moment of the reform was well chosen. Hardly a month later, on the 10th of December 2020, the international media echo about the reform was even enhanced by the announcement of the US-brokered deal that Morocco and Israel would normalise their diplomatic relations after almost 20 years of official silence. As Moroccan media suggest, the ball for the quid pro quo concession – „Moroccan Sahara” for diplomatic ties with Israel – was likely already set rolling during an official visit to Morocco by Jared.¹⁰⁴⁰ Incidentally, the Chief Rabbi of Morocco David Pinto maintains close personal and friendly ties with Jared Kushner, Donald Trump's son-in-law, and author of the US-American „Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People” plan. David Pinto is also said to have played a significant role in the authorisation of Ivanka Trump's conversion to Judaism and her marriage with Jared Kushner (Boum 2017, p. 154). During Kushner's personal visit to Morocco on 28 - 29 May 2019, David Pinto guided him to the tomb of his saintly revered grandfather Haim Pinto. At the occasion, the Rabbi deeply praised the long tradition of the Moroccan kings' protection of his Jewish subjects, by referring to the refusal of the late King Mohammed V to extradite them to the Nazi forces,¹⁰⁴¹ thereby prominently forging the Moroccan nation-brand

¹⁰³⁹ Ruppert-abbadi (2020).

¹⁰⁴⁰ Majdi (2020).

¹⁰⁴¹ Torah Box (2019).

of a historically reliable partner morally and culturally close to the west and the US. Until today, programmes for foreign delegations in Morocco regularly include visits to the Jewish Museum in Casablanca or Jewish cemeteries, most prominently for the US ambassador and Donald Trump's Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, during the latter's visit to Morocco in October 2020.¹⁰⁴²

The conclusion to the tripartite negotiations arrived only on the eve of Donald Trump's presidency. If the Kingdom was to take advantage of the American government's desire to secure Donald Trump's political legacy at all costs, it was a closing window of opportunity for the mutually beneficial deal. Demonstrations were silenced and the parties' margins to oppose measures in foreign policy matters have long been severely curtailed.¹⁰⁴³ Morocco was moreover the fourth Arab country to 'normalize' their diplomatic ties and was thus not isolated in its position. Additionally, in autumn 2020, the new military escalation of the conflict with the POLISARIO Front in the buffer zone near Guerguerate in Western Sahara presented government officials with an opportunity to make use of many Moroccans' desire for a definitive solution to the situation. It is very likely that the closeness of the two events is not mere coincidence but reflects the will to surf the wave of anger against Algeria and its protégé, the POLISARIO Front. In the weeks after the normalisation agreement in December 2020, it is interesting how Moroccan media insisted on the fact that during the side programme, high-ranking Israeli officials visited the Mausoleum of King Mohammed V and Hassan II in Rabat as if to underline the Israeli government's tribute and acknowledgement of the two kings' outstanding achievements.¹⁰⁴⁴ To ensure that a domestic audience would accept what should be considered a Moroccan foreign policy success, the kingdom uses cultural policies to accompany and undergird military and economic collaboration agreements. This shows us that although military and economic collaboration is needed to ex post justify the problematic deal with the US and Israel, the cultural component continues to play a prominent role, especially when it comes to legitimising the decision to renew bonds with the Jewish state of Israel. This adds a new component to the argument of Wainscott (2018), who suggested that Morocco's outreach to West African countries can be explained by the fact that economic development projects

¹⁰⁴² Oudrhiri (2020b).

¹⁰⁴³ Cf. Ahdani (2020d). In 2013 and 2017 several parties tried to sanction by law any effort to normalise relations with Israel. Finally, the laws were not adopted due to the refusal of royal support, a sign of the high-level priority of the Moroccan Jewish heritage for the kingdom's nation-brand of openness towards the world, cf. Ahdani (2018); Hakari (2021).

¹⁰⁴⁴ TelQuel (2021c).

back up actions of cultural collaboration.¹⁰⁴⁵ I argue that the opposite is true for the outreach to the West and the USA and Israel in particular. Here Morocco's cultural actions back up controversial diplomatic, political and economic agreements.

Yet, to make the acclaimed Moroccan exceptionalism thrive within the Moroccan population in terms of lived values, more didactic programmes are needed, and more Moroccan state actors must join forces. In the years following the normalisation agreement, the Moroccan state institutions proved surprising and almost unprecedented convergence in cultural policies pertaining to Jewish heritage. By June 2021, 1390 „Clubs of tolerance and coexistence in diversity” had been created across the country under a new agreement between the Association Essaouira Mogador and the Ministry of Education. According to the minister, over 60.500 pupils were to benefit from the new initiative at the Moroccan schools, learning about cultural and religious pluralism by understanding the special relationship between Muslims and Jews in the kingdom.¹⁰⁴⁶ The official discourse here links seemingly democratic values like the development of a critical mindset to the capacity to navigate in a rapidly changing world where dangers lurk everywhere – especially in the cyber-space.¹⁰⁴⁷

The Moroccan public is presented with a reality where the promotion of Jewish culture at school thus becomes directly related to the combat against extremism and, therefore, relevant for security issues. It remains to be seen whether the reshuffling of the Moroccan government in the wake of the September 2021 parliamentary elections manages to retain these dynamics so enthusiastically promoted by former education minister Amzazi, who, despite his replacement in 2021, labels the reform „a founding project for our society and our future generations, a project which stands for the Moroccan exception” (Amiar 2022, p. 152).

Outside school, in April 2021, Culture Minister Othmane El Ferdaous, the wali of the region Fès-Meknès, Essaid Zniber, and the president of the regional council, Mohand Laenser, signed a cooperation agreement with Mehdi Qotbi of the National Museum Foundation to lay the

¹⁰⁴⁵ Already in June 2020 (six months before the triangular deal of mutual recognition and diplomatic normalisation), rumours were spread by the Spanish newspaper *El Espanol* about calls from a royal agent (allegedly André Azoulay) to Jewish businessmen operating in and from the Spanish exclave Melilla as to convince them to transfer their businesses to Morocco in exchange for tax and toll advantages and facilitation of exports to Africa. According to the newspaper, these calls follow a strategy to instrumentalise Morocco's connection to the Jewish community to drain economic activity from Melilla to Morocco, thereby boosting the Rif region's economy and steadily advancing the kingdom's claims on the contested Spanish exclaves. While these allegations can hardly be verified and while Moroccan media categorically denied the report the other day, the business deals between Morocco, Israel and the US concluded only a few months later seem to speak a less ambiguous language in favour of Wainscott's argument. Cf. Handaji (2020); Moreno (2020); P.A. (2020); Zine (2020).

¹⁰⁴⁶ *Aujourd'hui le Maroc* (2021).

¹⁰⁴⁷ *Aujourd'hui le Maroc* (2021).

fundament for a new „cultural ecosystem” in the region of Fès that involves the two new museums – the Museum of Moroccan Jewry and the Museum of Islamic Culture - as vectors of a solid message to future generations as cultural minister Othmane el Ferdaous explained. For Serge Berdugo, who presides over the scientific committee of the new Jewish museum, this message should convey the historical reality that all Moroccans share the same ancestors who together formed a civilisation „which enlightens the world”.¹⁰⁴⁸ From this picture presented by Moroccan officials, we can read a missionary approach which targets two groups: After the normalisation with the Jewish state of Israel, it should firstly instil among the Moroccan population a pride for the civilisational accomplishments of the Moroccan society, which is claimed to have paved the way towards nowadays’ generally accepted global values such as pluralism, tolerance and religious freedom of which the king’s promotion of the Jewish heritage in Morocco is a telling symbol. To make this message generally acceptable, the government needed to improve the image of Jews in Morocco, which explains the pedagogic mission of the new institution, which – as if to pre-empt any accusation of favouring Jewish heritage – is launched simultaneously with one on Islamic culture. Secondly, the museum clearly and self-confidently formulates how the country wants to be perceived by the outside world, namely as a promoter of peace and tolerance between the peoples. For this, it is crucial to the state leaders that the world acknowledges that unlike existing private museums on Judaism in the Arab world and the (at least partly) private Jewish Museum in Casablanca, the new museum in Fès is a state project, planned, funded, and executed by a majority Muslim state as Mehdi Qotbi explained:

“It’s a **strong message in a time of conflict**, in a time when when you open the news whether it’s TV or radio or you read the newspapers, you only watch wars, only conflicts. **Morocco, under the leadership of HM the King, sends a strong message to the world, a message of peace, fraternity, of living together in this country which is Morocco**, because it must be remembered: 2 years ago, HM launched the restoration of the Batha Palace which will now be the Museum of Islamic Art. I am simply telling you this little parenthesis to tell you that it will be the largest museum of Islamic art by the objects we have found. And at the same time when SM launched the restoration work, he also kicked off the construction of the Museum of Moroccan Judaism. This message from the city of Fès is something exceptional, because it is really a hymn to understanding between religions and between peoples and the city of Fès, which is the [first] spiritual city [of Morocco] of course. **It is the first museum dedicated to Judaism financed by the Moroccan state on the African continent, in the Arab world, in the Muslim world.** I am not talking about private museums; there is a private museum in Casablanca, but that has nothing to do with it. It is the Moroccan state which underlines the importance of the multiplicity of our roots, through construction by the dedication of a budget which will therefore be dedicated to the construction of this museum of Judaism.”¹⁰⁴⁹

On 17 September 2021, Morocco’s National Museum Foundation and the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris concluded a new cooperation agreement.¹⁰⁵⁰ A first joint project was planned for

¹⁰⁴⁸ Idrissi (2021).

¹⁰⁴⁹ M. C. Alaoui and Benmini (2021).

¹⁰⁵⁰ Chraibi (2021c).

the autumn of the same year. The exposition „Juifs d’Orient, une histoire plurimillénaire – Jews from the Orient, a multi-millennial story”, starting in Paris in November 2021, was reported nationwide in Morocco since it reserved a special place for the Moroccan experience by presenting a story of peaceful coexistence that was explicitly opposed to the European one of persecution and the Middle Eastern one of permanent conflict. Furthermore, it was mentioned that Jack Lang, on behalf of the French Republic, would push for the recognition of King Mohammed V as Rightful among the Nations at the Yad Vashem memorial in Israel.¹⁰⁵¹ As rightly explained by Amiar (2022, 204 f.), this matter bears some urgency since it is crucial to the identity building of Moroccans and Israelis of Moroccan ascendance alike: it determines the narrative of tolerance and peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Jews in Moroccan history and thus impacts the king’s diplomatic role in the Middle East conflict. The latter is urgently needed if the monarchy is to preserve its moderator position in the conflict and uphold the king’s credibility as both a defender of the Palestinian/Muslim cause and peace interlocutor of the Jewish state of Israel.

Still, in November 2021, an archaeological project was initiated in a collaboration between the INSAP of Morocco, the Ben Gurion University of Negev and the Sorbonne University in Paris, financed by the Israeli *Centre Chaim Herzog pour les études et la diplomatie du Moyen-Orient*. The project was supported by the new Moroccan Minister of Culture, Mohammed Mehdi Bensaid, and all relevant political forces in the region of Agadir. The multinational team intervened in a crumbled synagogue in Tamanart, in the Tata province, saving precious documents and renovating the building. According to an official communiqué, the project aimed to preserve Moroccan-Jewish heritage as a „common heritage“ with the help of a participatory approach. It involved all relevant political and social actors and the entire population. This shows how cultural projects about the Jewish elements of Moroccan identity become a playground for testing new (seemingly more democratic) governance modes to involve as many Moroccans as possible and to make them familiar with the shared heritage. Additionally, in a conference that took place in the same context, ways to promote the economy in the province were discussed, paving the way for future collaborations in the tourism sector.¹⁰⁵² Such projects – if managed correctly – could finally contribute to identifying the larger public with the very cultural goods they are benefitting from economically.

¹⁰⁵¹ Faridi (2022).

¹⁰⁵² Médias24 (2021c); TelQuel (2021d).

Already in September 2021, Mehdi Qotbi announced an upcoming bilateral agreement with Israel in the museum sector. This promise was held in spring 2022: on March 30th, Mehdi Qotbi, on behalf of the *National Museum Foundation*, concluded a memorandum of understanding with the Israeli ICOM president Samira Raz. This cooperation agreement stipulates the mutual loan of cultural artefacts, (pedagogic) training programmes for museum staff, support in setting up exhibitions and digitising archive material, etc. Both sides perceive culture as a bridgebuilder for a better understanding of the other, which points to the clear pedagogic mission of culture.¹⁰⁵³ Making culture accessible and understandable can serve as a vehicle for political messages. One of the first cultural missions of this cooperation agreement consists of exchanging experts to create the new Museum of Moroccan Jewry in Fès. Moroccan and Israeli media report that Mehdi Qotbi stressed that this museum is going to be the first state-sponsored Jewish museum in the Arab-Muslim world; they make Philippe Cohen, an Israeli art collector of Moroccan descent, work in favour of the Moroccan monarchy. To Moroccan and Israeli media, the latter told how he became the broker of the cultural deal between the Israeli ICOM and the NMF of Mehdi Qotbi. His cousin Steve O'Hana, president of the newly created Morocco-Israel business council, apparently informed him that Mehdi Qotbi was looking for someone with good contacts to the Israeli museum landscape to explore ways of potential cooperation. Cohen confesses to being impressed by the „hyper-symbolic” place of the project initiated by King Mohammed VI. While paying credit to the Moroccan sovereign, it is demonstrated to both an international and a national public that Jews recognise the superior position of the king. Furthermore, when Cohen employs vocabulary describing different degrees of relatedness, such as „place of fraternity” and „we are cousins”, he reduces the difference and distance between the two world religious groups – Muslims and Jews. Such discourses run counter to the alienation processes between the Moroccan Muslims and Jews. From a Jewish community member like Philippe Cohen, such words are more likely to be perceived as credible than any other accounts of yet another foreign policy expert whose only goals are selfish ones..¹⁰⁵⁴

By labelling the relationship between Jews and Muslims, Israelis and Moroccans in terms of kinship, the impression of closeness, mutual understanding and identical goals is evoked. In the same spirit, Morocco continued to bolster its international image of tolerance and moderation and advance its normalisation plans with Israel throughout 2022 and most of 2023.

¹⁰⁵³ TelQuel (2022a).

¹⁰⁵⁴ i24 (2022); Ibnouzahar (2022a).

On 19 August 2022, after three years of renovation, the former synagogue Assayag, abandoned and ruinous for 60 years, was reopened in Tangier. It was re-named Bait Yehouda, recalling the name of the synagogue's founder. During the inauguration ceremony, the rabbi and Serge Berdugo chanted a prayer to praise Hassan II, Mohammed V, the current King Mohammed VI and the royal family. This appraisal, echoed by the MAP and a lot of national and international newspapers and broadcasters, underlined the allegiance of the Jews in Morocco to the monarchy, which is thereby presented as the shared point of reference and identity of all Moroccans, Muslim or Jewish alike.¹⁰⁵⁵ Furthermore, it is stressed in many accounts that the project, which necessitated a budget of 2 Million Dirhams, was carried out in cooperation between a variety of Moroccan authorities and civil society, including the Ministry of Culture, the Agency for the Development of the North, the Wali of the Tangier-Tetouan-al Hoceima region as well as the Jewish community of Tangier. This image helps to stress the national unity in carrying out the second phase of the „enlightened” royal orientations to promote the kingdom's Jewish heritage – as Serge Berdugo framed it in an interview for Le360. In many respects, Bait Yehouda resembles the Bayt Dakira in Essaouira in its mission and design. It will provide ethnographic information on the particularities of the Jewish community in Tangier and host several research institutes on Jewish heritage that are supposed to collaborate closely with universities and research institutions worldwide.¹⁰⁵⁶ At the same time, the centre presents its visitors with the official discourse, according to which King Mohammed VI is the protector and guarantor of the peaceful coexistence of Jews and Muslims in Morocco.

Despite all these cultural actions, though, by 2021, only around 41% of the Moroccan population appears to approve of Morocco's normalisation of relations with Israel (Arab Barometer 2021) – one has to admit, though, that this was the highest rate among the evaluated countries in the MENA region. Against the backdrop of the ongoing war in Gaza, however, this ratio dropped significantly to only 13% (Arab Barometer 2024, p. 36), and the promotion of Jewish heritage in Morocco became ever riskier. Hence, the inauguration of the new Jewish Museum in Morocco's spiritual capital Fès was postponed. According to a scientific committee member of the new museum, even the National Museum Foundation (FNM), headed by the king's cultural lobbyist Mehdi Qotbi, who is responsible for the museum's creation, was widely left in the dark about the reasons for the delay. All they knew was that the decision was taken

¹⁰⁵⁵ European Jewish Congress (2022); Jalil and Mountassir (2024); Kadry (2022); Kasraoui (2022a); Maghreb-Post (2022); Médias24 (2022); The Algemeiner (2022b); The Times of Israel (2022); Zine (2022).

¹⁰⁵⁶ L'Observateur (2022).

at a „high level” considering the situation in the Middle East.¹⁰⁵⁷ After Hamas’ terror attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, the Israeli counterstrike left vast parts of the Gaza Strip devastated, and the humanitarian situation for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians deteriorated gravely in the following weeks. The situation in Gaza fuelled massive protests of solidarity all over the world, including Morocco, where many people criticised the regime for normalising its relations with Israel and aligning with the West. Since „high level” is a typical Moroccan chiffrage, meaning the royal palace, the statement of the FNM member likely indicates that the Moroccan regime replies to public pressure and that promoting Jewish heritage is a matter of opportunism. While it was helpful to demonstrate openness and tolerance when the window of opportunity among the Western states to push Morocco’s claims on Western Sahara was wide open, it became less attractive when the decision to normalise relations with Israel started to sabotage the legitimacy of the regime.

6.6.4. Promoting Morocco’s African Identity

In an interview with a high-ranking official of Morocco’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccans Living Abroad, my interlocutor spoke about Morocco’s vision to engage in South-South cooperation. According to her, “Morocco realised the need for South-South cooperation” when the kingdom saw that expertise could be exchanged on the continental level and not only in the colonial North-South logic:

“I’m talking about the cultural aspects, but certainly, the economic aspects had their say and perhaps had their triggering moments. I can’t say much about that, but you also have to look at the economic aspect to see how things got started. But, in any case, culture goes hand in hand with politics and economics, and sometimes, it moves ahead of these two aspects to take hold where politics can’t do things. Culture is ahead of these two aspects. [...] In any case, this is a general example: if I, as a country, have bad political relations with another country, culture can continue to function.”¹⁰⁵⁸

This quote proves that the Moroccan regime has identified cultural diplomacy as an important tool to solve political problems and improve diplomatic relations. This is why, since 2014, beyond civilian domains, Morocco has welcomed African cadres who want to become diplomats to complete one year of their training in the kingdom in a new dedicated programme at the kingdom’s diplomacy academy. A large part of the foreign students’ training in Morocco concentrates on cultural diplomacy, making them visit the kingdom’s regions, museums, handicraft workshops etc. A similar programme exists for mid-career diplomats from African countries, who can spend two weeks to benefit from Morocco’s expertise in specific topics,

¹⁰⁵⁷ Informal conversation with the author on 30 May 2024.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Interview, Cultural Diplomacy, 1.

including cultural diplomacy.¹⁰⁵⁹ Training foreign diplomats and inculcating them with an awareness of Morocco's cultural and civilisational achievements is a smart move of Morocco's regime to ensure a long-term improvement of diplomatic relations with African countries that, in the past, might not always have been favourable towards Morocco's foreign policy goals such as obtaining international recognition of its claims on Western Sahara. Recently, one of the most important channels of cultural diplomacy in Morocco has been the National Museum Foundation (FNM) (Figure 67).



Figure 67: FNM president Mehdi Qotbi (centre) and MMVI director Abdelaziz el Idrissi (back) receiving the author (right) and proudly introducing him to bestselling author Tahar ben Jelloun (left) in May 2024

In 2015, the FNM's Mohammed VI Museum for Modern and Contemporary Art in Rabat dedicated a large exhibition to Moroccan medieval history, a time when the borders of the former Moroccan Sultanate's empire reached deep into the African continent. Another exposition entitled *L'Afrique en capitale* prominently featured pieces of contemporary African art. These expositions were organised ahead of as well in the slipstream of Morocco's re-integration into the African Union, which happened in January 2017 after Morocco had been absent from the pan-African organisation due to its diverging position

with regards to the POLISARIO Front in the annexed Western Sahara. They, hence, strongly underlined the kingdom's new orientation towards the African continent by stressing its African roots (Dines 2021). Asked about his remarks on the exposition's impact in the context of Morocco's cultural diplomacy, Qotbi explained:

In 1981, François Mitterrand made a statement that appealed to me. He had said „I will never make any trip abroad without being preceded by an exhibition or a cultural event. So I am first better known and better received”. He understood that any political action to be really stronger needs cultural action [...] The exhibition Medieval Morocco and Contemporary Morocco [...] also aroused a great deal of enthusiasm. There were over 170.000 people. Visitors were able to discover Morocco and its historical richness. Cultural diplomacy is about being recognized and considered. **When you have cultural richness, you are much better regarded.**¹⁰⁶⁰

¹⁰⁵⁹ Interview, Cultural Diplomacy, 1. Other topics involve, for instance, environmental policies and sustainability issues.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Majdi (2017).

