Distant Proximity

A comparative analysis of migrant netizen engagement before and during the Arab Spring

Johanne Kübler

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to
obtaining the degree of Doctor of Political and Social Sciences
of the European University Institute

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European University Institute
Department of Political and Social Sciences

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I Johanne Kübler certify that I am the author of the work "Distant Proximity: A comparative analysis of migrant netizen engagement before and during the Arab Spring" I have presented for examination for the Ph.D. at the European University Institute. I also certify that this is solely my own original work, other than where I have clearly indicated, in this declaration and in the thesis, that it is the work of others.

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ABSTRACT

The spread of the internet and migration are key dimensions associated with globalization and range among the most salient challenges of our times. Looking at the intersection of these two phenomena, this dissertation explores how the internet enables citizens of non-democracies living abroad to partake in the political discourse and online campaigns in their home countries. How does the fact of living in non-authoritarian countries affect the migrant's position inside their online community? Using concepts from the contentious politics literature, I examine why migrant netizens adopt different roles in online campaigns in the years leading to and during the Arab uprisings at the examples of Tunisia and Morocco. I draw upon multiple empirical strategies including an analysis of web crawls of the Tunisian and Moroccan blogospheres, in-depth interviews with a number of key actors and frame analysis. I find that migrants were among the pioneers of political blogging, are well-integrated in their respective blogosphere and often occupy central positions. Political opportunity structures matter, thus the relative absence of repression allows migrants to act as radical mobilizers in highly repressive regimes like Tunisia. In contrast to that, migrant netizens in slightly more liberal settings like Morocco are less of a driving force than an equal partner in online discussions and campaigns, even if they might provide additional resources and establish contacts with international actors. Finally, the frame analysis reveals that radical migrant bloggers are likely to suffer from a lack of credibility due to their relative immunity to repression, unless they adapt their frames to the concerns of the wider blogger community, thereby enabling the creation of a broad coalition.

The Web does not just connect machines, it connects people.

— Tim Berners-Lee, *inventor of the World Wide Web*

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INTRODUCTION

Whether one considers the impact of the invention of the printing press on the politico-religious movement of reformation, the radio on the spread of propaganda in Nazi Germany or the first-ever televised presidential debates on the election of J. F. Kennedy - technological developments in the communication sector have fueled debates on the effect they have on society and their prospects as instruments of democracy (e.g. Dunham, 1938; Lerner, 1958). Today, the use of internet tools by protests movements, for example in Moldova in 2009 (the first alleged "Twitter revolution" (Morozov, 2009b)), nourished similar hopes regarding the potential effects of the spread of the internet on political institutions and, more broadly, in the democratization process. In that sense, the controversy over the empowering character of the internet, encouraged by the prominence of information technologies in the organization and publication of protest during the Arab uprisings, is only the most recent incarnation of this general tendency (Groshek, 2010).

In addition to the focus on modern communication tools in democratization processes, the internet especially is often portrayed as the late embodiment of the Global Village, the contraction of the world by instantaneous movement of information using electronic communication technology, as predicted by Marshall McLuhan (1962). From its origins as a computer network linking scientific laboratories to enable communication and the and sharing of computer resources among researchers, the internet has grown to link an estimated 3.4 billion users worldwide in 2016. As the ultimate instrument of dissemination of technology and knowledge, it is – next to increased trade, capital and investment movements and migration – one of the key dimensions associated with globalization. Its structure–a network of networks, allowing people to communicate and interact beyond borders and across long distances –is seen as a prime example of the global interconnectedness that characterizes our era. As people cross international borders in unparalleled numbers and with increasing speed, the internet is a major tool for migrants wishing to remain in contact with their home countries, providing cheap

communication through email and internet telephony as well as the possibility to stay informed about societal and political developments through news websites.