For Qotbi, cultural diplomacy thus is a means of exerting international influence by enhancing Morocco's cultural attractiveness. The reinforced orientation towards Africa - while fostering the ties with Europe - allows Morocco to deploy a specific cultural diplomacy that puts the kingdom, Mehdi Qotbi, and his foundation in the position to work as a multiplier and bridge between Europe and Africa:

So culture never, never had been taken into consideration before the accession of His Majesty Mohammed VI to the throne. His Majesty Mohammed VI is passionate about art. He has encouraged the artists by buying from them, he has created today what we call 'the artistic dynamics of collectors' [...] His Majesty the King encouraged both ministries and Moroccan companies to buy [...]. So it's really the first one that gave a dynamic and gave importance to artists and culture. Today – I can tell you this, it is official and I have nothing to hide from you – I have met the diplomatic counsellors of the French Republic who told me that they have instructions to not only put everything on the card of trade and business, but to also concentrate on the cultural level and promote culture. And this is why – I think – the AFD [scil. the French Development Agency] has started discussions with us in order to try – with their financial support - to attract museum professionals from Africa to be trained in Morocco. So if they have done this, it is because [...] they know that Moroccans who are Africans themselves know to speak to other Africans.”¹⁰⁶¹

This Moroccan-French cooperation project announced here became a reality on the 9 November 2020, when the AFD and Qotbi's FNM signed an accord worth 300.000 euros to finance a pan-African training programme for professionals in the field of museums and African cultural heritage on Moroccan soil. It is a notable success of Moroccan cultural diplomacy efforts that France chose the rather inexperienced Moroccan FNM as a partner for an 18-month Pan-African training programme in museology.¹⁰⁶² As Mehdi Qotbi explained in a speech at the HEM Rabat Business School, such efforts are part of a high-level vision to make use of the kingdom's cultural capital to promote the development of the country:

We have today, thanks to His Majesty King Mohammed VI, a very great confidence and a very good image of the country abroad. **Our rich identity could be a vector of development.** In a rapidly changing world, culture is of course a vector of growth and a generator of wealth. [...] His Majesty King Mohammed VI has made culture and the arts a lever for development, thus giving them the place they deserve. He also urged in several of his speeches all actors in the world of diplomacy to integrate the new rules of **soft power, thus giving rise to real cultural diplomacy, a diplomacy endowed with a global strategy of clear and coherent influence that the Kingdom consolidates over the years.**¹⁰⁶³

This speech draws together the geographic extent of Moroccan diplomatic ambitions, the high-level role that the immaterial – and inexhaustible – resource culture can play for the future of Morocco, and the prominent role that King Mohammed VI allegedly holds in this project: The development of soft power resources appears to be sanctioned by the highest political authority (cf. also Abourabi, 2020, p. 246 f.).

Morocco's efforts in cultural diplomacy appear to be acknowledged by other African states. This can be deduced from the fact that the 8th edition of the *Africities* Summit by the *United*

¹⁰⁶¹ Interview, Museums, 1.

¹⁰⁶² Agence Francaise de Développement (AFD) (2021); TelQuel (2020).

¹⁰⁶³ Nait Youssef (2016).

Cities and Local Governments of Africa (UCLGA) was held in Marrakesh, and Marrakesh was named the first-ever cultural capital of Africa for the year 2020. However, just one week ahead of the official launch of events, after the intervention of the Moroccan government on the 23rd of January 2020, the title was transferred to the Moroccan political capital Rabat (Dines 2021, p. 745). Officially, the reason for this widely criticised move was the government's consideration of Rabat's strong candidacy (UCLGA 2020).¹⁰⁶⁴ Well-informed foreign sources, reported, in turn, that the reasons for the sudden displacement were geopolitical: Originally, Marrakesh had been chosen because of its tremendous interest in international tourism and because of its vibrant art scene. Yet, the move of the title became a plausible step given the rather mediocre preparation of the event in Marrakesh. Even more importantly, however, the regime considered that for the African community living or interested in Morocco, Marrakesh is of minor importance as compared to the capital Rabat with its political institutions, universities etc. Therefore, the government decided to move the highly symbolic title to Rabat despite the capital's minor relevance in the art scene as compared to Marrakesh and Casablanca, always bearing in mind that upgrading the Moroccan image abroad might eventually help garner support for Morocco's claims on Western Sahara on the African continent.¹⁰⁶⁵ Mehdi Qotbi, who is suspected to be behind the last-minute change, put this decision into the following perspective: „I'm going to confess something to you. I don't care whether it is Rabat or Marrakesh. From the moment that it speaks of Morocco, it is essential. This is what is important to me.”¹⁰⁶⁶ This statement underlined the importance of the new title within the royal vision to transform Rabat into *Rabat, ville lumière, capitale culturelle du Maroc* with far-reaching renown on the African continent. Among the great efforts undertaken to enhance the international image of the kingdom's political and administrative capital, the creation of the MMVI plays a crucial role.¹⁰⁶⁷

¹⁰⁶⁴ See El Ouardighi (2020); Ketti (2020a).

¹⁰⁶⁵ Interview, International culture cooperation, 1.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Interview, Museums, 1.

¹⁰⁶⁷ The 9 billion Dirham project (other sources speak of 18 billion Dirhams) was initiated on 12 May 2014 by King Mohammed VI and aims at creating 12.000 jobs and attracting 4 million tourists to Rabat until 2020 (El Kherraz & El Faker, 2017; LeMatin, 2014). As we have seen in more detail in chapter 6.2.3.3.2. and 6.2.3.3.3., large parts of the old town have been restored; a modern tramway has taken up service and connects Rabat to its sister city Salé; the new *Mohammed VI Museum for Modern and Contemporary Art* was inaugurated in 2014; the *Grand Theatre of Rabat* has been inaugurated, which – according to officials – is supposed to equal the Opera of Paris, Scala of Milan or the Theatre of Moscow. Furthermore, the highest tower in Africa has been completed and carries the king's name; in 2016, the monarch also launched the erection of the Art & Culture House, destined to be Morocco's National Archives' Library; in 2017, the *Musée de l'histoire et des civilisations* was reopened after years of renovation; in early 2020, the new *National Museum of Photography* was opened in a newly restored fortress at the sea and the *Musée national de l'archéologie et des sciences de la terre* is in planning.

However, contrary to Qotbi's confidence in the development of a „global strategy of clear and coherent influence”, based on my interview with other high-ranking ministry officials,¹⁰⁶⁸ I share the impression of A. Iraqi (2018, p. 487) and Régragui (2013) that Morocco suffers from the absence of coordination between the different political and societal actors working to mainstream the Moroccan nation brand. Beyond individual empirical highlights,¹⁰⁶⁹ there is only scarce evidence of efforts to coordinate the different actors from the spheres of religion, festivals, cultural heritage, or museology. Fernandez-Molina went as far as to argue that slogans in Moroccan foreign policy, such as „economic diplomacy”, „advanced status”/„more than association, less than accession” to the European Union and „new African policy” are but „empty signifiers [...] parroted uncritically by most domestic actors, some of whom at times even claim authorship” (Fernandez Molina 2016, p. 215). For instance, one source working for a foreign cultural organisation underlined that the effectiveness of cultural projects strongly depends on the personal engagement of the king's representatives, including walis. Essaid Zniber, wali of the Fès-Meknès region since 2015, is described as very competent and culture-friendly. By contrast, others, like the wali of Marrakesh, are less enthusiastic about culture and are unable to properly handle the domain. Running counter to the kingdom's overall pro-African approach, the authorities in Marrakesh declined the offer of a group of African choreographers and dancers to organise the Biennale of African Dance in Marrakesh in 2020. Given its very conservative ideology, the city administration of Marrakesh under the wali's leadership was neither ready to financially contribute nor provide venues for African dance art, which was considered too body emphatic and sensual. Hence, the organisers had to turn towards France's Institut Français and Germany's Goethe Institute to make the event take place nevertheless.¹⁰⁷⁰ This is a problem in branding that Morocco does not face alone (Cull 2019) and that some actors working to foster the Moroccan nation brand are well aware of, but have not yet found a solution for.¹⁰⁷¹ Régragui (2013) attributes the superficiality of Morocco's branding efforts to structural limits resulting from the predominance of autocratic management traditions which handicap a creative content development that is autonomous from the monarchy, independent from inter-ministerial concurrence and free from partial ambitions to participate in deep state benefits. This lack of coherence may ultimately jeopardise the

¹⁰⁶⁸ Interview, Cultural Diplomacy, 1.

¹⁰⁶⁹ As seen in chapter 6.2.3.2, one such exception would be the renovation of medinas financed by a royally sanctioned consortium of public funding institutions, including several ministries.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Interview, International culture cooperation, 1. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the event was postponed and could eventually take place in November 2021, cf. Roussel (2021).

¹⁰⁷¹ Interview, Cultural Diplomacy, 1.

kingdom's soft power efforts in reaching its goals regarding the international recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara as well as the international acceptance of Morocco as a regional/continental power.

So far, however, there is no sign of strains. Quite the contrary is the case. The years 2019 to 2022 have been marked by a series of 28 consulate inaugurations by Arab, African and Latin American states and official statements about their support of Morocco's autonomy plan for Western Sahara (Allen & Trinidad 2024). The Comoros made a start by opening a representation in December 2019, Gabun, Sao Tomé-and-Príncipe, and the Central African Republic did so in January 2020, followed by Ivory Coast (February 2020), Djibouti, Burundi, Guinea and Libéria (March 2020). On 23 October 2020, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau and Equatorial Guinea opened consulates in Dakhla. As the first Arab state, on 4 November 2020, the United Arab Emirates followed the example of these African states, as did Bahrein, Haiti and the Democratic Republic of Congo in December 2020. Jordan joined the fray in 2021 just like Senegal, Malawi and Sierra Leone. In January 2022, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States representing seven countries also opened a consulate. Suriname enlarged the number of foreign representations in the Western Sahara in May 2022. Togo added itself to the list in July 2022 followed by Cap Verde on 31 August 2022 and Guatemala in December 2022 (Figure 68).¹⁰⁷² Some of these countries, for a long time, had refused to recognise Morocco's claims on the Western Sahara. These countries include Burkina Faso, Burundi, Eswatini, Guinea Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, Malawi, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Sierre Leone, Togo and Zambia.¹⁰⁷³ In 2023, Israel announced the opening of a consulate as being part of its normalisation policy with Morocco, yet this plan was put on hold in the context of the Gaza war starting in October 2023 and also the USA have not followed up on their promise to open a consulate in the Western Sahara under the Biden administration. It is, however, noteworthy that on the 31st of July 2024, Emmanuel Macron implicitly declared that France would henceforth recognise Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara and support Morocco's autonomy plan for the region.¹⁰⁷⁴

¹⁰⁷² el Bouzdaini (2023).

¹⁰⁷³ Jaabouk (2022a). For the international law implications of these recognitions see Allen and Trinidad (2024).

¹⁰⁷⁴ Gormezano (2024); Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates (2024).

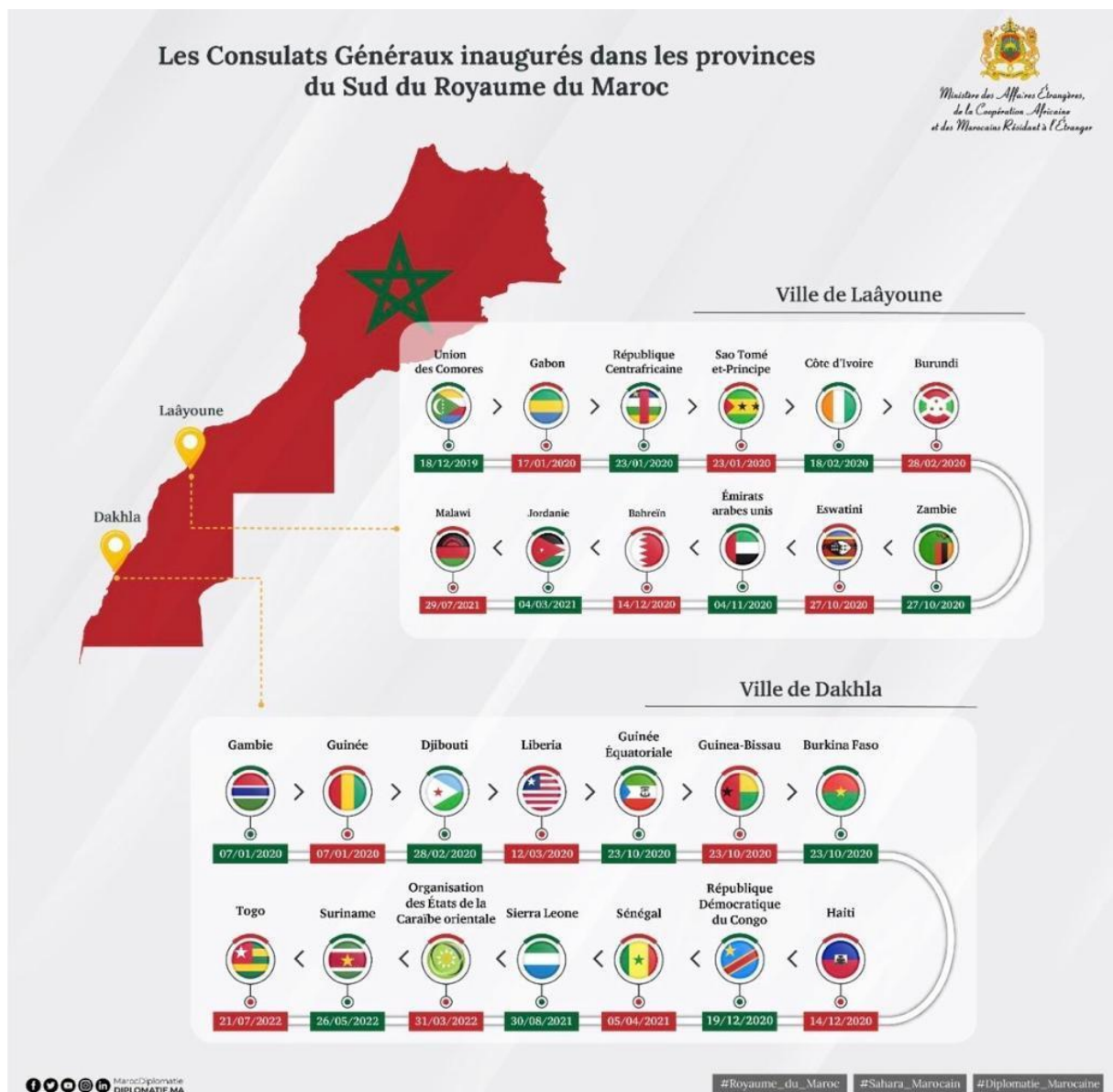


Figure 68: Countries recognising Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara with embassies in Dakhla or Laâyoune inaugurated between December 2019 and July 2022 ¹⁰⁷⁵

¹⁰⁷⁵ Jaabouk (2022a).

7. Conclusion

In May 2024, over eight years after my first visit to Morocco, I returned to the kingdom for a short two-week stay. Like during my first journey to Rabat, I met colleagues and friends at the famous Café Maure, a jewel in the Kasbah des Oudayas offering a magnificent view over the Bouregreg and Rabat's twin-city Salé on the right riverbank. The place was the same, yet still different. The Moroccan state had taken advantage of the COVID19-pandemic to renovate the whole kasbah, inaugurate a brand new museum, the Musée de la Parure, and also bring the Café Maure to its original form which it had partly lost after decades of private exploitation and wild adjustment. Ultimately, one might suggest, the Moroccan civil society's fear that the café might be lost forever after the authorities had demolished the emblematic site in 2020 had been ungrounded.¹⁰⁷⁶ At the same time, however, I had the impression that the new splendour of the kasbah had changed the integrative atmosphere in the café that had been so special about this place. The people enjoying their mint tea and cookies on the café's terraces appeared wealthier, maybe even more international. Overall, the café now finally seemed to play its part in the monarchy's neoliberal rehabilitation project for the Bouregreg Valley which, like so many other royal projects in Morocco, provides a visible bridge between history and modernity. United under the king's banner, Moroccans shall use this bridge to rebrand their national identity, anchored in tradition, seizing the present and paving the way to a bright future full of opportunities.

7.1. Uniting Modernity and Tradition under the King's Banner: Conclusions from the Empirical Analysis

Along with liberal theorists of Islam, Maghraoui (2009, p. 208) has argued that, in Morocco, the „reform of the religious field has to be conceived within a broader movement of culture with clear, rational and coherent institutional ramifications. Its main components would have to be the quest for individual liberties, democracy, respect for the law and the capacity of individuals to achieve their religious as well as social and political rights. Religious reforms might be more lasting and effective if they are conceived in a way that frees individuals not only from different forms of extremism but also away from state mediation and a prescribed body of doctrinal dogmatism.” From a normative perspective, this statement certainly contains some truth. From an analytical perspective, however, it ignores the teleology of Morocco's religious reforms. In the kingdom, the regime's reform efforts have never been about opening discourse for a meaningful moral value update. The rationale behind restructuring the religious

¹⁰⁷⁶ Cf. the foreword to this book.

field has rather been to react to domestic and international pressure and curb contestation from radical forces in society, curtail the effects of extremist thoughts while avoiding producing new enemies on the more conservative front. The fact that the security perspective prevails in the religious discourse is therefore not a flaw in the regime's reform efforts but rather their essence. However, this need not mean that the regime totally disregards the need for „a broader movement of culture” or the people's strife for more individual liberties with more social and political rights. The following summary of my study provides an overview of how the Moroccan regime looks at these societal demands through the lens of power maintenance. It recapitulates how the monarchy tries to keep the upper hand in the country's power game by channelling the demands and condensing them into manageable affairs would allow to preserve the identifying autocratic characteristics of Morocco's regime. It summarises how societal claims were reduced to demands for cultural recognition and economic grievances that the monarchy addressed with cultural policies.

This thesis set out to trace the genesis of and the reasoning behind royal identity projects and determine how they are deployed to bolster the king's grip on power and the maintenance of Morocco's monarchical regime. Building upon theoretical considerations, this book concentrated on three main elements of culture which are of particular significance in forging, communicating and reproducing (national) identity, i.e. religion, language and historicity. A combination of authoritarian upgrading and legitimation theory helped analyse how the Moroccan monarchy recurs to cultural policies to ensure the persistence of its rule. The following paragraphs are dedicated to the empirical findings associated with one of the five upgrading strategies and the three legitimation modes they deploy (legal mode, policy mode, symbolic mode):

- 1) Appropriation of Civil Society
- 2) Management of Political Contestation
- 3) Capturing of economic reforms
- 4) Control of Media and communication technology
- 5) Diversification of international linkages

As we have seen throughout chapter 6, these analytical categories are seldom clear-cut. In reality they often overlap, complement each other and sometimes even contradict. The following section provides a synthesis that accounts of the empirical complexity while treating each group of empirical examples under the very category where it fits best.

My first analytical category which considered the regime's efforts to appropriate the civil society, showed how the monarchy uses cultural policies to forge a national identity which centres around the king as its integrative figure. After the infamous Years of Lead, a period of repression under the late King Hassan II, his son Mohammed VI had to re-establish the historical bond between the monarchy and the Moroccan people and ensure their loyalty and allegiance. To this end, the monarchy made sure to reemphasise the constants of the nation built upon a tolerant and moderate interpretation of Islam, dubbed Moroccan, and the diffusion of what the monarchy defined as authentically Moroccan values. In this regard, institutions play an essential role (policy mode). Although the weight of the king's religious authority appears to be slowly dwindling, religious elites remain the monarchy's prime intermediaries, and mosques are the main echo chambers that diffuse official narratives and boost royally sanctioned Moroccan values. All over the country, the Habous Ministry builds mosques and encourages private donors to do so as well, in exchange for tax reductions. In continuity with a practice established by his predecessors, many new mosques carry the monarch's name. Furthermore, historic mosques are constantly renovated. The regime's mosque renovation strategy needs to be read not only as a tribute to the historic grandeur of these emblematic monuments of the Moroccan faith but also as a reaction to repeated deadly accidents involving crumbling places of worship in the last decades. Ensuring a safe and serene religious practice is part of *amir al mouminine*'s primary performance claims. The regime also trains loyal imams, religious guides and traditional education teachers who constantly work to spread the word about *amir al mouminine*'s spiritual authority, Sunni-Maliki jurisprudence, Ashaari school of thought and Sufi tradition. While late King Hassan II had often used force to ensure his hold on power, especially after the failed coups in the early 1970s, his son resorts to a narrative of democratisation, allowing for civilian participation and inclusion. Every citizen shall have a reason for patriotism and pride. To this end, the king broadened the identity discourse to stress the contribution of diversity to national unity. Under Mohammed VI, the nationalist discourse slowly abandoned the traditional focus on the Arab-Islamic element as a key reference of Moroccan identity. The monarchy adopted a more inclusive approach that embraces the Amazigh and Hassani communities. The legal framework has successively been reformed and adapted to formally integrate the Amazigh and Hassani components into the Moroccan judicial, education, media and economic systems (legal mode). On a policy level (policy mode), these legal provisions have been put into place through institution-building and new policy programmes. Among the most prominent institutions emerged the IRCAM as a reified symbol of the monarchy's willingness to integrate Amazigh culture into the Moroccan identity

discourse. To this end, the royal institute conducts research on topics related to the Amazigh language and history, engages in linguistic engineering to standardise the Amazigh language for introduction in the Moroccan education system (partly implemented since 2003) and public administration, promotes Amazigh arts, literature and theatre, and provides advice to Moroccan authorities and state institutions that wish to comply with their official obligation to offer public services in Tamazight. Overall, we can observe the regime's strong instrumentalisation of the Royal Academy, the National Archive, national universities, and dedicated religious research institutions. Through these institutions the regime produces loyal historiographical, sociological and religious science research that abides with the official narratives of an old nation unified under the sultan's (and later the king's) banner, strong by its allegiance to the monarchy, confident thanks to its unwavering Islamic faith, proud of its civilisational accomplishments and standing together against external and internal threats be it from the Ottomans, European colonisation, the Algerian expansion, secession in Western Sahara or the Rif, or Islamist terror. This narrative is also transported through traditional education, schools, expositions and museums (upgraded old and recently created ones). To the best of my knowledge, for the first time, this study undertook a detailed academic analysis of the mainstreaming function of (para-state institutions like the National Museum Foundation and the High Commissariat for Former Resistance Fighters and Members of the Liberation Army. By establishing new museums and memorials, they increasingly monopolise and control the cultural narrative in the country to bolster the king's position as a crystallisation point of Moroccan identity. Furthermore, all over the country, emblematic buildings are renovated, and new monuments are erected to showcase the grandeur of the Moroccan civilisation and stir the population's pride in the nation's historical achievements under the guidance of the monarchy. The king also uses „starchitecture“, i.e. the hiring of internationally celebrated architects for cultural megaprojects such as theatres and skyscrapers, to leave a visible trace in the country's architectural landscape in continuation of his predecessors' construction activities. Like the museums, these ultramodern (almost megalomaniac) buildings are reified tokens of the king's vision to establish the Moroccan nation as a civilisation renowned for its modernity anchored in tradition and conscious of its culture and history. They are symbols of the human development path he wants his citizens to pursue under his leadership (symbolic mode).

With regards to the second upgrading strategy, I focused on the Moroccan regime's efforts to silence or manage contestation which questions the monarchy's red lines. These red lines consist of a) the Islamic nature of the kingdom with *amir al mouminine* as its highest religious authority, b) the monarchy meaning both Morocco's state system and the members of the royal

family, c) the democratic character of the Moroccan regime and finally d) Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara. Upon his arrival on the throne, King Mohammed VI had to face four threats, which he inherited from his father to varying degrees. The first threat concerns the emergence of Islamist actors who questioned the state's dealing with religious questions and the king's spiritual authority as Commander of the Faithful. With the 2003 terror attacks in Casablanca, this threat became ever more urgent. In the wake of this deadly event, the monarchy started to take back control over the religious sector and reformed it considerably under the header of „spiritual security” by closely associating religious freedom, control of spiritual elites and religious education (legal mode and policy mode). Since 2003, the regime has either coopted Islamic experts into the system by giving them official posts or threatened them with jail or other forms of repression if they do not respect the established red lines. Similarly, cultural and religious organisations have been shut down or deprived of their funding sources if they did not comply. In a similar vein, while political parties with ethnic references were banned from the political landscape, parties with religious orientation were allowed to participate in national elections as long as they accept the institution of *amir al mouminine*, which stipulates the king as the highest religious authority of the country. On a policy level (policy mode), the mosques were closely bound to the system, and those who want to become imams need to undergo special state-sponsored training. Those who already are imams are required to swear allegiance to the principles of state Islam or to fear losing their jobs and end up in prison. Furthermore, the state started to instrumentalise women and train them to become spiritual guides (*murshidat*) who have easier access to families and social spaces where the state's imams do not reach. Research institutions and state-owned religious think tanks were mandated to develop counter-narratives that help combat the ideology of extremist preachers. This strategy of „immunising” both multipliers and recipients of the state's official religious messages is supplemented on a legal level. The capacity to issue religious rulings (*fatwas*) has been monopolised by the Higher Council of Moroccan Oulema which is controlled and presided over by the king. Also, the laws regulating the construction and sponsoring of new mosques and religious staff were revised to protect the spiritual prerogatives of the monarchy and ensure control over places of worship (legal mode). Furthermore, on the level of the penitentiary system, the regime started to use the full range of methods to deter and discourage radicalisation. This involves a strategy of sticks and carrots, encompassing long prison sentences for jihadists as well as a rehabilitation programme with a perspective for a royal pardon awaiting those extremists who repent and are ready to recognise the king's religious authority. Yet, the regime continues to persecute proselytism and conversion as well as public

behaviour that is not in line with what is considered true Islamic values including abortion or modern feminist perspectives on society (legal mode). This shows that the state makes sure not to alienate the conservative elites and provoke their dangerous mobilisation and opposition potential by daring to advance too far in its modernist course. The second threat emanates from the Amazigh movements which had grown stronger in the 1980s and 1990s, not least in interaction with the Amazigh community living abroad and other Amazigh movements in countries like neighbouring Algeria. As we have seen, King Mohammed VI continued the liberalisation course his father had taken since the late years of his father's rule. To discourage Imazighen's contestation against his rule, he once more used a combination of repression and concession. While creating the IRCAM and integrating Tamazight as a subject into the curriculum of pupils' first schoolyears, was supposed to be read as symbols of the king's acknowledgement of the Imazighen's contribution to the development of the nation, the regime continued to discourage Amazigh opposition in the country. Cultural projects were used to boast about a participative approach while, in reality, pitting different actors against each other. For the first time, this study provided a detailed analysis of the political processes and conditions which facilitated the king's (re-)emergence as Morocco's most powerful political force. This was the case in the process of introducing the Amazigh language into the constitution and later into public administration and the education system (legal mode). The conservative political elites representing an exclusively Arabo-Muslim identity competed with more inclusive political forces defending the representation of the Amazigh language in the Moroccan public. The political stalemate engendered by this power struggle delegitimised the political parties within the democratically elected government coalition which was led by the conservative PJD. Yet, it also allowed the king to step in as the supreme arbiter. By imposing his royal solution and presenting it as a last resort in a political impasse, he succeeded in moderating two conflicting societal strands which, in parts, both used to oppose the monarchy in the past. While framing his intervention as an act to ensure democratic procedures, the palace in fact promoted the autocratic governance elements in Morocco's political system represented by the monarchy. Regarding the third threat, the monarchy acted in a similar vein. Former political detainees of his father Hassan II and regions actively marginalised by the late king, increasingly mobilised to demand state recognition of their sufferings. To manage this contestation, the king agreed to introduce two truth commissions which set out to examine past state crimes and granted indemnities (policy mode). These indemnities issued by the more comprehensive commission called IER also involved collective compensations which, beyond economic reparations, were meant to commemorate the atrocities of the regime, enable archival work and promote research

on Moroccan old and recent history. While these initial promises for cultural actions managed to take the wind out of the opposition's sails, the regime did not deliver on them. Alleged real estate problems and social issues resulted in endless procrastination ultimately resulting in the monarchy weathering the storm while discouraging the opposition which was anyways fading with age. Yet, the lack of implementation of the reconciliation commission's recommendations does not mean that the regime has not done anything in the cultural field. Quite the contrary is the case. The least we can say is that the IER process has created a certain awareness of the usefulness of cultural policies to appease social discontent. In fact, over the years the regime has invested a lot in the cultural field, in the construction and maintenance of collective identity. It is not surprising though that the focus of these cultural policies has been less on moments in Moroccan history that were rather embarrassing for the monarchy, such as the Years of Lead under Hassan II. The population nowadays is sworn in once more on the discourse of democracy à la marocaine, the nation's struggle for international recognition of Morocco's claim on Western Sahara and the monarchy as a time-honoured warrantor of peace and social cohesion (symbolic mode). This trend became even more visible while examining the fourth threat that Mohammed VI had to face upon his ascension to the throne and continues to be far more dangerous. In regions like the former Spanish protectorates in Western Sahara in the south and the Rif in the north, protests against the Moroccan central state's hegemony are still vibrant and demonstrate decry state violence, corruption and economic marginalisation. These contestation movements continue to be repressed, their leaders are arrested and sent to prison (legal mode). Yet, the movements are also managed on a politico-legal level, i.e. the level of state organisation. In the course of the advanced decentralisation process, the regime adopted an approach which I call „cultural gerrymandering“. This approach makes sure that a culturally relatively homogeneous region like the Rif is divided into two political regions where a new regional identity is promoted through new institutions like museums or theatres (policy mode). In other regions like Western Sahara, the new political regions claim to obliterate artificial borders from the colonial era by re-establishing the cultural unity of the Sahraoui people with the Moroccan nation and providing them with new spaces to express their culture as valuable contributions to Morocco's diverse national identity (policy mode and symbolic mode). This shows how the regime used cultural policies to reduce political, social and economic grievances to manageable cultural ones. To enhance the state's effectiveness in delivering its promises for development, the legal framework that pertains to cultural heritage has successively been reformed to incrementally hollow out governmental institutions such as the Ministry of Culture and bypass elected bodies such as municipal councils (legal mode). This benefitted the creation

of more specialised and flexible organisations like the local development agencies (SDLs), the ADER Fès, the Agence Bouregreg or the National Museum Foundation which report directly to the king or the Ministry of the Interior which is associated with the palace (policy mode). These agencies and local/regional development bodies increasingly take over the market of renovation and economic exploitation of cultural sites. SDLs, pseudo-NGOs like the National Museum Foundation or agencies like the Agence Bouregreg help to undermine the decentralisation trend and compensate for the formal loss of political grip and control coming with the legal empowerment of decentralised institutions like municipal councils. The SDLs, pseudo-NGOs and agencies justify their action through a technocratic argument, which depoliticises highly political matters such as the question of cultural identity. This depoliticisation however only involves curbing the influence of party politics rather than the liberation of all political teleology within the cultural narratives. While the pseudo-NGOs, agencies and SDLs ensure a depoliticised execution of the project beyond any party politics that could eventually jeopardise the success of the project, they also make sure to deliver an interpretative narrative along with the product of their work which aligns with the official royalist/monarchist ideology. In fact, with this pseudo-liberalisation, neoliberal megaprojects arose yielding the creation of new theatres in Oujda, Casablanca and Rabat or the rehabilitation of the Bouregreg valley in Rabat/Salé including the construction of Africa's highest tower baptised in the king's name. The renovation projects are supposed to demonstrate civilisational grandeur to impress the domestic and foreign public and attract international investors. Unlike in earlier decades when the regime's modernisation projects were closely associated with state violence against public opposition, the process today claims a more inclusive and participative approach that often involves the organisation of public (pseudo-)hearings and indemnifications upon expropriations in public interest. On the symbolic level (symbolic level), this public interest is framed in terms of modern development as well as national and regional security. Another key feature is the omnipresence of references to Moroccan cultural and political history, the kingdom's historic dimension reaching from Andalusia deep into (and even across) the Sahara and the traditional position of the king as religious leader of a moderate version of Islam that complies with international standards of pluralism and promotes interfaith dialogue.

The third analytical category dealt with strategies that harness economic reforms to enlarge the groups of people who benefit from national funds and other sources of income. This category enabled me to show that the Moroccan state concentrates on the valorisation or capitalisation of Moroccan history. In this context, cultural policies are conceived to boost human development in urban and rural areas by upgrading local living conditions. This strategy directly

responds to a widespread social problem. Under the late King Hassan II, some Moroccan regions like the northern Rif or some Amazigh-dominated rural territories have long been neglected and even actively marginalised by the monarchy as a collective punishment for open contestation, leading to flagrant underdevelopment and poverty. Furthermore, over the last decades, about half of the former population of the medinas has moved to the new cities for more comfort and socio-economic perspectives. By leaving the historic centres, the latter got increasingly abandoned – mainly by the middle class while the poorest stayed and often squatted increasingly ruinous buildings. Most people got alienated from their history, a tendency the monarchy observes with great anxiety given that its rule is also built upon its traditional legitimacy. Therefore, the regime's intervention in heritage renovation needs to be seen in the context of both ideological and performance legitimisation (policy mode and symbolic mode): Locals are co-opted by direct contributions to their social welfare when their homes are restored and equipped with sanitary facilities. Furthermore, the regime aspires to maximise tourist attractivity by renovating heritage sites and monuments, polishing the facades, paving the streets, and creating museums and exhibition rooms that provide income to local populations. The economic dimension of cultural heritage is, therefore, closely linked to the exploitation of its tourist potential (policy mode). The frames used to accompany this development are mostly concerned with (urban/rural/national) development through a modernisation of the Moroccan kingdom (symbolic mode). This approach, however, often goes hand in hand with the uniformisation of Moroccan towns as well as the gentrification of neighbourhoods designated to become tourist attractions that clearly correspond to Orientalist stereotypes of Middle Eastern towns. Also, in the countryside, the renovation of old kasbahs, ksours and collective granaries emphasises the state's willingness to integrate Amazigh heritage into the kingdom's identity discourse by giving them new visibility in the country's economic development agenda (policy mode). Conversely, their touristification also risks depriving them of their spiritual or historical sense. The same is true for Morocco's omnipresent festivals, which are promoted around the year in Moroccan cities and the countryside. While they ensure the influx of national and international visitors and the generation of seasonal income, some of them have also become commoditised cultural products that mainly satisfy a cliché-oriented international taste and sometimes do not represent more than commercialised versions of the spiritually laden moussems they used to be. Hence, the reconciliation of the Moroccan people with the state and the kingdom's historic legacy is supposed to pass by the recognition of the national heritage's economic value and by the acceptance of the king as the historic cause and the modern guarantor of this new-old wealth (symbolic mode).

My fourth analytical category enabled me to show that the control of media and communication technology has become a vital instrument within Morocco's cultural policy. On the institutional level, since the early years of Mohammed VI's rule, the state has created new national and international broadcasting media, such as an Amazigh TV channel or broadcasters (policy mode), which bring the official reading of Islam into Moroccans' homes (symbolic mode). It is no coincidence that the latter stations carry the king's name to strengthen his religious authority as *amir al mouminine*. As of today, the religious radio channel *Radio Mohammed VI du Saint Coran* has already become the most popular radio station in the kingdom with an audience quota of roughly 15%. While a politicisation of the religious discourse provided in mosques is forbidden in Morocco, on special occasions, whenever the regime wishes to push and religiously legitimise certain state policies, the king has the Habous Ministry prepare Friday sermons that are either diffused directly into the mosque via a public TV channel or they are handed out to the imams who are required to read them out under the surveillance of security officers from the Interior Ministry, a palace proxy. This policy is supposed to strengthen the conviction in Morocco's society that the king's executive authority emanates from his spiritual authority as Commander of the Faithful. At the same time, on a legal level, media and ethical laws facilitate cultural censure like in the case of Nabil Ayouch's film *Much loved* or cultural events of the legally dissolved Association *Racines*, which allegedly violated the kingdom's moral institutions and crossed the monarchy's red lines. This procedure enhances the influence of institutions like the national press agency MAP, the Moroccan Cinematographic Council CCM or the High Authority of Audiovisual Communication HACA as gatekeepers of the Moroccan media landscape. The MAP is omnipresent in broadcasting the official narrative about the historical, religious and traditional roots of the people's allegiance with the king. It offers a reading of Moroccan distant and recent history that is often uncritically adopted by other Moroccan media. This policy bolsters the king's position in moral and political questions (symbolic mode). He is promoted as the guardian of what is presented to be authentically Moroccan values and as the sole time-honoured, impartial, benevolent and trustworthy political institution in the country. Furthermore, finance laws allocate financial resources to public channels, leaving the Amazigh channel underfinanced and unable to develop a full-scale programme that would satisfy its legal mission (legal mode). Beyond classical media, museums serve as important broadcasters of official narratives (symbolic mode). The goal to open a museum in every major city of the country (policy mode) reflects the national aim to disseminate the royal vision for a pan-Moroccan identity encompassing all constitutionally recognised affluents of Moroccan culture, i.e. Amazigh, Hassani, Arab, African, Muslim,

Jewish and Mediterranean. Yet, museums also fulfil another political function since they legitimise the king's major reform projects. The Mohammed VI Museum for Modern and Contemporary Art in Rabat claims to contribute to the democratisation of culture by making art accessible to anyone irrespective of income and milieu. In turn, Bayt Dakira in Essaouira commemorates Jewish culture in Morocco as a testimonial of the path of religious moderation and tolerance chosen by Morocco under the spiritual leadership of *amir al mouminine*. In a similar vein, the festival sector is booming under Mohammed VI not only as a driver of economic development. Promoted under the royal patronage of King Mohammed VI, they have become immersive tokens of Morocco's open and tolerant society, modern and cosmopolitan yet rooted in the Islamic faith and Sufi tradition. As for the symbolic mode, these policies come with narratives that focus on the personal development of every Moroccan and the idea of gaining full citizenship through the inculcation of national history and tolerant values warranted by the king.

Finally, the fifth upgrading strategy concept that was employed to analyse cultural policies in Morocco was concerned with the question of how the Moroccan monarchy tries to enhance its international image and garner foreign support for its claims on the Western Sahara by imposing itself as a reliable partner on an international level. In this context, it is crucial to recall that ensuring sovereignty over and international recognition for its claims on Western Sahara is vital to the monarchy's domestic legitimacy. In this category, the policy and symbolic modes are, therefore, more relevant than the legal one since we mainly deal with classic and public diplomacy. The book showed how Morocco makes use of international crises such as 9/11, the 2012 Islamist upheaval in Mali or the rise of the Islamic State in the Middle East to promote King Mohammed VI as peacemaker and master of interfaith dialogue. He presented himself on equal footing with other religious leaders like Pope Francis (symbolic mode). He claimed to offer the world a moderate and tolerant alternative to Saudi Wahabism. He travels the African continent to inaugurate mosques he sponsored and endowed with his name, distributes tens of thousands of Moroccan-design copies of the Holy Qur'an and invites Muslims from Africa, Europe and Asia to undergo religious training in Morocco to become spiritual guides and imams (policy mode). Furthermore, the monarchy fostered relations with the Moroccan Jewish community living in Morocco, Israel, Europe, and the United States to showcase its openness and tolerance. Through the preservation and promotion of Jewish heritage on the Moroccan territory and beyond (policy mode), the king tries to impress their international partners and make use of the networks of Jews with Moroccan origins in influential positions to garner international support in the Western Sahara issue. The fact that countries like Algeria and

Morocco seem to follow new global trends of multi-culturalism as promoted by UNESCO has been interpreted as a soft-power success of this international organisation (Medici 2018). The data collected for this study, however, suggests a different interpretation. I argue that the fact that international observers assess the policy change as an act of compliance with changing international trends should rather be seen as a soft-power success of these regimes. By investing in minimal yet ostensible efforts, they try to make the world believe in their window-dressing democracy. In reality, pseudo-pluralistic reforms conceal, to the outside and inside, the ruling autocrats' unchanging will to stay in power. Establishing international norms and values has rather opened avenues for regime legitimization without fundamental changes to their systems: By pretending to abide by these norms and values, regimes portray themselves as committed members of the international community. Thereby, they either deceive their Western partners or at least ease the task for their Western partners to look the other way and more easily justify the cooperation vis-à-vis a domestic audience concerned with the rule of law. In fact, Morocco's cultural diplomacy activities – although disguised in soft power narratives – are hardly of any peaceful nature. UNESCO has long turned into a battlefield where the kingdom strives for exclusive international recognition of allegedly authentically Moroccan cultural elements (policy mode). For the Moroccan monarchy, this battle is one over cultural sovereignty against what is presented as hostile activities of an Algerian impostor. Like the increasing number of states recognising Morocco's claims on Western Sahara, this cultural combat is supposed to create a rally-around-the-flag effect, uniting Moroccans behind the king's banner. Enduing himself with the image of a tireless defender of Moroccan cultural identity against foreign aggression is, hence, yet another coup in the king's efforts to legitimise his power in times when religious authority alone is no longer enough to convince people at home of his right to rule (symbolic mode).