This dissertation covers the area where these phenomena intersect by presenting the results of an investigation into the participation of migrants in online communities of two semi-authoritarian states– Tunisia and Morocco –in the years preceding the Arab uprisings in 2011. The primary motivation for this thesis arose in the aftermath of the so-called Arab Spring, when baffled experts of the region hotly debated whether or not it had been fueled by the use of internet tools. On the one hand, the Western media had heralded the internet's ability to circumvent state censorship, arguing that it would providing dissidents with a platform to voice their opinions through blogs, websites and social networking sites, thereby eroding the information monopoly of the state. At the time, the media had the tendency to either over- or underemphasize the role played by internet tools such as social media on the ground, portraying the events and the use of online technology as largely spontaneous. Scholars of the Middle East, on the other hand, largely failed to anticipate the uprisings due to the field's pre-occupation with the region's failure to democratize during the "third wave" of democratization. They cited as causes of that failure the legacies of colonialism and state-formation, a weak civil society, rentierism, the supposed incompatibility between Islam and democracy, regional conflicts, Western tolerance of friendly dictatorship, lack of critical prerequisites for democracy or over-endowment with factors that contribute to successful authoritarianism (Bellin, 2004). Of course, the region's eventual slip into turmoil – most notably the civil wars in Libya, Syria and Yemen – ultimately confirmed the position of those scholars who had insisted that the region's particularities would impede its democratization (Springborg, 2011, e.g.). Nevertheless, it must be noted that the curious "Arab Exceptionalism" resulted in a scholarly obsession with the reasons for the persistence of authoritarianism in the area and gave rise to speculation about the consequences of the (natural) death of long-term Arab leaders (Schlumberger, 2007; King, 2009, amongst others), as this was the only change imaginable for a large part of the scholarly establishment. The focus on these explanations has meant that the greater social trends leading to the emergence of popular movements calling for regime change have been largely overlooked (with the notable exception of Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule (2003)).

Based on my own research experience in the area, I suspected that the reality was more intricate than the absolutist arguments presented by both camps. While it appeared obvious to me that technology cannot by itself cause a revolution, prior investigations into online activism in Tunisia and Egypt had taught me that online spaces had served as alternative domains for political debate in the context

of an extremely restricted public sphere (Kuebler, 2011). Given that the regime in Tunisia had been highly effective in censoring public debate and repeatedly repressing protest, most recently in the mining basin of Gafsa in 2008, the spread of the uprisings beyond the disaffected Tunisian south was truly puzzling and indeed hinted at a layer of online mobilization facilitating the circulation of information. Indeed, the increasing ubiquity of internet connectivity and the spread of portable devices such as mobile phones in developing countries results in the fact that cyberactivism, in the Middle East and elsewhere, is no longer limited to "isolated, politically motivated hackers. It is instead deeply integrated with contemporary social movement strategy and accessible to computer and mobile phone users with only basic skills: it is a distinguishing feature of modern political communication and a means of creating the élan that marks social change," (Howard, 2010, p. 11) and I share his point of view that "Democracy - and democratization - can no longer be effectively studied without some attention paid to the role of digital information technologies." (p.132) Truth be told, media have accompanied insurgent movements throughout history. In that sense, the Arab uprisings merely serve as a new and prominent example of the broader debate on how technological advances in the communication sector affect society and how they can serve as instruments of democracy.

However, contrary to the claim of spontaneity (with its inherent focus on a very narrow time frame), I suspected that the roots of the online layer of contention were laid long before the uprising itself. It is true that internet tools allow a message to spread with great speed; however, the number of people it is going to reach is highly dependent on the network the sender has built beforehand.[1] Without such a pre-existing network, sending out information can be likened to a message in a bottle, as it might be taken up by other users, but more likely will remain unnoticed. This process is complicated in highly repressive environments, where other users might refrain from sharing important information because they fear retribution from the state. As a result, the relationship between democratization processes in authoritarian countries and new media is more complicated than what was implied both by the media and by activists themselves, such as when the manager of the first Facebook page that organized the Egyptian January 25th protests, Wael Ghonim, proclaimed that "if you want to liberate a government, give them the internet" (Rao, 2011).

The realization that strategic planning matters prompted me to turn towards identifying the opinion leaders in selected activist networks. Finally, international

1 In addition, on social media platforms, the algorithms play an important role. The personalization of the kind of information each user receives has been termed "filter bubble" (Pariser, 2011).

praise for the collective Tunisian blog Nawaat – managed by Tunisians living abroad – in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, sparkled my interest in investigating how the internet allows migrants to partake in – as well as to shape – societal debates in home countries. In fact, it appears that online mobilizations of migrants provide a new take on a classical dilemma of how citizens can react when they are dissatisfied with their governments. Whereas it has been long accepted that their choices include loyalty, exit and voice (Hirschman, 1970), the low costs of internet-based communication mean that exit and voice are no longer mutually exclusive. In line with previous studies analysing the use of internet tools in transnational social movements –which underscored its potential to coordinate loosely coupled networks over great distances –it is not astonishing that protests against authoritarian regimes, for example in Tunisia, have benefited from online support of dissidents living abroad. These represent marginalized political actors who are usually neglected in the domestic sphere.