Figure 69 graphically summarises my findings, which allow us to respond to one of the most urgent questions in research on Morocco's identity politics.

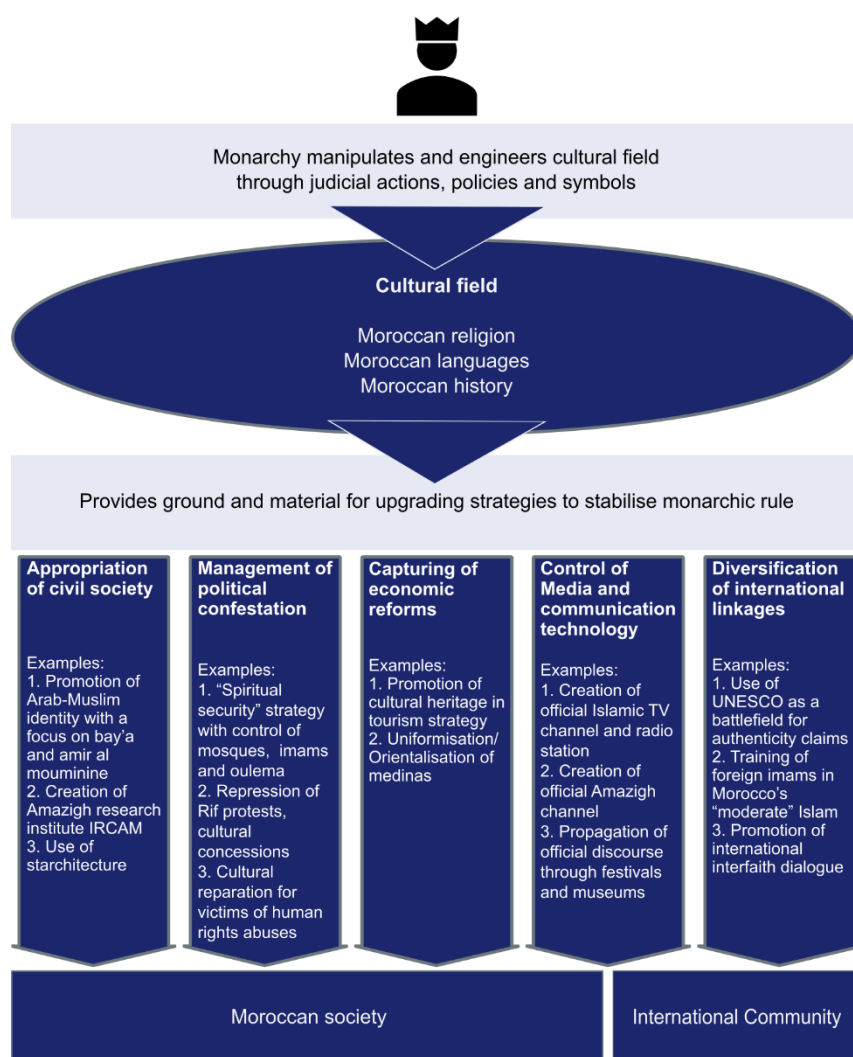


Figure 69: Cultural policies and the stabilisation of monarchic power

According to Hegasy (2017a, 129ff.), the monarchy under the late King Hassan II has successfully made its regime appear like the incarnation of authentic Moroccan identity. She argued that most Moroccan citizens can align behind the official top-down narrative of authentic Moroccaness, considering the trauma of (post-) colonial oppression and the continued experience of humiliation of Islamic heritage made by Muslims around the world. Consequently, the sentiment of identitarian disorientation in large parts of the Arab world opens discursive spaces in which social and political leaders can (re-)invent traditions and make confident claims about the preservation of authenticity that will likely fall on fertile soil.

As of 2017, Sonja Hegasy (2017a) was not sure whether this also applies to Mohammed VI, who has been investing a lot into forging a bond of his own with the Moroccan people by promoting a revision of Moroccan history. As of 2024, I confidently argue that, after some years

of discursive opening, the monarchy under Mohammed VI has managed to re-monopolise the Moroccan identity debate. While, compared to Hassan II's time, this debate is more inclusive about its references, it is not necessarily more participatory or less top-down. For sure, civil society actors can place their demands in relative freedom as long as they respect the rules of the game. Whether they fall on fertile ground, however, still hinges on the autocratic decision of the royal palace and its willingness to give in to social grievances. Like under Hassan II, the identity discourse under Mohammed VI is hence still essential to the monarchy's stability. To ensure its power maintenance, the monarchy's claims to authenticity still need to be validated through institutions and rituals. The target group from which the new support base is recruited has, however, been broadened beyond the country's old political and religious elites. Under Mohammed VI, it incorporates the formerly marginalised Imazighen or minorities like the Jewish community. Also, political opposition forces from the Rif region or Western Sahara or even from among former political detainees of the Leaden Years are addressed by the monarchy's cultural policies. Finally, the international community is of paramount importance since it grants the monarchy credibility, validates its discourse of good governance and tolerance and supports Morocco's take on the Western Sahara issue.

This book has provided evidence that it is no longer wise to label the whole cultural debate in the kingdom as mere donor's talk on behalf of the monarchy. While it is true that the regime's wording of democracy seems to recall popular buzzwords employed by Morocco's Western partners, cultural window dressing to garner international support is certainly part of the monarchy's soft power strategy. Nevertheless, based on the data presented in this book, we are well advised to assume that Morocco's highest-ranking decision makers in both the palace and the government have identified cultural policies as a useful means to boost the monarchy's image and enlarge its support base within the domestic population. Yet, since this study set out to analyse the regime's perspective on cultural policies as an instrument of power maintenance, it was able to capture the population's reaction to the regime's approach only in as far as some cultural policies are designed as a direct response to contestation and popular unrest. The study design, therefore, paved the way for a future sociological survey that could evaluate the level of public opposition, indifference, or support for the state's cultural policies. This will help to measure how effectively the different modes of authoritarian upgrading in Morocco's cultural policy field bolster the monarchy's legitimacy. This is particularly relevant in areas such as the Atlas region, the Oriental region and the Western Sahara, which I could not cover during my field research phases, due to travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic or constraints

in time and resources. Furthermore, such a study is urgently needed, considering the recent developments in Morocco, which lie outside the scope of this study:

A few days after my last visit to Rabat in early May 2024, I spent some days in Morocco's south around Marrakesh and the Atlas Mountains around Ouarzazate. The contrast could not have been starker. The traces of the earthquake that devastated large parts of these regions on 8 September 2023 were still omnipresent over half a year after the disaster. For over 120 years, no earthquake of similar magnitude had ravaged Morocco. Almost 3000 people died, and thousands more were injured. The United Nations estimated that about 300.000 people had been affected by the catastrophe, losing their homes or access to water and food.¹⁰⁷⁷ Also on a cultural level, the country was hit hard. Over 27 monuments and national heritage sites were destroyed or heavily damaged during the earthquake, including some of highly symbolic importance, such as the Bahia and Badia palaces in Marrakesh, the Traouirt Kasbah, the Ksar Aït Benhaddou in Ouarzazate and the historic mosque of Tinmel (Figure 50).¹⁰⁷⁸ In total, 2.516 mosques and other cultic spaces had been damaged by the earthquake, necessitating an investment of 1,2 billion Dirhams to rehabilitate the places of worship.¹⁰⁷⁹ In the first hours following the disaster, the king remained silent, apparently because he had undergone medical treatments in France. Although the king later launched a comprehensive aid programme¹⁰⁸⁰ also that also includes the renovation of mosques¹⁰⁸¹ and cultural heritage,¹⁰⁸² this disengagement with national events appears symptomatic and upsets many Moroccans. Already in 2022, the king had spent little time in Morocco and much time abroad, especially in France. He tends to outsource any official obligations to his relatives or high-ranking officials of the government. This is often held against him, as people in Morocco are increasingly getting the impression that the king is taking less and less interest in his official duties and that only his staff is governing the country¹⁰⁸³— such rumours are even more prevalent in Algeria where they are freely exploited and fueled by pictures and video clips of a seemingly drunk king tumbling through the streets of Paris in August 2022.¹⁰⁸⁴ Ahead of the 2030 FIFA Football World Cup, which Morocco is going to co-host with Spain and Portugal, it remains to be seen whether the

¹⁰⁷⁷ Felser (2023).

¹⁰⁷⁸ Assif (2024), Bousmid (2023).

¹⁰⁷⁹ Mokhliss (2023).

¹⁰⁸⁰ SNRTNews (2024)

¹⁰⁸¹ Mokhliss (2023).

¹⁰⁸² A. (2023b).

¹⁰⁸³ Bar'el (2022); Carrión (2022); Meslem (2022).

¹⁰⁸⁴ Algérie Focus (2024); B. (2022); La Libre (2022).

regime will be able to allocate sufficient means to repair the loss and damage and make the monuments an asset in harnessing the domestic legitimization potential and the soft power benefits this megaevent might provide in terms of foreign investments, influx of tourists or international recognition for its claims on Western Sahara.

7.2. Conclusions for Research on Cultural Policies

Identity politics matters for power maintenance in the MENA region. My research shows that not only in petrol states in the Middle East have cultural policies been identified as a means to bolster the people's identification with the incumbent regime. Rather, despite its limited rent-distribution potential, also in a lynchpin monarchy like Morocco cultural policies are considered more than luxury. Nowadays, they are a priority in the regime's efforts to enhance its legitimacy and ensure its hold on power. Like other studies on formerly understudied policy fields such as environmental policies, this fundamentally improves our understanding of power maintenance mechanisms at work in the region: It reminds us to look for examples of authoritarian learning in areas which might have gone unnoticed so far because we believed it to require a too big number of financial means to be of any significance in economically less endowed countries. It helps us to refrain from giving in to the intuitive tendency to reduce our scope of research to the most obvious elements of authoritarian upgrading, i.e. acts of repression and economic payoffs. Whereas religion has also been a relatively common field of study in the context of the MENA region, to my knowledge, this study is one of the most comprehensive ones about cultural policies, especially in the context of power maintenance in the region. The broad definition of culture chosen for this study has allowed us to bridge the long-established yet artificial divide existing in research on Maghrebian and Middle Eastern politics between religious policies and policies affecting other cultural fields, such as language and historicity. This enabled us to demonstrate how these areas interact and form a fertile ground for legitimization efforts designed to appeal to Morocco's most relevant identitarian groups. Hence, my conceptual framework has proven a useful approach to intersectional studies that could also be adopted for similar studies on other countries in the MENA region. My definition of cultural policies and the combination of authoritarian upgrading and legitimization theory used for this study has allowed us to capture large parts of the mechanisms at play in Morocco's power maintenance. In the introduction to this book, I have enumerated the current debates and main strands of regime maintenance research in Morocco, including environmental policies, decentralisation policies, social policies, urbanisation policies, and sports policies. Throughout this study, it has become clear how much these research fields are interwoven with cultural policy research, e.g. through museums that deal with environmental issues or sports and through

what I call cultural gerrymandering. I, therefore, argue that cultural policy research represents a practical entry point to a new research area since it allows us to capture not only virulent debates about national identity but also grasp bits and pieces of other policy fields. Finally, in my study, one specific aspect emerged as a particularly compelling area of cultural policy action, namely the Jewish heritage field. Considering the normalisation trend between Israel and Arab states in the larger MENA region, this aspect deserves a deeper analysis in future research. This could prove particularly interesting for researchers in international relations since – as we have seen for the Moroccan case – the promotion of Jewish heritage can become a crucial element in fostering diplomatic ties between Arab countries, Israel and the West with repercussions on economic relations and even cooperation in national and regional security. Against the backdrop of the ongoing war in the Middle East, such a study is a particularly urgent desideratum because any normalisation between predominantly Muslim states and Israel may also have a direct detrimental effect on the regime’s legitimacy, which the regime has to cope with especially when the ruling elite relies on spiritual authority claims. This book has started to pave the way to filling this empirical gap.

7.3. Going beyond Morocco: Theoretical Implications

To understand the durability of authoritarian regimes in the MENA region, research can no longer ignore cultural policies, they are more than luxury. In their “sentimentality” approach, Demmelhuber and Thies (2023) deconstruct the cultural and historical references and narratives used by autocratic leaders to inspire their people with a new sense of belonging within the specific context of the exceptionally rich Gulf monarchies. The results of this study contribute to this assessment. They clearly demonstrate that, even beyond the petrol states of the Gulf, autocratic rulers engage in more than mere emulation of their oil-rich, megalomaniac counterparts from the Arab Peninsula. Next to prestigious cultural projects similar to those in the Gulf states, the king of Morocco also creatively invests in the very cultural sectors that have the highest potential impact within *both* the international community and the domestic public. This explains the focus on the language and the cultural heritage of marginalised groups. While this study does not claim to be an impact study that specifies the degree to which these investments are generating the very effect they were designed for, i.e. the creation of diffuse support from the population, this study provides empirical support to the idea that monarchs are able to create a sentimental attachment to the regime if they use cultural policies wisely, i.e. in an ostentatious but also contextualised way. However, it seems unlikely that the findings can easily be generalised also for “republican” dictators in the MENA region despite the rich cultural heritage in their respective countries. We have reason to believe that “republican”

dictators in the MENA region do not necessarily lack cultural awareness and financial means or have individual aversions that make them refrain from investing more in cultural policies to uphold their rule. Non-monarchical regimes in the region, be they of single-party, personalist or military nature, might simply have a harder time harnessing the political potential cultural policies yield than their royal counterparts. A brief glance at Egypt suggests that cultural policy strategies are, in fact, less fruitful in republican contexts than a simple function of repression and co-option. Elshahed (2014) explained that failing to engage in cultural policies in a serious manner may have damaging effects on society: In a very top down manner, new museum projects like the Grand Egyptian Museum mainly target a foreign public and fail to involve the local population and perceive of culture solely as a „commodity in the service of neo-liberal economy” (Elshahed 2014, p. 267). However, the orientation towards the international market makes autocratic leaders turn a blind eye to contemporary cultural production despite an emerging popular need for and interest in culture. Elshahed also explained that the historic lack of cultural training and domestic engagement in museology results in soulless museum structures that hardly satisfy the demands of an international public accustomed to more skillfully designed exhibitions. „What is lacking is not a manipulation of objects for the purpose of a nationalist narrative but rather evidence of any curatorial logic, let alone a reflective and critical perspective of the Museum and its contents” (Elshahed 2014, p. 260). The disappointment caused by this pedagogical and organisational negligence may render re-visits of international publics unlikely and leave domestic publics alienated from their cultural heritage. The outbreak of the 2011 social uprisings in Egypt for Elshahed also hints at the incapability on behalf of the Egyptian authorities to make use of the societal glue culture can provide, despite giving way to public strife for a more „diverse yet unified Egyptian understanding of the collective past” (Elshahed 2014, p. 266). Elshahed’s account underlines that, in studying cultural policies as strategic means of power assertion, we must also account for the policy design to evaluate their pertinence and the seriousness with which their authors pursue them. In sum, we can say that the observations from Egypt do partly apply to Morocco and the Gulf Monarchies, too, where poor cultural policy design might also generate (more or less open) dissent. Just like the presidents of Egypt, the Moroccan monarchy seems to show a preference for tangible cultural projects with an economic interest rate, i.e. the promotion of cultural elements that have the potential to generate revenue locally and can hence mitigate protest. Morocco also targets the international community to enhance its soft power. In fact, for the Moroccan regime, soft power has become a key resource to attract Western tourists, foreign investments and international support for Morocco’s claims on Western Sahara. These

measures, however, are not always designed in a better way than in Egypt, nor are they always followed up by the necessary financial means to make them sustainable. The short comparison between the Egyptian and Moroccan cases illustrates that richness in cultural resources, allocation of sufficient financial means and cultural policy design alone do not explain diverging outcomes concerning regime stability. The evidence presented in this book supports that, eventually, the nature of the respective autocrat matters more than his readiness to use cultural policies for regime maintenance. Cultural policies are easier to use for kings and yield better stabilising results in monarchies as they are enshrined in the very character of their system of domination. However, a comparative follow-up study across republics and monarchies would shed more light on the robustness of this mechanism. It would help determine the influence of regime type on cultural policy usage and effectiveness in terms of political stability.

The conceptual approach developed in this study is generally open to comparative work. Since it invites laborious and meticulous policy analyses, one might limit the comparison to one of the five pillars used in this study in case a rather comprehensive documentary approach is unfeasible.

However, only a finely grained framework enables us to capture a broadly inclusive picture with a higher empirical resolution that reduces the risk of excluding crucial elements that would otherwise blur away. While the approach does not allow for examining the long-term stabilising impact of cultural policies, focusing on the three modes of regime stabilisation allows for a glimpse into the immediate legal, political and symbolic contexts of each upgrading strategy, including their target groups' immediate reactions. This brings more light to the underresearched grey zones of regime stabilisation beyond and between legitimisation, co-option and repression.

8. References

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9. Appendices

9.1. List of Interviews, Background Conversations and Sites Visited

Overview of interviews and background conversations conducted between January 2020 and May 2024¹⁰⁸⁵

Type of interlocutor (some people have multiple functions and are counted in each category)	Subcategories	Name of the interlocutor	Function of interlocutor	Date(s) of the interview(s)	Format and length of interviews	Record status	Interview code
Artists	Contemporary art		Artist and art professor	01/03/2020 in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 90 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, Artist, 1
	Urban development studies		Researcher on urban development projects in Morocco	16/06/2021, digital	Informal conversation	Concurrent notes	Informal conversation, Urban development, 1
Researchers	Political Science/Religious studies		US Professor specialised in Religious Studies	Regular exchange	Informal conversations		Informal conversation, Religious studies, 1
	Comparative literature, language & identity politics		Professor at International University of Rabat	26/02/2020 in Salé	Background conversation, ca 79 min	Audio recording and concurrent notes	Background conversation, Cultural policies, 1
	Cultural policies		Professor at Mohammed V University in Rabat	10/04/2020 digital	Background conversation, ca 70 min	concurrent notes	Background conversation, Cultural policies, 2

¹⁰⁸⁵ Compilation inspired by the model of Bleich and Pekkanen (2013, p. 103).

			Author of a book on Morocco's cultural policies	18/02/2020 in Rabat	Background conversation, ca 94 min	Audio recording and concurrent notes	Background conversation, Cultural policies, 3
	Amazigh studies		Linguist and expert in Amazigh language and culture	21/02/2020 in Fès	Background conversation, ca 69 min	Audio recording and concurrent notes	Background conversation, Cultural policies, 4
			Linguist specialised on Amazigh language planning a	Regular exchange	Informal conversations	Retrospective notes	Informal conversation, Language policies, 1
	Political science		Professor at Mohammed V University in Rabat	17/08/2020 digital	Background conversation, ca 104 min	Audio recording and partial transcript	Background conversation, Political system, 1
			Professor at the International University of Rabat	03/03/2020 in Salé	Background conversation	concurrent notes	Background conversation, Political system 2
	Geography/adminis tration		Former High Ranking Wali at the Interior Ministry	03/08/2021 in Salé	Interview, ca 60 min	Partially recorded and transcribed	Interview, Political system, 1
	Sociology		Sociology professor at Mohammed V University in Rabat	18/02/2020 and 06/03/2020 both in Rabat	Background conversations , ca 100 min	Supplementary notes taken after the meeting	Background conversation, Moroccan society, 1 Background conversation, Moroccan society, 2
			Sociology professor at Mohammed V University in Rabat	25/08/2020, digital	Background conversation, ca 68 min	Handwritten notes	Background conversation, Moroccan society, 3
	Religious studies		Researcher, Former official at the Rabita Mohammedia of Moroccan Oulema	11/03/2020 in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 62 min	Audio recording and partial transcript	Interview, Religious policies, 1

	Literature/culture juive		Professor at Mohammed V University in Rabat	19/02/2020 in Rabat	Background conversation, ca 60 min	Concurrent notes	Background conversation, Jewish life in Morocco, 1
			PhD researcher on Jewish literature in the Maghreb	Regular exchanges	Informal conversations	Retrospective notes	Informal conversations, Jewish literature in the Maghreb, 1
	Heritage studies		Professor at the Mohammed V University in Rabat; Former official at Morocco's UNESCO Commission	21/05/2021 digital and 11/08/2021 in Rabat	Guideline interviews Ca 56min (interview 1) Ca 60 min (interview 2)	Audio recording for first interview, supplementary notes taken one hour after the second interview	Interview, Cultural heritage, 1 Interview, Cultural heritage, 2
			Former Geography Professor at Mohammed V University in Rabat and director at a research section at IRCAM	21/07/2021 in Temara	Background conversation, ca 60 min	Handwritten notes	Background conversation, Cultural heritage, 1
			Member of the scientific committee at National Museum Foundation	21/07/2021 in Rabat 03/08/2021 in Rabat 09/05/2024 in Rabat 13/05/2024 in Marrakesh	Informal conversations	Handwritten concurrent and supplementary notes	Informal conversation, Cultural heritage, 1 Informal conversation, Cultural heritage, 2 Informal conversation, Cultural heritage, 3 Informal conversation, Cultural heritage, 4
			Professor at INSAP, expert on cultural heritage and UNESCO policies	02/03/2020 in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 60 min	Handwritten concurrent notes	Interview, Cultural heritage, 3

			Researcher in cultural heritage; ICOMOS member	01/03/2022 digital	Background conversation, ca 60 min	Handwritten concurrent notes	Background conversation, cultural heritage, 2
			Former geography professor at University of Bayreuth	18/06/2021, in Bayreuth	Background conversation, ca 90 min		Background conversation, cultural heritage, 3
Religious minorities	Churches		Representative of a Christian church	22/02/2021	Written guideline interview	Interviewee submitted written answers to my guideline questions	Interview, Religious policies, 2
	Jewish community	André Azoulay	Royal advisor to the late King Hassan II and current King Mohammed VI; founding president of the Association Essaouira Mogador; former president of the <i>Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation</i> , president of the Executive Committee of the <i>'Foundation of the Three Cultures'</i> ; honorary president of <i>Association Mimouna</i>	19/08/2021, digital 12/05/2024 in Essaouira	Guideline interview (1 st encounter), ca/ 25 min Guided tour through Bayt Dakira (2 nd encounter), ca/ 30 min	Audio recording during the first interview, concurrent notes on the second	Interview, Jewish heritage, 1
			Secretary General of a local Jewish Community of Rabat	27/04/2020, digital	Guideline interview, ca 54 min	Audio recording, concurrent notes	Interview, Jewish heritage, 2
	Festival organisation	Neila Tazi	President of the Fédération des Industries Culturelles et Créatives (FICC); president of the	04/05/2020, digital	Guideline interview, ca 53 min	Audio recording, concurrent notes	Interview, Festival industry, 1

			CGEM parliamentary group in the Chamber of Councillors in Moroccan Parliament; Founder and head of the Gnaoua Festival in Essaouira				
		Fouzi Skali	Founding director of <i>Festival de Fès de la Culture Soufie</i> and <i>Festival de Fès des Musiques Sacrées du Monde</i>	28/08/2020, digital	Guideline interview, ca 62 min	Audio recording, concurrent notes	Interview, Festival industry, 2
	Heritage association		Architect, representative of a civil society organisation active in heritage preservation	20/05/2021, digital	Guideline interview, ca 76 min	Audio recording, concurrent notes	Interview, Cultural heritage, 4
	Cultural association		Coordinator of a cultural association	28/03/2020, digital	Guideline interview, ca 89 min	Audio recording	Interview, Cultural policies, 1
			Member of Eassaouira Mogador	02/05/2020 13/08/2021, in Essaouira	Guideline interviews Ca 60min during 2 nd interview	Interviewee submitted written answers to my guideline questions (1 st interview) Handwritten notes (2 nd interview)	Interview, Jewish heritage, 3 Interview, Jewish heritage, 4
Cultural industries	Fédération des Industries Culturelles et Créatives (FICC)	Neila Tazi	See above				

(Current/former) Members of royal palace	Royal advisor	André Azoulay	See above				
	Palace official		Former member of the royal palace, active in PR	08/09/2020, digital	Guideline interview, ca 31 min	Audio recording	Interview, Cultural policies, 2
Government officials (ministry, national)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs		High-ranking official	12/03/2020, in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 60 min	Audio recording, partial transcript	Interview, Cultural Diplomacy, 1
	Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs		High-ranking official	24/04/2020, 29/04/2020, 07/05/2020 (all digital) 29/07/2021, in Rabat 11/08/2021, in Rabat	Guideline interviews, ca 83 min (1 st interview) Ca 63 min (2 nd interview) Ca 81 min (3 rd interview) Ca 60 min (4 th interview) Ca 60 min (5 th interview)	Audio recording, concurrent notes	Interview, Religious Policies, 3 Interview, Religious Policies, 4 Interview, Religious Policies, 5 Interview, Religious Policies, 6 Interview, Religious Policies, 7
	Ministry of Culture		High-ranking official	12/03/2020, in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 92 min	Audio recording	Interview, Cultural policies, 3
			Hing-ranking official	23/03/2020, digital	Guideline interview, ca 73 min	Audio recording	Interview, Cultural policies, 4
			Former high-ranking official	29/08/2020, digital	Guideline interview, ca 114 min	Audio recording	Interview, Cultural policies, 5

			Former high-ranking official	11/04/2020, digital	Guideline interview, ca 113 min	Audio recording	Interview, Cultural policies, 6
			Mid-hierarchy official	04/03/2020, in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 80 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, Cultural policies, 7
			Mid-hierarchy official	25/03/2020, digital	Guideline interview, ca 60 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, Cultural policies, 8
			High-ranking official	26/03/2020, digital	Guideline interview, ca 60 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, Cultural policies, 9
	Ministry of Education		Mid-hierarchy official	29/07/2021 in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 60 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, National education, 1
			High-ranking official	22/09/2021, digital	Guideline interview, ca 43 min	Audio recording	Interview, National education, 2
Government officials (ministry, regional divisions)	Regional Directorates for Culture		Conservationist	21/02/2020	Guideline interview, ca 82 min	Audio recording, full transcript	Interview, Cultural heritage, 5
			Regional Director	15/04/2020	Guideline interview	Interviewee submitted his answers in written form	Interview, Cultural policies, 10
	Regional Directorate for Tourism		Provincial Delegate for Tourism	27/09/2021, digital	Guideline interview	Concurrent notes	Interview, Cultural tourism, 1
State officials (national institutions)	Royan Institute of Amazigh Culture (IRCAM)		High-ranking official	21/09/2021, digital	Guideline interview, ca 77 min	Audio recording	Interview, Language policies, 1
			Researcher	27/02/2020, in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 60 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, Language policies, 2

		High-ranking official	28/07/2021 in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 77 min	Audio recording	Interview, Language policies, 3
		Researcher	06/03/2020 in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 60 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, Language policies, 4
		High-ranking official	13/03/2020 in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 60 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, Language policies, 5
		High-ranking official	09/03/2020 in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 60 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, Language policies, 6
		High-ranking official	27/02/2020 10/05/2024 both in Rabat	Group discussions, ca 94 min (first encounter) Ca 60 min (second encounter)	Audio recording Concurrent notes	Interview, Language policies, 7 Interview, Language policies, 8
		Researcher	27/02/2020	Group discussions, ca 94 min (first encounter)	Audio recording Concurrent notes	Interview, Language policies, 9
		Researcher	27/02/2020 in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 56 min	Audio recording	Interview, Language policies, 10
		High-ranking official	13/03/2020 10/05/2024 both in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 58 min (first encounter) Ca 60 min (second encounter)	Audio recording Concurrent notes	Interview, Language policies, 11 Interview, Language policies, 12
		High-ranking official	02/03/2020 in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 60 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, Language policies, 13

	National Museum Foundation	Mehdi Qotbi	President	15/02/2020 09/05/2020 both in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 63 min (first encounter) Group discussion, ca 60 min (second encounter)	Audio recording Concurrent notes	Interview, Museums, 1
		Abdelaziz el Idrissi	Right hand of the president, director of the Mohammed VI Museum for Modern and Contemporary Art	29/07/2021 in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 35 min	Audio recording	Interview, Museums, 2
	Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, Murshidin and Murshidat		High-ranking official	10/05/2024 in Rabat,	Guided tour and informal conversation, ca 80 min	Concurrent and supplementary notes after the meeting	Interview, Religious policies, 8
			Researcher and Imam trainer	16/04/2020 digital	Guideline interview, ca 94 min	Audio recording	Interview, Religious policies, 9
	Mohammed VI Institute for Qur'anic Lectures and Studies		High-ranking official	12/03/2020 in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 84 min	Audio recording	Interview, Religious policies, 10
	National Library	Driss Khrouz	Former director of the National Library (2003-2016); Director General of the Foundation Esprit de Fès and of the Festival des musiques sacrées	27/3/2020 digital	Guideline interview, ca 72 min	Audio recording and partial transcript	Interview, National Library, 1
			President of the Commission on the				

			elaboration of a draft law on the Council for National Languages and Culture				
	Constitution writing commissions	Lahcen Oulhaj	President of the Permanent Commission for the permanent analysis of Economic and Social Trends at the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE); Member of the Constitution Writing Commission in 2011	11/05/2020, digital	Guideline interview, ca 65 min	Audio recording	Interview, Constitution, 1
	Hassan II Fund for Economic and Social Development		Mid-ranking official	09/03/2020, in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 60 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, Cultural heritage, 6
	Tamazight (8 th national TV channel in Amazigh language)		Journalist	24/02/2020, in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 195 min	Audio recording	Interview, Amazigh media, 1
	Fondation CDG		High-ranking official	17/09/2021, digital	Guideline interview, ca 70 min	Audio recording	Interview, Fondation CDG, 1
	CNDH		Mid-ranking official	28/02/2020, in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 85 min	Audio recording	Interview, Human rights, 1

	Al Qaraouiyine University		High-ranking official	26/08/2020, digital	Guideline interview, ca 45 min	Audio recording	Interview, Religious policies, 10
	INSAP		High-ranking official	06/03/2020, in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 20 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, Cultural heritage, 7
	ISADAC		High-ranking official	10/03/2020, in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 10 min Interview interrupted and ultimately cancelled due to national COVID-19 lockdown	Concurrent notes	Interview, Cultural policies, 11
Parliamentarians	PJD		High-ranking party member and parliamentarian of the second chamber	19/09/2020, digital	Guideline interview, ca 71 min	Audio recording	Interview, Parliament, 1
	PPS		Parliamentarian in the Chamber of Representatives	25/02/2020, in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 60 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, Parliament, 2
	Mouvement Populaire		Former parliamentarian in the Chamber of Representatives (2011-2016)	26/11/2020, digital	Guideline interview, ca 56 min	Audio recording	Interview, Parliament, 3
Museums (public and private)	Mohammed VI Museum for Modern and Contemporary Art	Abdelaziz el Idrissi	See above				

	Bayt Dakira		High-ranking official	03/06/2020, digital	Guideline interview, ca 42 min	Audio recording	Interview, Jewish heritage, 5
			High-ranking official	13/08/2021, in Essaouira	Guideline interview, ca 74 min	Audio recording, concurrent notes	Interview, Jewish heritage, 6
	Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden (Macaal) in Marrakesh		High-ranking representative	10/03/2021, digital	Guideline interview, ca 30 min	Partial audio recording, concurrent notes	Interview, Museum, 3
Executive agencies and architects	Agency for the Development and Rehabilitation of the Medina of Fès (ADER)		Head of Division	08/05/2024, in Fès	Group discussion, ca 70 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, Cultural heritage, 8
			Architect	03/03/2020 and 25/04/2020 in Rabat 18/06/2021, digital	Guideline interviews, ca 120 min in total	Concurrent and supplementary notes taken after the meetings	Interview, Cultural heritage, 9 Interview, Cultural heritage, 10 Interview, Cultural heritage, 11
	Al Omrane Holding		Director of a Section	24/08/2021, digital	Guideline interview, ca 50 min	Audio recording	Interview, Cultural heritage, 12
	Agency for the re-organisation of the Bouregreg Valley (AAVB, Agence Bouregreg)		Former high-ranking official	25/09/2021, digital	Guideline interview, ca 55 min	Audio recording	Interview, Cultural heritage, 13
	Rehabilitation of Essaouira		Architect	14/08/2021, in Essaouira	Guideline interview, ca 34 min	Audio recording	Interview, Cultural heritage, 14

International institutions	UNESCO		High-ranking official in Morocco	05/08/2021, digital/Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 86 min	Audio recording	Interview, UNESCO, 1
Foreign actors	Embassies		Ambassador	09/05/2024, in Rabat	Panel discussion, ca 45 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, International relations, 1
			Former ambassador	12/05/2023	Background conversation, ca 60 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, International relations, 2
			Head of cultural department	12/08/2021, in Rabat	Background conversation, ca 60 min	Recorded memo after meeting	Interview, International relations, 3
	Foreign foundations		Head of the Morocco office	19/12/2022, digital	Background conversation, ca 60 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, International relations, 4
			Head of the Morocco office	Regular exchanges	Informal conversation, ca 180 min in total	Supplementary notes after the meetings	Interview, International relations, 5
	GIZ		High-ranking official	10/05/2024, in Rabat	Panel discussion, ca/ 30 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, International relations, 6
			Project head	08/07/2021, digital	Background conversation, ca 45 min	Concurrent notes	Interview, International relations, 7
	Foreign culture institute		Head of the institute	26/02/2020, in Rabat	Guideline interview, ca 72 min	Audio recording	Interview, International culture cooperation, 1

Visitors of the EXPO 2023	Visitors to the Moroccan pavillon			01/11/2021, digital	Group interview, ca 74 min	Audio recording, concurrent notes	Interview, International relations, 8
Total number of interlocutors	92						
Total number of interviews	106						

Cultural sites visited

Type of Heritage	Heritage site	Region/city	Date of visit
Medina/old town	Medina and Mellah of Fès	Fès	25/02/2018-28/02/2018 03/03/2018-04/03/2018 20/02/2020-22/02/2020 07/05/2024-08/05/2024
	Medina of Meknès	Meknès	27/02/2018 22/02/2020
	Medina and Mellah of Rabat	Rabat	01/03/2018 15/02/2020-17/03/2020 19/07/2021-12/08/2021 09/05/2024-11/05/2024
	Medina and Mellah of Marrakesh	Marrakesh	18/12/2018-22/12/2018 14/08/2021-16/08/2021 13/05/2024
	Medina of Essaouira	Essaouira	12/08/2021-14/08/2021
	Medina of Tangier	Tangier	14/03/2020
	Medina of Tetouan	Tetouan	07/08/2021-08/08/2021
	Medina of Chefchaouen	Chefchaouen	08/08/2021-09/08/2021
	Medina of Salé	Salé	23/02/2020
	Medina of Casablanca	Casablanca	28/02/2018-03/03/2018 31/07/2021
	Medina of Ouarzazate	Ouarzazate	14/05/2024-15/05/2024
Colonial new towns	Quartier Habous	Casablanca	01/03/2018 31/07/2021
	Quartier Hassan	Rabat	01/03/2018 15/02/2020-17/03/2020 19/07/2021-12/08/2021 09/05/2024-11/05/2024
Fondouks/Caravanseries	Fondouk el Nejjarine	Fès	07/05/2024
Kasbah and ksour	Kasbah des Oudayas	Rabat	01/03/2018 17/02/2020 20/07/2021 09/05/2024
	Kasbah Taourirt	Ouarzazate	15/05/2024
	Ksour Ait ben Haddou	Ouarzazate	14/05/2024

	Kasbah	Tangier	14/03/2020
	Scala de la Kasbah	Essaouira	13/08/2021
			12/05/2024
Religious sites	Marinid Medersa	Salé	23/02/2020
	Hassan II Mosque	Casablanca	01/03/2018
	St. Peter's Cathedral	Rabat	13/03/2020
	Church of Nuestra Señora de la Victoria	Tetouan	07/08/2021
	Institut Mohammed VI pour la Formation des Imam Mourchidines et Mourchidates	Rabat	10/05/2024
	Institut Mohammed VI des lectures et études coraniques	Rabat	12/03/2020
Museums	Mohammed VI Museum for Modern and Contemporary Art	Rabat	29/07/2021
			09/05/2024
	Archaeological Museum	Rabat	
	Photography Museum	Rabat	21/07/2021
	Musée de la Parure	Rabat	09/05/2024
	Archaeological Museum	Tetouan	07/08/2021
	Bayt Dakira	Essaouira	13/08/2021
Other heritage sites			12/05/2024
	Dar el Bacha Museum	Marrakesh	15/08/2021
	Volubilis	Meknès	22/02/2020
	Heri es-Souani	Meknès	27/02/2018
	Menara Gardens	Marrakesh	19/12/2018
	Jamaa el Fna	Marrakesh	19/12/2018
			14/08/2021-16/08/2021
Festivals and concerts attended			13/05/2024
	Hassan Tower and Mausoleum of Mohammed V and Hassan II	Rabat	17/02/2020
			20/07/2021
			09/05/2024
	Mazamma site	Ajdir	06/05/2024
	Jazz au Chellah	Rabat	10/05/2024
	Mohammed V theatre	Rabat	

9.2. Example of Interview Guidelines with Answers Filled in by an Interviewee Responding in Written Form

Présentation

■, tout d'abord, je tiens à vous remercier d'avoir accepté cet entretien. Comme je vous l'ai déjà écrit, je fais mon doctorat en sciences politique à l'université de Bayreuth en Allemagne.

Dans mes recherches, je m'intéresse à la politique culturelle de l'état marocain et son évolution depuis l'intronisation de Mohammed VI. Sous le terme de politique culturelle j'entends surtout des actions de l'état dans les sous-domaines de la politique du religieux, de la politique des langues et de la politique du patrimoine matériel ou immatériel.

Pour cela je m'adresse aux différents représentants des groupes culturels et confessionnels ainsi qu'aux responsables des questions culturelles au sein des autorités marocaines.

Si vous avez encore des questions sur mon projet, n'hésitez pas à me contacter et à consulter le site web du projet: https://www.politik.uni-bayreuth.de/en/team/vruest_andreas/index.php

Avant de commencer, je suis obligé de vous demander si vous acceptez être cité dans mon étude. Pour cela, veuillez cocher la case qui correspond le mieux à votre préférence :

☒	J'autorise le chercheur à me citer <u>de manière directe et explicite</u> .
☐	J'autorise le chercheur à me citer <u>de manière directe à condition que mon nom ne soit pas révélé</u> (garantie d'anonymat). Par contre, un pseudonyme/alias ou une courte description de mes fonctions pourront être utilisés tant qu'aucune identification avec ma personne ne sera possible.
☐	J'autorise le chercheur à me citer <u>de manière indirecte et à intégrer mes opinions dans des synthèses d'autres interviews</u> à condition que mon nom ne soit pas révélé (garantie d'anonymat). Par contre, un pseudonyme/alias ou une courte description de mes fonctions pourront être utilisés tant qu'aucune identification avec ma personne ne sera possible.
☐	Je ne souhaite pas être cité(e) de quelconque manière. Je vois cette interview comme conversation à titre purement informatif. Par contre, je suis d'accord que mon opinion sera incluse dans des synthèses d'une multitude d'interviews à condition que rien ne permette de m'identifier avec une opinion spécifique.

A. Partie générale

1. S'il vous plaît, décrivez-moi les enjeux et les priorités de la politique culturelle du Maroc tel que vous la percevez.
A mon avis, le principal enjeu de la politique culturelle du Maroc c'est tout d'abord, la définition d'un projet de société future. Cela relève peut-être de la politique générale de l'Etat marocain, mais je pense que pour avoir une visibilité d'ensemble pour le secteur culturel, il est primordial de savoir pour quel modèle de société nous œuvrons. C'est vrai que d'emblée nous savons que la société marocaine est marquée par « la diversité au sein de l'unité » ; mais cela semble aujourd'hui insuffisant pour déterminer le type d'action culturelle à entreprendre qui doit d'une part répondre aux aspirations des citoyens (avec leurs multiples diversités : d'âge, de sexe, de provenance, de niveau scolaire.....) et de l'autre du besoin à construire ou du moins à participer à l'échafaudage d'une société libre et éclairée.

Pour ce qui est des priorités, je pense que la mise en œuvre d'une stratégie de « proximité culturelle » est l'une des priorités fondamentales. Au lieu d'investir dans de grands événements qui ont plutôt un caractère festif ou de divertissement, il faut pouvoir organiser des activités circonscrites mais quotidiennes au sein des divers quartiers de la ville. Pour cela, il est temps de trouver le moyen juridique qui permet d'inscrire obligatoirement et de façon annuelle dans les programmes des collectivités territoriales la construction d'équipements culturels à l'échelle de chaque quartier, l'embauche d'animateurs et de techniciens des métiers de la culture et la programmation d'activités culturelles selon un calendrier bien précis pour pouvoir établir cette « proximité culturelle ». Car, comme disait un artiste, les « jeunes ont besoin d'espaces de créations, de répétitions et d'apprentissage artistiques, les troupes de théâtres de lieux fixes pour se produire, les cinéastes de salles de cinémas pour projeter leurs films et les peintres de petites galeries, pour se faire connaître et espérer exister un jour. Beaucoup de professionnels des arts ont soif de donner de leurs temps et d'apprendre aux citoyennes de demain ce qu'est l'éducation à l'art et à la culture ». Et bien entendu, l'Etat tout seul (à travers le ministère de la culture) ne peut pas tout faire.

Par ailleurs, la formation et la formation continue des gens travaillant dans le domaine de la culture est une autre priorité comme l'éducation à la culture (le livre, le patrimoine, le théâtre, la musique, le cinéma, l'art....) au sein des établissements scolaires et dès le très jeune âge à travers, par exemple, des jeux ludiques, des travaux pratiques, des visites guidées... L'objectif est de dépasser la vision élitiste de la culture afin d'inculquer les valeurs d'une culture inclusive, qui permettent le développement social égalitaire aussi bien des couches sociales aisées que celles défavorisées ou en situation difficile.

2. D'après vous, qui sont les acteurs principaux dans la politique culturelle du Maroc et quel est leur rôle ?
 - ✓ Les institutions étatiques sont les premiers acteurs culturels au Maroc, notamment le ministère de la culture, de la jeunesse et des sports, le ministère de l'éducation nationale et de l'enseignement supérieur, le ministère de l'intérieur (à travers les collectivités et les préfectures, notamment), le ministère des Habous et des Affaires Islamiques.
 - ✓ La société civile à travers les associations à vocation culturelle.
 - ✓ Le secteur privé à travers le mécénat et la création de fondations culturelles.
 - ✓ Les services culturels étrangers.

3. D'après vous, y'avait-il des changements dans la politique culturelle du Maroc au fil des 20 dernières années ? Veuillez les décrire, s'il vous plaît.

Durant les 20 dernières années la politique culturelle du Maroc a connu d'énormes changements. Ces changements sont sensibles à tous les niveaux : institutionnel, juridique, académique, financier et des programmes culturels mis en œuvre.

Ainsi au point de vue institutionnel et juridique, le ministère de la culture est devenu un ministère à part entier. Alors que la gestion gouvernementale de la culture se faisait au paravent par l'attribution de cette gestion à d'autres ministères ou, dans les meilleurs des cas, l'utilisation d'une désignation floue et équivoque de « ministère chargé des affaires culturelles », depuis plus d'une vingtaine d'années, ce ministère fut doté de textes de loi qui définissent les attributions qui sont les siennes et son organisation interne et territoriale (4 Directions centrales, 12 Directions régionales, des instituts d'enseignements supérieurs, des centres spécialisés....etc.).

D'un autre côté la prise en charge de la culture fut confortée durant ces dernières années par la création d'instances spécialisées dans des domaines bien précis : Institut royal de la culture amazigh, Direction de l'histoire et du patrimoine militaire, Fondation nationale des musées....

Au point de vue académique et de la formation, en plus des instituts spécialisés dans des domaines spécifiques (Institut des sciences de l'archéologie et du patrimoine, institut supérieur des arts dramatiques et d'animation culturelle, école des beaux arts), plusieurs facultés du royaume ont commencé à livrer des formations diplômantes dans les métiers de la culture.

Le budget dédié à la culture, quoique toujours en deçà des aspirations des professionnels, a connu une augmentation substantielle. A titre d'exemple, les recettes des rentrées des monuments historiques et sites archéologiques relevant du ministère de la culture furent multipliées par 7 dans certains cas [REDACTED].

Au niveau de la programmation culturelle, il y a eu un progrès sensible grâce notamment à l'apport des cadres des instituts de formation qui ont été créés. Le Maroc compte aujourd'hui une dizaine de festivals et de rencontres culturels de renommées internationales.

B. Partie détaillée

1. S'il vous plaît, décrivez-moi où se situe votre direction dans le paysage culturel au Maroc.

La Direction régionale [REDACTED] est l'une des 12 directions correspondantes aux 12 régions du royaume. A l'image du ministère de tutelle, cette direction s'occupe, à l'échelle de la région qui compte 8 provinces, du livre et de la lecture publique à travers la création et l'équipement de bibliothèques, de médiathèques, de points de lecture et l'organisation d'activités axées sur l'encouragement de la lecture et de l'écriture..., la promotion des arts à travers la création et l'équipement de centres culturels, de conservatoire de musique, de galeries d'art et l'organisation d'activités autour des différents types d'Art. La conservation, la restauration, l'inventaire et la promotion des patrimoines culturels (matériel et immatériel).

2. S'il vous plaît, décrivez-moi les conditions et les priorités de votre travail au Maroc.

a. Quels sont les axes principaux de votre travail?

Comme décrit précédemment, les axes principaux de notre travail sont :

- ✓ Le livre et la lecture publique ;
- ✓ La promotion des Arts toute discipline confondue ;
- ✓ La conservation du patrimoine culturel.

b. D'où venait l'idée pour ce programme ?

Le programme établi découle des attributions de la direction régionale de la culture à savoir la gestion de la culture et du patrimoine culturel à l'échelle de la région [REDACTED].

Ceci est réalisé en étroite collaboration avec les services centraux concernés, les communes de la région, les associations et les fondations culturelles de la région et bien sûr les autorités locales. En plus d'un certain nombre d'activités et d'événements récurrents annuellement [REDACTED].

[REDACTED], un programme annuel, établi à la fin de chaque année par la direction régionale, est réalisé au cours de l'année qui suit selon les moyens financiers mis à sa disposition par le département de tutelle.

c. Comment mettez-vous en place ce programme?

Etant donné que notre programme est élaboré à la base des programmes des associations et des fondations culturelles et des aspirations des communes ou d'autres services gouvernementaux, la mise en œuvre de certains volets du programme en question peut faire appel à des coopérations multisectorielles.

3. Y-a-t-il des coopérations avec des institutions étatiques ou des groupes civils ?

a. Svp, décrivez-moi en quoi consistent ces coopérations ?

Les coopérations prennent plusieurs formes :

- ✓ La mise à disposition gratuite des locaux relevant de la direction pour l'organisation des activités culturelles (salle de théâtre, galeries d'art, monuments historiques...) ;
- ✓ Le soutien logistique ;
- ✓ L'encadrement technique ;
- ✓ L'impression d'affiches, banderoles, dépliants... ;
- ✓ La prise en charge des frais de séjours d'artistes, écrivains... ;
- ✓ La rémunération de techniciens, conférenciers, artistes...

b. Svp, précisez comment ces coopérations se sont-elles établies ?

4. S'il vous plaît, décrivez-moi les grands défis/problèmes que vous rencontrez dans votre travail (aussi par rapport aux autres autorités marocaines). S'il vous plaît, illustrez votre description avec des exemples.

Les problèmes rencontrés par ordre de prégnance peuvent être résumés comme suit :

- ✓ Manque de personnel ;
- ✓ Faiblesse des moyens financiers ;
- ✓ Faiblesse de l'infrastructure culturelle.

5. Comment réagissez-vous face à ces défis/problèmes? S'il vous plaît, illustrez votre description avec des exemples.

L'établissement de partenariat pour la réalisation et la gestion d'équipement culturel avec les communes territoriales. A titre d'exemple, la réalisation en cours des centres culturels des villes de [redacted] se fait dans le cadre d'une convention entre le Ministère de la Culture et les communes des villes respectives.

L'organisation d'activités culturelles se fait souvent dans le cadre de partenariat notamment pour les grands événements tels les festivals.

L'incitation des communes à prendre en charge la gestion de certains équipements culturels tels les médiathèques et les bibliothèques par exemple. La Direction régionale en assure des formations appropriées aux fonctionnaires affectés à la gestion de ces équipements.

6. [redacted] dispose d'une des plus hautes densités de monuments classés « patrimoine national/mondial » sur le continent africain. S'il vous plaît, décrivez ce que cela signifie pour votre travail. Veuillez illustrer votre description avec des exemples.

La médina de [redacted] et son arrière-pays est l'une des villes les plus riches en patrimoine au niveau du royaume. Elle regroupe plusieurs monuments classés patrimoine national sans compter les sites inscrits et une multitude d'édifices historiques qui méritent le même intérêt. Objets d'attraction touristique et culturelle, les sites et les monuments historiques de cette ville participent substantiellement à l'alimentation des recettes du Fond National d'Action Culturelle. Mais aujourd'hui, le tissu urbain traditionnel auquel on doit la renommée de cette ville est soumis aux contraintes d'une urbanisation des plus effrénées. La médina de [redacted] connaît des transformations inquiétantes et ses édifices historiques attirent les convoitises de tout horizon lorsqu'ils sont laissés à l'abandon.

Face à cette situation, de grands efforts sont continuellement déployés et des résultats probants sont enregistrés. En effet, les conventions multisectorielles signées et mises en œuvre ces dernières années sous la houlette de la plus haute autorité du pays ont permis la restauration des murailles historiques, de plusieurs monuments [redacted]

ménra...), la réhabilitation des quartiers historiques, la création d'équipements socioculturels...etc. Et les travaux n'en finissent pas.

La Direction régionale de la culture comporte une entité dédiée à la gestion du patrimoine qui est la conservation régionale du patrimoine culturel qui englobe à son tour des services spécialisés dans la gestion des sites les plus importants en plus d'une inspection régionale des monuments historiques qui s'occupe, entre autres, de la médina de [redacted]

Aujourd'hui, sans parler du secteur privé, l'Inspection est continuellement interpellée par les autorités locales et les services de l'urbanisme locaux et régionaux (Agence urbaine de [redacted], Inspection régionale de l'urbanisme, les divisions municipales et provinciales d'urbanisme et d'architecture, la direction régionale de l'habitat, la direction régionale de la culture...). En outre, l'intérêt de plus en plus porté au patrimoine par les opérateurs touristiques, les établissements scolaires et universitaires se traduit par une demande croissante des prestations de l'Inspection des monuments. Conformément aux orientations du département de tutelle et en concertation avec tous les opérateurs concernés, cette inspection assure les tâches suivantes :

- (1) Réaliser et superviser la restauration et l'entretien des monuments historiques et sites de la région et assurer la conservation et la gestion des sites dont nous sommes directement responsables [redacted]
- (2) L'inventaire du patrimoine culturel matériel et immatériel et la préparation des études techniques relatives à la restauration des monuments ;
- (3) Le contrôle permanent des travaux de construction de réparation et d'aménagement au sein de la médina de [redacted]
- (4) La participation à l'évaluation des documents d'urbanisme à l'échelle de la région (P.A, SDAU, Plan de sauvegarde...) ;
- (5) La surveillance de l'application des textes juridiques concernant la conservation du patrimoine culturel et sa protection.

8. Si vous pensez à l'avenir, quels seront les plus grands défis que vous allez rencontrer et comment comptez-vous les adresser ?

Le plus grand défis de l'avenir à mon sens est le manque de ressources humaines notamment un personnel qualifié et efficient.

9.3. Examples from Interview Transcripts and Research Notes

a) Example of a full transcript of recorded Interview, Cultural heritage, 5

SD: ... il s'agit de...

AW: Alors on peut, uh...

SD: ... c'est la Division

Donc, c'est une division qui fait partie de la Direction Régionale de la Culture. Uh, c'est une division qui a été créée par un arrêté ministériel. c'est celui là [ZEIGT EIN DOKUMENT MIT EINER NUMMER]. Donc le numéro, c'est 16-1701 en 2016, le 10 juin 2016, qui précise, en fait, les... les attributions et les missions de chaque service et de chaque division. Donc la division de la conservation, elle a, en fait, plusieurs missions concernant la conservation, la protection du patrimoine, la promotion des médinas et aussi la mise-en-valeur du patrimoine culturel immatériel, uhh, l'inventaire aussi, l'actuel..., et la mise-à-jour de la plateforme du patrimoine dans la région, uhh, aussi l'interprétation du patrimoine, donc c'est, uhh en fait, la sensibilisation en vers tout ce qui est patrimoine matériel et immatériel de la région. Uhh, en plus, uhh, en plus de la restauration aussi. Et cette conservation, elle a deux services. Un service d'inspection des monuments historiques au niveau de la région et un service de l'inventaire du patrimoine et sa mise-en-valeur. Donc le service d'inspection des monuments historiques s'occupe surtout de tout ce qui est purement technique. Donc c'est la programmation des projets à envisager importants pour la restauration, la protection du patrimoine dans la région, uhh, c'est, uhh l'étude des budgets aussi nécessaires, le suivi, par exemple, les appels d'offre, les marchés de restauration, donc tout ce qui est en relation avec la préparation des documents nécessaires pour cet, uh, appel d'offre, notamment les CPS, les uh...

AW: Les quoi ?

SD: Le Cahier de Prescription Spéciale. [...] C'est pour le lancement d'un appel d'offres, par exemple pour un marché de restauration, c'est le Cahier de Charges avec lequel entreprise donc va prendre le marché ou va travailler par la suite sur des articles précises, par exemple usage de quel dosage de – je ne dirai n'importe quoi – de mortier ou sable et à la chaux ; donc c'est toutes ces détails techniques et de prescription techniques. Et aussi ce service s'occupe l'étude des autorisations concernant le dépôt de dossiers de demande de construction, de restauration, de réhabilitation de tout bâtiment, monument dans les périmètres des médinas qui sont classés patrimoine national. Et même que ceux qui sont inscrits sur la liste du patrimoine mondial, tel le cas de [REDACTED] c'est une autre ville dans la région et le site de [REDACTED] donc c'est surtout ça. Et les autres, il y en a quelques médinas qui sont classées patrimoine nationale, par exemple il y a une petite ville à côté de [REDACTED] uhhh, en fait ça, c'est une documentation sur la médina [REDACTED] [ÜBERGIBT EINE MAPPE MIT DETAILS] un historique sur la création de la médina, sur uhh, un plan topographique de la qui, donc de la ville. La médina aussi de [REDACTED] qui s'intéresse à classer patrimoine national en 2016. Aussi uhhh la médina [REDACTED], donc pas mal de médinas ont été classées à l'époque du protectorat en fait.

b) Handwritten concurrent notes of Interview, Language policies, 6

• notes plurielles : on est avec des étudiants
notamment pour que : résoudre l'anté-pluriel, donc analyse des verbes
dans ce cas : le sujet appliqué

→ 1^{er} niveau

→ en comp avec patois de CDG
dans l'écriture
dans l'écriture

→ à l'IACTA : beaucoup plus de théâtres dans les futures de théâtre
→ avant l'IACTA : jamais plus de théâtre
maintenant : on a vu à la

contenir matériel + formation et aussi un programme de soutien aux artistes (notamment les artistes)

avant la culture était prioritaire

avant ministère de la culture depuis ce soutien finit à soutenir le théâtre
maintenant, le théâtre artistique n'est pas soutenu

depuis création de l'IACTA on continue à travailler → pour ça

travailler la culture, communication → pour ça

→ la communication de l'IACTA : communication de la région qui se fait
→ maintenant chaque ville → pour ça
→ dans l'écriture

→ la communication de l'IACTA : on a vu le ministère a soutenu
la culture

9.4. Extract from Research Diary

28.11.19	Schaffung eines Museums und eines Medienhauses, Theaters und Restaurierungsarbeiten in alHoceima	<i>Im Nachgang der Empfehlungen der IER sollten 4 Museen gebaut werden: 1 Museum in der Rif-Region, 1 Museum in Casablanca über die Geschichte marokkos, 1 Museum im Ouarzazate und 1 Museum in Dakhla.</i> <i>Der CNDH hatte daraufhin am 15./16.7.2011 ein internationales wissenschaftliches Kolloquium in Hoceima einberufen (https://www.ccme.org.ma/fr/activites/item/9166-patrimoine-culturel-du-rif-quelle-museographie -- > Ablauf und Inhalt siehe Dokumente), bei dem es um die Umsetzung der Empfehlungen des IER ging. Bei diesem Kolloquium, das unter königlicher Schirmherrschaft stand, ließ Mohammed VI eine königliche Botschaft verlesen, in der er ganz klar macht, welche Rolle das Museum und der öffentliche Umgang mit der Geschichte marokkos und der Rif-Region im Speziellen für die Identitätsbildung des Landes hat und die Wiedergutmachung eines kollektiven Vorurteils (<i>préjudice collectif</i>). Aus der Rede werden verschiedene Dinge deutlich:</i> <i>1. der Geist liberaler Reform im Zuge des Verfassungsprozesses</i> <i>2. ein Bemühen um Versöhnung und Wiedergutmachung durch Anerkennung erlittenen Unrechts</i> <i>3. der Wunsch ein Marokko aufzubauen, das aus seiner kulturellen Vielfalt heraus stark ist</i> <i>4. ein fast mahnender Appell bzw eine Erinnerung, dass aller kultureller Stolz der Regionen sich zwar legitimerweise in die fortgeschrittene Dezentralisierungsbestrebungen einfügen kann, aber nie zersetzend oder secessionistisch sein darf sondern im Dienst einer gemeinsamen, vereinten pluralen marokkanischen Identität stehen muss</i> <i>5. diese in Vielfalt vereinte Identität muss dem Erhalt und der Förderung des gemeinsamen (demokratischen) Staatsprojektes dienen</i> <i>Die Ergebnisse der Tagung wurden in einem Buch dann beim Verlag Croisée des Chemins veröffentlicht. Außerdem wurde dabei ein Partnerschaftsabkommen zwischen dem CNDH, dem Conseil de la communauté marocaine à l'étranger (CCME), dem conseil communal d'Al-Hoceima et la région de Taza Taounat Al-Hoceima geschlossen. Im September 2011 wurde dann ein weiteres Treffen durch den CNDH einberufen, bei dem es um die Einbindung der Zivilgesellschaft in den Museumsprozess ging. Das Museum soll das Kulturerbe der Region würdigen und das Unrecht während der Année de Plomb aufarbeiten. Das Projekt gerät dann aber aufgrund angeblicher politischer Streitigkeiten in der Region massiv in Verzug. Auch die EU (https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/europeaid/online-services/index.cfm?ADSSChck=1641470939683&do=publi.detPUB&searchtype=AS&zgeo=35582&debpub=&orderby=tit&orderbyad=Desc&nbPubliList=50&page=4&aoref=132864) beteiligte sich an dem Projekt und ein spanisches Unternehmen war mit der Renovierung beauftragt, zog sich dann aber zurück, als es nicht weiterging sodass das extra für den Zweck renovierte Gebäude 2017 schließlich von Obdachlosen genutzt wurde. Dies hat schließlich massive Konsequenzen, sodass – wie an anderer Stelle hier im Tagebuch gezeigt – selbst der Kulturminister gehen muss und Laaraj eingesetzt wird, der selbst aus der Region kommt. 2019 wurden dann zwei weitere Partnerschaftsabkommen zw. dem Regionalrat und dem Kulturministerium bzw. dem Stadtrat von Hoceima abgeschlossen. Auch das Innenministerium ist an Bord. Aber erst 2020 und 2021 kommt dann wieder wirklich Dynamik in die Sache, als der CNDH neue Treffen anberaumt. Dabei stellt die CNDH Direktorin in Aussicht, man wolle das Museum zum Vorzeigemodell für den Umgang mit dem Kulturerbe und der geschichtlichen Aufarbeitung des Landes machen.</i>

		SM le Roi adresse un message aux participants au colloque international sur le patrimoine culturel du Rif Al Hoceima - "Louange à Dieu. Prière et salut sur le Prophète, Sa famille et Ses compagnons. Mesdames, Messieurs, Il Nous est agréable de vous adresser ce message à l'ouverture de ce colloque international, consacré au thème intitulé: "Le patrimoine culturel du Rif: quelle muséographie?". Cette rencontre dans la ville d'Al-Hoceima, se tient sous Notre Haut Patronage, compte tenu de l'intérêt éminent que Nous attachons à la protection du l'héritage culturel, historique et patrimonial que recèlent la région du Rif et la ville d'Al-Hoceima qui sont si chères à Notre cœur, et dont Nous entourons la vaillante population de toute Notre attention et Notre sollicitude. Nous tenons d'abord à souhaiter la bienvenue aux participantes et aux participants à ce colloque, qui sont, en l'occurrence, d'éminents chercheurs en histoire, en archéologie, en patrimoine et en muséographie, outre les représentants d'institutions nationales et d'instances académiques, ainsi que les acteurs de la société civile. Tous sont concernés par les échanges d'opinions en perspective sur les questions inscrites à l'ordre du jour de cette importance rencontre académique. Ce colloque est organisé par le Conseil national des Droits de l'Homme (CNDH), en partenariat avec le Conseil communal de la ville d'Al-Hoceima, du Conseil de la Région Taza-Al-Hoceima-Taounate, et avec le concours du Conseil de la Communauté Marocaine à l'Etranger, l'Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe, l'Institut national des Sciences de l'Archéologie et du Patrimoine et bien d'autres instances étrangères qualifiées. Il acquiert, de ce fait, une importante dimension des droits de l'Homme, qui constitue le fondement même du rôle d'avant-garde assumé par le CNDH en la matière. En effet, celui-ci a été érigé en institution constitutionnelle dans le cadre du choix démocratique national et du référentiel universel que Nous avons adoptés pour assurer la protection et la promotion des droits de l'Homme dans notre pays. A cet égard, Nous tenons à saluer les efforts inlassables que ne cesse de déployer le Conseil national des Droits de l'Homme, en collaboration avec ses partenaires, en vue de mettre en œuvre les recommandations de l'Instance Equité et Réconciliation, avec leurs multiples ramifications. Citons notamment celles liées à la réparation du préjudice collectif, à l'Histoire et à la sauvegarde de la mémoire, et qui revêtent une importance capitale dans la consolidation du modèle marocain singulier. Modèle dont le leadership est reconnu à l'échelle régionale et internationale en matière de justice transitionnelle, vouée à la réalisation de l'équité et de la réconciliation. Voilà pourquoi Nous réaffirmons la nécessité d'attacher l'intérêt qu'il faut à la sauvegarde de la mémoire collective des Marocains. Il s'agit, en effet, d'une étape essentielle dans le processus de parachèvement de la société démocratique, dont Nous œuvrons à consolider les assises et à préserver les acquis. Parallèlement, il importe d'aider les Marocains à se réconcilier davantage avec leur histoire et à transcender les travers du passé, de sorte qu'ils puissent préserver leur présent et continuer à s'investir résolument dans le chantier de réforme démocratique et de développement global que Nous avons mise en

9.5. Framework of Content Markers

Category	Description of content markers (markers referring to...)	Example
Appropriation of civil society	National identity	Le Conseil ne ménagera donc aucun effort qui servirait à valoriser la richesse culturelle commune et à mettre en exergue les particularités locales historiques qui forgent l' identité nationale et qui renforcent la cohésion de la société (Bouayach 2022).
	the historical bond between the king and his people	La sacralité de nos constantes qui font l'objet d'une unanimité nationale, à savoir l'Islam en tant que religion de l'Etat garant de la liberté du culte, ainsi que la commanderie des croyants, le régime monarchique, l'unité nationale, l'intégrité territoriale et le choix démocratique, nous apporte un gage et un socle solides pour bâtir un compromis historique ayant la force d'un nouveau pacte entre le Trône et le peuple (Mohammed VI 2011a).
	democratisation	La création du musée d'Al Hoceima s'inscrit dans le sillage des exigences constitutionnelles évoquées dans le message que SM le Roi Mohammed VI a adressé aux participants au colloque international sur le patrimoine culturel du Rif en 2011, dans lequel le Souverain a souligné la nécessité de sauvegarder la mémoire collective des Marocains, qui constitue „une étape essentielle dans le processus de parachèvement de la société démocratique”(Chamaly 2020b).
	the spreading of Moroccan values	Le Souverain avait donné ses Hautes instructions aux deux ministères pour élaborer cet ouvrage en vue d'en faire un livre de référence en matière de diffusion des valeurs nationales authentiques inspirées des préceptes de la religion islamique (MAP 2005).
	the contribution of diversity to national unity	Nous tenons, avec autant de détermination, à renforcer l'identité marocaine , en veillant à la réhabilitation de ses multiples affluents, dans lesquels notre unité nationale puise sa force et sa richesse“ (Mohammed VI 2009).
	the constants of the nation	„Mais si long et ardu que puisse être le chemin à parcourir, nous n'en serons que plus déterminés à maintenir le cap et à faire avancer le pays sur la voie du progrès et de la prospérité. Notre atout majeur, pour y parvenir, réside dans des constantes nationales fondamentales que Nous ne cessons, du reste, de rénover. Il s'agit, au premier chef, de l'unité de l'Islam sunnite malékite, dont Nous assumons, en Notre qualité d'Amir Al-Mouminine, la charge de moderniser l'édifice institutionnel et l'espace culturel. Nous entendons, effectivement, en prémunir le caractère modéré et tolérant contre les risques d'extrémisme et d'ostracisme , tout en confortant la coexistence entre notre foi tolérante et les autres religions et cultures. » (Mohammed VI 2009).
	participation and inclusion of civil society	Le Conseil national des droits de l'Homme (CNDH) organise, vendredi à Nador, une rencontre autour du thème „ Musée du Rif : rôle de la société civile “, et ce dans le cadre de la mise en œuvre des recommandations de l'Instance Equité et Réconciliation (IER) en matière d'archives, d'Histoire et de mémoire (MAP 2011c).
	national pride/patriotism	Le Maroc est juif, chrétien, musulman, amazigh, arabe et africain. On doit en faire un motif de fierté et non en avoir honte (Lamlili 2017a).
	loyalty/allegiance to the king	En rencontrant les forces vives de cette région qui Nous est si chère, Nous Nous faisons un plaisir de dire à ses habitants à quel point Nous avons été touché par la chaleur de l'accueil et la loyauté de l'allégeance qu'ils Nous ont témoignées (Mohammed VI 2013c).

Managing contestation	National security	Notre but ultime est de veiller à ce que nos honorables oulémas apportent une contribution plus efficiente au processus de réforme et de modernisation que Nous conduisons dans tous les domaines. Nous tenons à ce qu'ils s'attachent, en particulier, à apporter leur concours au renforcement de la sécurité spirituelle de la nation, en veillant à la préservation de sa doctrine religieuse qui se réclame d'un islam sunnite tolérant (Mohammed VI 2008).
	National stability	Enfin, des séances ont été consacrées, au cours de cette étape, à la présentation d'enregistrements audio-visuels de témoignages de familles des victimes du terrorisme, l'objectif étant de sensibiliser les détenus condamnés dans ce cadre à l'ampleur des effets des préjudices provoqués par l'extrémisme violent et leur effet sur la stabilité et la sécurité de la société (Association nationale des Auditeurs jeunes de l'Institut des Hautes Etudes de Défense nationale 2018).
	Social cohesion	Cette réunion, selon M. El Otmani, constitue l'aboutissement d'un débat national fructueux et constructif sur la diversité culturelle et linguistique de la société marocaine, en parfaite harmonie avec la forte volonté royale, exprimée dans les deux discours royaux de la fête du Trône et d'Ajdir en 2001, visant à consolider la cohésion sociétale et à préserver l'identité marocaine plurielle (MAP 2021b).
	reconciliation	Concernant les principales dimensions du programme, M. Tamek a évoqué notamment „ la réconciliation avec soi-même, avec la société, avec le texte religieux et avec les systèmes et normes régissant la société dans sa relation avec l'individu et avec les institutions“, expliquant que le programme consacre le principe fondateur de l'expérience de l'Instance Équité et Réconciliation, dans la mesure où le concept de Moussalaha est une initiative prise par les détenus dont les faits, les idées ou les actes terroristes se sont révélés préjudiciables pour la société (MAP 2022d).
	the fight against terrorism/ „obscurantism” or extremist views	Telle est la voie à suivre pour consolider l'esprit de citoyenneté positive et pour que la démocratie, le patriotisme et la dissémination de la culture des droits et devoirs de l'Homme , s'érigent comme le meilleur rempart pour prémunir notre société contre les tendances extrémistes et terroristes , que Nous sommes déterminé, du reste, à combattre avec la ferme volonté de ceux qui veillent à la sécurité et à la stabilité, dans le cadre de la primauté de la loi (Mohammed VI 2004b).
	the immunisation of the society	Les établissements d'enseignement traditionnel participent à l'immunisation de la société marocaine et la préservation de ses constantes religieuses et de son identité historique et civilisationnelle, et ce à travers la mise en place d'un système d'enseignement caractérisé par la modération, la tolérance et le respect de l'autre (Royaume du Maroc - Cour des comptes 2022, p. 75).
	enhanced efficiency of non-participant and non-democratic procedures	C'est simple, on crée des sociétés de développement local car nous avons failli dans notre rôle en tant qu'élus . Nous n'avons pas fait correctement notre travail, comme nous l'a rappelé le roi, et nous sommes responsables de cet échec » (Mousjid & Pauline 2016).
	Autocracy, tyranny, dictatorship, a strong man	Il y a eu une sorte de recherche dans le passé de valeurs pour vivre le présent. On sortait d'une longue période d'évidences, une époque autoritaire. Les Marocains étaient à la recherche de valeurs pour vivre ensemble. Il y avait cette idée qu'en étudiant notre passé, on trouverait peut-être des éléments pour arriver à faire du Maroc un pays pour tous (Hamdani 2022a).

	Repression and coercion	Un autre religieux serait dans le viseur du département d’Ahmed Toufiq . Il s’agirait de Redouan Benchekroun. Il aurait été déchargé de ses fonctions à la tête du Conseil des oulémas d’Ain Choq à Casablanca, en raison de ses positions hostiles vis à vis du festival Mawazine (Jaabouk 2015).
	Red lines	« Est puni d’un emprisonnement de six mois à deux ans et d’une amende de 20.000 à 200.000 dirhams ou de l’une de ces deux peines seulement quiconque porte atteinte à la religion islamique, au régime monarchique ou incite à porter atteinte à l’intégrité territoriale du Royaume» (Royaume du Maroc 2016) .
Economic reform	the valorisation of Moroccan culture	En revanche, l’arrière-pays recèle un potentiel archéologique et paléontologique dont la valorisation permettrait d’attirer un tourisme de niche (Conseil Economique, Social et Environnemental - La Commission ad’hoc chargée d’élaborer un nouveau modèle de développement pour les provinces du Sud 2013, p. 66).
	the economic development of a region	Sa Majesté le Roi Mohammed VI a fait de la culture et des arts un levier de développement , leur attribuant ainsi la place qu’ils méritent (Nait Youssef 2016).
	the attractivity of a site or region for tourism	Selon M. Akkouch, pour renforcer l’attractivité de ce monument et accueillir davantage de touristes marocains et étrangers, il est nécessaire de s’atteler à la réhabilitation de l’espace intérieur de la kasbah, la création d’une aire de repos à proximité et à l’aménagement de la route menant vers ce site historique, et ce à même de renforcer sa mise en valeur et développer le produit touristique de la région (Moumeni 2020b).
	the creation and improvement of tourist infrastructure	Elle a, à cet effet, précisé qu’aujourd’hui, les destinations culturelles, à forte charge patrimoniale représentent 45% des voyages internationaux mondiaux, notant que pour préserver ce patrimoine, le ministère s’est engagé dans différents programmes de réhabilitation des médinas à travers le Royaume, dont celles de Rabat et de Salé, outre la valorisation des circuits touristiques, des musées et des centres d’interprétation (La Relève 2020).
	financial effectiveness	Le renouveau de l’action culturelle nécessite la mise en place de mécanismes de financement pour la valorisation de la culture et la création d’un Conseil interrégional pour la promotion de la culture dont les missions seraient de promouvoir et préserver le patrimoine culturel dans sa diversité (Conseil Economique, Social et Environnemental - La Commission ad’hoc chargée d’élaborer un nouveau modèle de développement pour les provinces du Sud 2013, p. 79).
	Creation of job opportunities/stable revenue	« Ce patrimoine est une source de création de richesse et d’emplois et constitue un facteur d’attractivité pour le territoire national » (Ministère de la Culture 2013 (version of 2014), p. 25).
	improvement of people’s living conditions	Avec l’ambition d’ améliorer les conditions et le niveau de vie de tous ses citoyens et celle de figurer parmi les pays émergents sur la scène internationale, le Maroc est résolument engagé dans la construction d’un projet de société, moderne, performante et respectueuse de ses valeurs, une Nation prospère où il fait bon vivre , qui offre la perspective d’un avenir meilleur à toute sa jeunesse, qui se préoccupe quotidiennement de réduire les inégalités et les exclusions, qui s’impose de préserver ses ressources naturelles, ses valeurs culturelles et son patrimoine civilisationnel (Royaume du Maroc 2010, p. 5).
Controlling media and communication technology	the creation and use of national media	On se souvient que l’an passé, la „ radio coranique Mohammed VI „ , avait été lancée pendant le mois de Ramadhan. Son objectif est de „refléter les orientations du Maroc dans le domaine religieux“ et porter „ un message de tolérance et d’ouverture inspiré du Coran et de la Sunna. La radio consacre plus de 80%de son temps à la récitation du Coran, aux sciences coraniques, à la prédication et aux prières (Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques 2004).

	Programme of national broadcasters	„ Le programme des causeries de la Radio Mohammed VI du Saint Coran, sur Al-Hadith Ash-Sharif ambitionne de mettre en valeur l'unité culturelle de la Nation marocaine et de parer contre les tentatives de falsification de la Tradition et des paroles de Sidna Mohammad (Paix et Salut sur lui) (Maroc Diplomatique 2018c).
	media consumption quotas and consumers' preferences	La Radio Mohammed VI du Saint Coran a vu sa popularité croître de manière importante ces dernières années. En effet, selon les dernières données communiquées par le Groupement des Annonceurs, cette radio détient la plus importante part d'auditeurs au sein de la population des 15 - 54 ans (14,87%). Elle est cependant seconde, derrière la radio musicale et d'infotainment Hit Radio (12,81%) - chez les 18 - 34 ans (12,64%) (Le Desk & Reporters Without Borders 2017e).
	Instrumentalisation of media	«Nous travaillerons aux côtés des journalistes étrangers accrédités au Maroc et les journalistes internationaux pour promouvoir l'image de notre pays à l'international et défendre notre première cause nationale , en adoptant une politique de communication qui ne se limite pas à la mobilisation des médias nationaux mais s'ouvre aussi sur les médias étrangers», a en outre affirmé le ministre » (Quid 2021a).
	specification books (cahiers de charge) of national broadcasters	„Peu de gens le savent, mais Mohammed VI est pour une expression artistique libre, et aucun gouvernement ne pourra changer cela. Il sera toujours là pour gérer les dérapages, comme il l'a fait lors de la polémique des cahiers des charges des chaînes nationales ”, analyse Nouredine Ayouch (TelQuel 2013b).
	the communicative or educative role of museums, festivals or heritage sites	Nous menons de front des projets citoyens et éducatifs pour faire des musées des lieux de découverte et de partage. Nous allons à nouveau signer un partenariat avec le ministère de l'Éducation nationale afin de mettre en place des actions conjointes pour les élèves, d'organiser régulièrement des visites scolaires qui soient à la fois ludiques et pédagogiques et d'offrir la gratuité aux jeunes et à l'ensemble du corps enseignant (TelQuel 2021b).
International engagement	Morocco's position in the world or within the concert of nations	L'essence même de ce projet de complexe muséal est de rendre ses lettres de noblesse à une ville longtemps considérée comme une capitale administrative et de montrer aux Marocains et au reste du monde que Rabat est une ville ouverte et cosmopolite (TelQuel 2021b).
	Moroccan soft power	«Sa Majesté le Roi Mohammed VI [...] a par ailleurs exhorté dans plusieurs de ses discours tous les acteurs du monde de la diplomatie à intégrer les nouvelles règles du soft power, donnant ainsi lieu à une vraie diplomatie culturelle , une diplomatie dotée d'une stratégie globale d'influence claire et cohérente que le Royaume consolide au fil des ans», a-t-il ajouté (Nait Youssef 2016)
	Morocco's leadership role regarding universal values and cooperation	Sa Majesté a toujours prôné une approche multidimensionnelle à déployer à l'échelle mondiale. C'est ce qui justifie notre leadership au Forum international de la lutte contre le terrorisme (F. Iraqi 2019e).
	international organisations	« Ce recensement va s'appuyer sur les formes sur des formules juridiques, en cours d'élaboration, pour mettre en place à terme un label marocain qui sera reconnu à l'international, en particulier par l'UNESCO qui certifie l'origine historique ces monuments physique , mais aussi des savoirs, savoir-faire et pratiques d'un pays (El Ouardighi 2021c).
	foreign countries' recognition of Morocco's claims	But Morocco goes beyond this old zone of influence [...] and today even among countries in the East [of Africa], some of which are hostile to the question of the Sahara as being part of Morocco, even among these countries Morocco tries to broaden its support base and tries to convince them to support its primary national cause. All this is accomplished through that beautiful culture,

Overarching codes	on the Moroccan/Western Sahara	an Islam of openness, Maliki Islam that revolves around public interest and engenders flexibility and not the rigidity characteristic to other Muslim streams. (Interview, Jewish heritage, 5)
	Morocco as a bridge builder between civilisations	„Asilah has contributed to improving Morocco’s image in the international scene besides becoming a gateway to building bridges between peoples and civilisations and a platform of cultural dialogue,” Benaissa said (Guerraoui 2018).
	Morocco as an African country	On constate aujourd’hui dans le monde des incompréhensions qui entraînent des violences et des guerres. Je crois qu’il est important qu’un pays comme le Maroc envoie des messages aussi forts. Cette exposition sur les trésors de l’Islam en Afrique présente un Islam de tolérance qui s’est développé dans le continent. C’est important que de tels messages soient transmis aussi. L’Afrique n’est pas en reste en matière de conflits. Il faut donc envoyer des messages d’amour et de compréhension (Lahlali 2019).
	Morocco’s radiance	La ville d’Oujda, a-t-il dit, sera une année durant une plate-forme pour le rayonnement de la culture arabe et un espace d’interaction fructueuse entre les frères dans le cadre du développement de l’action arabe commune (MAP 2018c).
	the gratitude towards the king	Nous disposons aujourd’hui grâce à Sa Majesté le Roi Mohammed VI d’une très grande confiance et d’une très belle image du pays à l’étranger (Nait Youssef 2016).
	the king’s enlightened leadership/vision	Il est vrai que l’une des priorités du Royaume sous la conduite éclairée du roi Mohammed VI, Commandeur des croyants , est de favoriser l’émergence de l’islam de juste milieu tel que pratiqué depuis la dynastie des Idrissides au VIII ^e siècle, un islam de l’amour, du respect de l’autre, du partage et d’humanisme (Dubois & Diawara 2020).
	the king’s spiritual authority as <i>amir al mouminine</i>	Sa Majesté le Roi Mohammed VI, <i>Amir al mouminine</i> , veille à la préservation de la religion de la Oumma en adoptant une approche qui permet un encadrement religieux répondant aux besoins des fidèles, a affirmé M. Ahmed Toufiq, ministre des Habous et des Affaires islamiques (MAP 2019c).
	the king’s high orientation	L’exposition conforte la position royale contre l’extrémisme et ses méfaits. Elle s’inscrit également dans la droite ligne des Hautes orientations de Sa Majesté visant à préserver le patrimoine humain tout en le considérant comme une sauvegarde de la paix (Agence pour l’Aménagement de la Vallée du Bouregreg 2018).

9.6. Culture-Related Recommendations of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER)

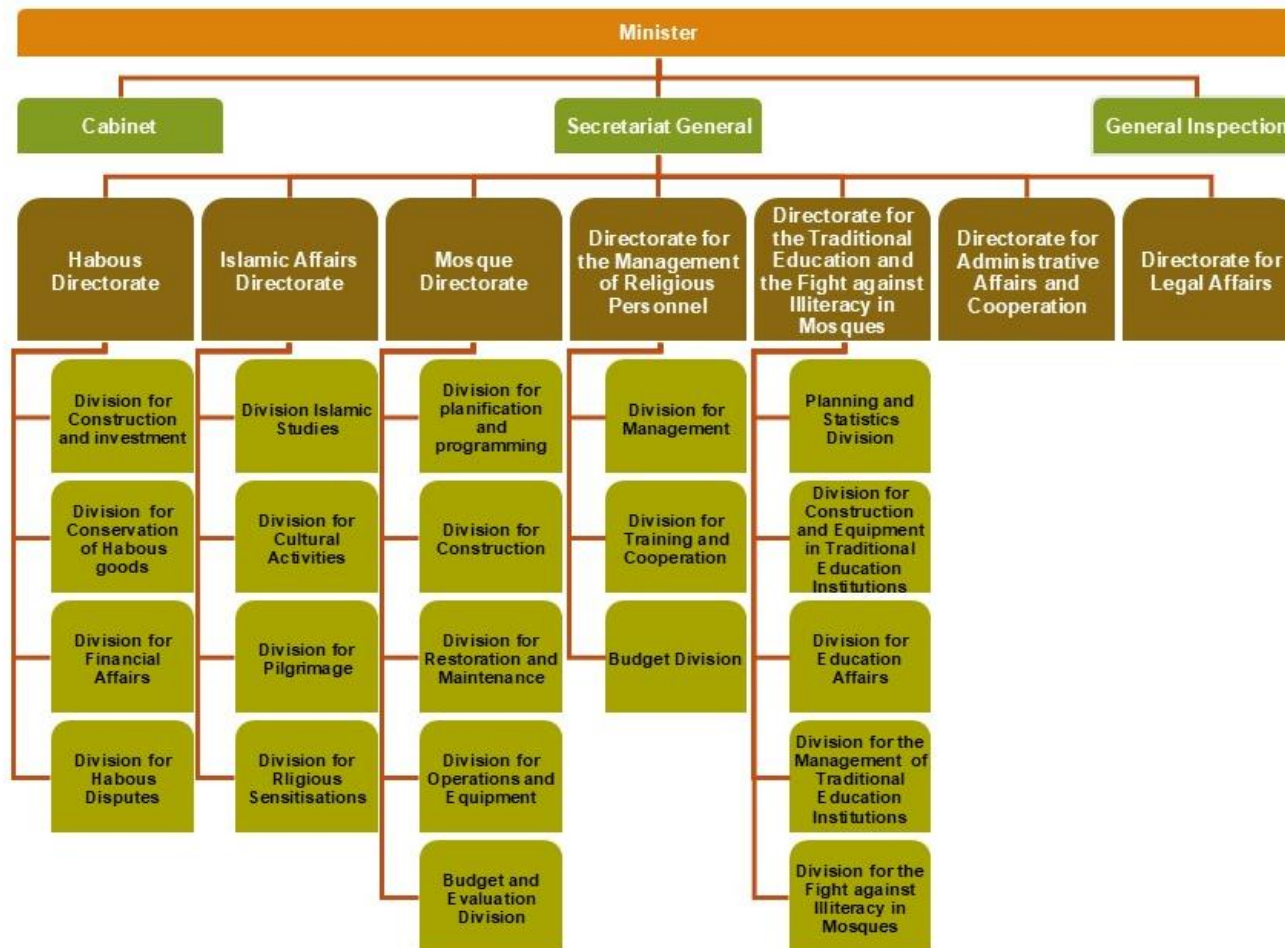
Location of the project	Project	Information about the project	Remarks
General recommendations	Establishment of the Moroccan Centre for Modern History	Establishment of the Moroccan Centre for Modern History, multidisciplinary, with the necessary human and financial resources, playing the role of formulating educational programmes and developing academic research in the fields in which it is working. It will also gather testimonies from most actors in society in order to provide an archive that may help in the writing of modern history	Institutions sponsoring the project: Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, Nanterre, France; International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands; La Casa Arabe, Madrid, Spain; There is a budget devoted to similar projects at the EU Commission in Rabat of about 4 million Euros.
	Establishment of the National History Museum	The establishment of the National History Museum, to contribute to the creation of a collective memory on the basis of numerous and varied readings of the modern history of Morocco in particular and Moroccan history in general.	
	Organizing the archive within a legal framework	Creating interest in those involved concerning the necessity of organizing the archive; Organizing the archive within a clear and transparent legal framework that ensures the maintenance, preservation, development and utilization of the archive, and organizing access to it by citizens and institutions.	The two projects enjoy the support of most of the institutions involved in the subject, e.g.: The National Library of the Kingdom; the National Centre for Documentation and Information; the Information Sciences School (ESI); the Moroccan Association for Historical Research; the Moroccan Association for Media Workers.
	Creating a national institute to oversee the archive	The Supreme Commission for the Archive will take responsibility for preserving and maintaining the archive in Morocco.	
Figuig region	Creation of projects for the women of the region	Definition of project: The project includes programmes to combat illiteracy, the creation of sociocultural and economic projects for women, subsidizing the scholarization of girls, creating centres to advise and train women in legal and health matters. Goals of project: to grant reparations for injuries that women suffered as a result of the violations either directly or indirectly; to help in the reinsertion of women of the region into economic, social and cultural life by building up their abilities and improving their skills.	Institutions sponsoring the project: the American Bar Association.

Kelaât M'gouna	Conversion of the Kelaât M'gouna Centre into a memorial and sociocultural centre.		Institutions sponsoring the project: the Immigration Association for Development and Democracy in France, which attended the proceedings of the National Forum on Reparation for Injuries.
Zagora: Tagounite-Agdez	Converting the former prison into a public space for cultural, associational and touristic activities, as well as activities with a social and economic dimension	Definition of project: The proposal was that the centre should include a craft industry complex and a professional training complex for women and young people. Shops would be built for craft industry. Those taking on the running of the shops would be trained in the techniques of management, administration and marketing of products. A centre would also be built for vocational training next to the craft industry complex, including training in traditional handicrafts. It would include levels of vocational training and a level of specialization, and in addition a boarding section would be built to house those coming from distant villages or those in need locally.	Institutions sponsoring the project: the Ellen Claire Institute, the Belgian Cooperative Agency in Wallonia
Agdez	Converting the centre into a museum and cultural and social centre		
The Derb Moulay Cherif centre in the Mohammedi district of Casablanca	Converting the centre into a museum and a socio-cultural centre.		The necessity of emptying the centre and the building of the present inhabitants in consultation with them and finding appropriate accommodation for them.
	Renovation and repair of the Mohammedi District youth centre.	The Mohammedi District youth centre is situated 1,200 metres from the prison, and is one of the biggest youth clubs in Morocco. In the past it used to contain important facilities for the young people of the district, the most important of which was the library.	
	Converting the Saâda Cinema into a place of memory; and for disseminating culture in the Mohammedi district.		
Rif region	Establishment of the Abdul Karim Khattabi Research Centre.	Location of project: the former pasha's residence in Al Hoceima which will be donated by the town council for this purpose.	Institutions sponsoring the project: Municipality of Al Hoceima, the Ministry of Culture, the regional government of Andalusia, Spain.
	To consider the house	Definition of project: to renovate the house of Abdul Karim Khattabi and use it as a history centre to publicize the person of Abdul Karim and as a	

	of Abdul Karim Khattabi as a historic monument.	socio-cultural centre.	
	Creation of projects for the women of the region.	Definition of project: The project includes programmes to combat illiteracy, to achieve socio-cultural and economic projects for women, subsidizing the scholarization of girls, creating centres to advise and train women in legal and health matters. Goals of project: to grant reparations for injuries that women suffered as a result of the violations either directly or indirectly; to help in the reinsertion of women of the region into economic, social and cultural life by building up their abilities and improving skills. Location of project: Sidi Bouefif the old mosque; possible places for burial: near the airport, near the broadcasting station, Dar Selloum, Ait boukhalef, Tribe of Hadj Sellam Amziane, Beni Hdifa, Mausoleum of Sidi Bouchaib.	Institutions sponsoring the project: the American Bar Association.
	Enlarging and renovating the mausoleum of Cherif Mohamed Ameziane in the Municipality of Zghenghen.	Definition of project: restoring the mausoleum of the first person to resist colonialism in the region (1910-1912). Location of project: the Nador region.	
	Organizing a national travelling exhibition about Abdul Karim Khattabi.		
The Courbiss Centre, Casablanca	Converting the centre into a sports, cultural and social complex.	Definition of project: to establish a sports, cultural and social complex for the benefit of the young people and children of the region, in such a way as to create job opportunities.	Institutions sponsoring the project: UCPA, France.
Ksar Tazmamart	Enabling the inhabitants to use the pastures near the former detention centre.		
Tan-Tan	Establishing a sociocultural centre for the benefit of the young people of the region.		
	Creation of projects for the women of the region.	Definition of project: The project includes programmes to combat illiteracy, the creation of socio-cultural and economic projects for women, subsidizing the scholarization of girls, creating centres to advise and train women in legal and health matters. Goals of project: to grant reparations for injuries that women suffered as a result of the violations either directly or indirectly; to help in the reinsertion of women of the region	Institutions sponsoring the project: the American Bar Association.

		into economic, social and cultural life by honing their abilities and skills.	
Khenifra	Creation of projects for the women of the region.	Definition of project: The project includes programmes to combat illiteracy, the creation of socio-cultural and economic projects for women, subsidizing the scholarization of girls, creating centres to advise and train women in legal and health matters. Goals of project: to grant reparations for injuries that women suffered as a result of the violations either directly or indirectly; to help in the reinsertion of women of the region into economic, social and cultural life by honing their abilities and skills.	Institutions sponsoring the project: the American Bar Association.
Dar Bricha	Converting the centre into a memorial and cultural centre		
Source: (Kingdom of Morocco -Equity and Reconciliation Commission 2009a, pp. 87–102)			

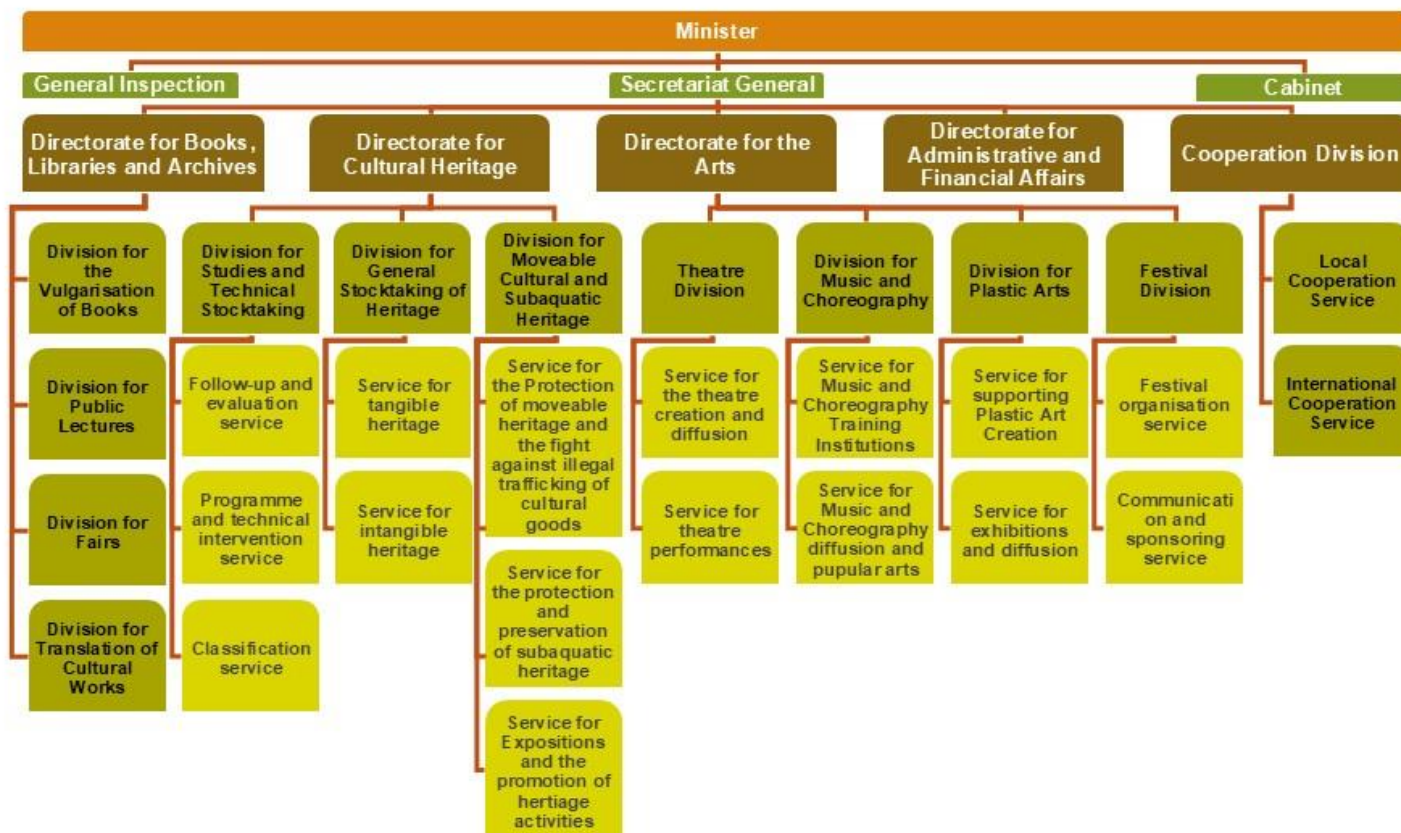
9.7. Structure of the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs



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¹⁰⁸⁶ Adapted by the author and Laura Wegner from Ministère des Habous et des Affaires islamiques (2016a).

9.8. Structure of the Ministry of Culture



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¹⁰⁸⁷ Adapted by the author and Laura Wegner from Ministère de la Jeunesse, de la Culture et de la Communication (2022).

9.9. Memorials Created by the High Commissariat For Former Resistance Fighters and Former Members of the Liberation Army

Month and year of retrieved data	Number of liberation memorials
December 2007	Creation of Morocco's first memorial under the new programme in Assa Zag ¹⁰⁸⁸
August 2010	26 ¹⁰⁸⁹
November 2013	44 ¹⁰⁹⁰
October 2014	52 ¹⁰⁹¹
December 2016/January 2017	69 ¹⁰⁹²
December 2017/January 2018	76 ¹⁰⁹³
November 2018	86 ¹⁰⁹⁴
July 2019	88-90 ¹⁰⁹⁵
December 2019	91 ¹⁰⁹⁶

¹⁰⁸⁸ le Matin (2019d).

¹⁰⁸⁹ MAP (2010b).

¹⁰⁹⁰ le Matin (2013b).

¹⁰⁹¹ Communes Du Maroc (2014); le Matin (2014).

¹⁰⁹² Quid (2017).

¹⁰⁹³ Aujourd'hui le Maroc (2018); Maroc Diplomatique (2018a).

¹⁰⁹⁴ le Matin (2018c).

¹⁰⁹⁵ le Matin (2019d); MAP (2019b).

¹⁰⁹⁶ Hespress (2019c).

February 2020	91
December 2022	103 ¹⁰⁹⁷
January 2023	103 ¹⁰⁹⁸
February and July 2023	104 ¹⁰⁹⁹

Inauguration	Location	Details (if retrievable)	Costs in Dirhams
2007	Assa Zag ¹¹⁰⁰		
2010	Oued Zem (Oriental region) ¹¹⁰¹		
2013-2015	Sidi Bennour ¹¹⁰²	620 m2, museum, library, reading room, audio-visual room, exposition room	1 mio
October 2014	Ait Ourir ¹¹⁰³	265m2 with museum, conference room, teaching room, library, show room	1,1 mio
January 2015	Fès ¹¹⁰⁴	1000 m2 and 532 m2 covered with a museum, library and reading area, communication space, multimedia room, offices, a reception room, functional accomodation	2 mio
January 2015	Fkih Ben Saleh ¹¹⁰⁵	Museum, gallery, library, reading area, conference room	2,4 mio
August 2016	Salé ¹¹⁰⁶		
2016	Benguerir ¹¹⁰⁷	Museum, library	1,5 mio
November 2017	Mrirt ¹¹⁰⁸	Museum and library	

¹⁰⁹⁷ La Relève (2023); MAP (2022g).

¹⁰⁹⁸ 2M (2023).

¹⁰⁹⁹ Ben Amar (2023).

¹¹⁰⁰ le Matin (2019d).

¹¹⁰¹ MAP (2010b).

¹¹⁰² Belcadi (2015); le Matin (2013b).

¹¹⁰³ Communes Du Maroc (2014); le Matin (2014).

¹¹⁰⁴ MAP (2015a).

¹¹⁰⁵ MAP (2015b).

¹¹⁰⁶ MAP Express (2016b).

¹¹⁰⁷ MAP Express (2016a).

¹¹⁰⁸ La Vie éco (2017).

2017	Rabat ¹¹⁰⁹	Centre for historical documents on resistance and liberation, especially on the Rif region (ca. 2 mio documents by 2017)	
January 2018	Azrou (Ifrane province) ¹¹¹⁰	Museum, library, reading room, conference room, exposition room, an office	
August 2018	Bir Gandouz (Aousserd province) ¹¹¹¹	625 m2, museum, exposition room, teaching room, offices, meeting rooms, rooms for cultural and pedagogic activities	2,77 mio
2018	Sidi Slimane ¹¹¹²	Exposition room, library, reading room, multimedia area	3 mio
2018	Essaouira ¹¹¹³	Museum, exposition room, Moroccan living room, multimedia room, library, internet room, reading room, teaching room, meeting room, research room, archive room, offices, audiovisual room	
January 2019	Marrakesh ¹¹¹⁴	360 m2, Museum, multimedia room, conference room, cultural activity room, library, reading room, research office, audio-visual space	
July 2019	Driwach		
July 2019	Al Hoceima ¹¹¹⁵	510 m2, museum, exposition room, reading room, library, multi-use room, multimedia room, teaching and training centre	2,9 mio
July 2019	Ben M'Sick arrondissement in Casablanca ¹¹¹⁶	550 m2 (of which of 245 m2 covered), museum, multimedia room, multi-use room, research and training workshop, exposition area, library, offices	5,6 mio
December 2019	Jorf (province of Errachidia) ¹¹¹⁷	600m2, multimedia room, library, teaching area, exposition room	1,5 mio
2020		No retrievable data	
2021	Aghbalou N'Kardous (Erachidia province) ¹¹¹⁸		
2022	Ain Beni Mathar (Jerada province) ¹¹¹⁹	Museum, library, multimedia room,	800.000
January 2023	El Ksiba	400 m2, museum, multimedia area, library, reading room	1,44 mio

¹¹⁰⁹ MAP Info (2017).

¹¹¹⁰ Maroc Diplomatique (2018a).

¹¹¹¹ le Matin (2018b); MAP Express (2018).

¹¹¹² le Matin (2018c).

¹¹¹³ Conseil Provincial du Tourisme d'Essaouira (2022).

¹¹¹⁴ Aujourd'hui le Maroc (2016); Emrhl Marrakech (2018); ("Espace De La Mémoire Historique De La Résistance Et De La Libération - Marrakech"); LesEco.ma (2019a).

¹¹¹⁵ MAP (2019b).

¹¹¹⁶ le Matin (2019d).

¹¹¹⁷ Hespress (2019c).

¹¹¹⁸ Yabiladi and MAP (2021b).

¹¹¹⁹ MAP (2022g).

	(Béni Mellal province)		
January 2023	Zaouiat Cheikh (Béni Mellal province) ¹¹²⁰	400m2, museum, multimedia area, library, reading room	1,67 mio
January 2023	Demnate (Azilal province) ¹¹²¹	500 m2, museum, multimedia area	1,99 mio
February 2023	Barkine (Guercif province) ¹¹²²	500 m2, of which 237 m2 are covered, museum, multimedia room, reading room, conference room, teaching room	800.000
Other locations (no retrievable additional data):	Targuist, el Jadida ¹¹²³ , Tangier ¹¹²⁴ , El Hajeb and Meknès, ¹¹²⁵ Laâyoune, Smara, Dakhla, Sidi Ifni, Ouarzazate, Taza, Safi, Taounate, Khouribga, Bouarfa, Beni Mellal, Tetouan, ¹¹²⁶ 12 in the Béni Mellal-Khénifra region (as of 2023), 12 planned for the Drâa-Tafilalet region (as of 2019) ¹¹²⁷ , Oued Zem and Oujda (announced in 2010 for a global budget of over 5 mio Dirhams) ¹¹²⁸ , Tazarine, Tata, Larache, M'Hamid El Ghizlane, Chichaoua, Aousserd, Sidi Kacem, Figuig, Talsinnt, Guelmim, Rissani, Ouazzane, Témara, Berrechid ¹¹²⁹		

¹¹²⁰ 2M (2023).

¹¹²¹ La Relève (2023).

¹¹²² MAP Express (2023).

¹¹²³ Infos Tourisme d'El Jadida (2018).

¹¹²⁴ MAP (2023d).

¹¹²⁵ Aujourd'hui le Maroc (2018).

¹¹²⁶ MAP (2015a).

¹¹²⁷ Hespress (2019c).

¹¹²⁸ MAP (2010b).

¹¹²⁹ See Royaume du Maroc (2019, p. 28).

9.10. Morocco in numbers

	Territory (in km ² , without Western Sahara/with Western Sahara)	Inhabitants (in million people)	Share of urban population	Life expectancy (in years)	Share of people aged younger than 25	GDP per capita (in USD)	Human Development Index (country rank / Index score)	GINI Index	Unemployment rate	Literacy rate (of people aged 15 and above)	Years of Schooling (expected / mean)	V-Dem (regime type/country rank)	Freedom House (status/score on 100 possible points)	Bertelsmann Transformation Index (status / index rank)	Reporters without borders (score / country rank)	Corruption Perceptions Index (score / country rank)	Democracy perception Index (Perceived democratic deficit)	SIPRI (military spending in billion USD/rank of major arms importers)
Score	446.550 / 716.550	37,42	64,1%	76,9	16,3%	3.672,1	120 / 0,698	39,5 %	13,3%	77%	14,6/6,1	Closed Autocracy / 108 of 179	Partly free / 37	Hard-line autocracy / 87 of 137	45,97 / 129 of 180	38 / 97 of 180	40	5,2 / 29
Source	CIA Fact sheet 2021 and 2024	Haut Commissariat du Plan (August 2024)	CIA Fact sheet 2021	Haut Commissariat du Plan (2022)	Haut Commissariat du Plan (2022)	World Bank (2023)	Human Development Report 2023/2024	World Bank (2013)	Haut Commissariat du Plan (August 2024)	World Bank (2022)	Human Development Report 2023/2024	V-Dem Democracy Report 2024	Freedom in the World 2024	BTI 2024 Country Report	Reporters without borders 2024	Corruption Perceptions Index 2023	Democracy Perception Index 2024	SIPRI, Trends in World Military Expenditure 2023; Trends in International Arms Transfer 2023