With this particular focus, the present doctoral thesis contributes to the growing field exploring internet use in democratization efforts as well as to the nascent field that studies the use of online tools by overseas populations or diasporas. While the impact of a large organized overseas community on the political situation in their home country has been an object of study for some time, notably regarding their support of warring factions in conflicts in their countries of origin and homegrown terrorism in the West (P. Collier, 2000; Kaldor, 2001; Crone and Harrow, 2011, e.g.), the innovation of this dissertation lies in its investigation of how the internet empowers smaller groups and individual migrants. In this context, many questions came to the fore, such as whether living abroad can be a factor predestining an activist to be more prominent than others or how the fact of living abroad affects the standing of a cyberactivist among his peers. The apparent successful uprising in Tunisia was paired with Morocco, a country in the region with a similar overseas population that experienced widespread protest without culminating in a regime change.

THESIS OUTLINE

In chapter two, I will present and discuss several concepts used in this thesis, deriving primarily from the literature on political engagement of migrants, contentious politics, and cyberactivism. It first engages with the question of how to conceptualize activism by migrants, critically reflecting on the literature on diasporas and transnational communities. It then presents concepts borrowed from contentious politics, examining political opportunity structures for social movements in au-

thoritarian states and the state's reaction in the form of repression, toleration and facilitation. Then, the chapter lays out how dissidents use internet-based tools as a resource, ranging from the digital augmentation of protest to new modes of digitally-enabled collective action. It will also discuss whether the formation of a collective identity still matters in online campaigns or whether it has become obsolete. Finally, the chapter lays out my hypotheses and provides their theoretical underpinning.

Chapter three presents the research design as well as the methodology which governs my choice and use of methods to answer my research questions. The methods used in this thesis include link analysis of networks obtained by mapping blogospheres, using insights from social network analysis. This method is supplemented by a regression analysis to assess the relationship between a number of variables. Given that web mapping and regression analysis fail to capture the motives and strategies of actors such as bloggers and cyberactivists, a number of semi-structured interviews were conducted as well. Finally, the chapter's last section is devoted to case selection, including a brief discussion of regime types and a justification of why Tunisia and Morocco were chosen as cases.

Introducing the empirical part of the thesis, chapter four explores the power structures in the selected online activism sphere and identifies leading figures in the present web crawls. These leading figures will be identified by ranking the nodes by the number of incoming links in both Tunisia and Morocco. Given that the networks include both blogs and institutional websites of the countries of origin, the chapter also investigates how developing states use the internet to reach out to their diasporas. Finally, a regression analysis performed on the Tunisian dataset will evaluate the influence of variables such as the age of a website, its type and location on a website's centrality measure in the network.

Chapter five investigates how the very fact of being based abroad provides political opportunities to certain actors, enabling them to taking up prominent roles in their respective cyberactivist communities. It focuses on the role of repression, both in the shape of physical repression and online censorship, in shaping the protest activities undertaken by online activists. The chapter will lay out how online forums and blogs can serve as a free space in authoritarian regimes, that is, as a space comparatively free from interference by the state. However, this online freedom is not absolute, given that many authoritarian states intervene through internet censorship, thereby affecting the political opportunity structures available to online activities of bloggers and activists in Morocco and Tunisia.

Chapter six analyzes whether a collective identity, which is an important component of traditional social movements but also features prominently in theories

about diaspora, emerged inside the respective blogospheres and if so, what characterizes this collective identity. The chapter also examines the different categories of migrant activists and how they frame their political engagement in the context of online campaigns. It shows how the development of a strong collective identity can be impeded by exogenous factors such as linguistic and political fragmentation. Finally, the chapter focuses on how the collective identity evolves over time, leading to durable relationships between activists.

Finally, chapter seven summarizes the main findings of the dissertation, discusses their broader implications as well as their limitations, and suggests further research agendas.

Part I

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

2

THEORIES AND CONCEPTS

The internet is ubiquitous in developed countries, and increasingly so in the rest of the world. As people cross international borders in unparalleled numbers and with unprecedented speed, the internet emerges as a major tool for migrants desiring to remain in contact with their home countries, by providing cheap communication through email and internet telephony as well as the possibility to stay informed about societal and political developments. While many diaspora communities have been vocal and produced a large amount of media in the past, the interactivity of the internet enables migrants to engage in many-to-many conversations concerning their home societies in real time, as opposed to one-way communication of traditional media.

These properties of the internet allow migrants not only to take an active part in online debates and political campaigns, but also to initiate them. However, it appears that involvement of migrants varies in different contexts. Recently, international recognition for the collective Tunisian blog Nawaat – managed by Tunisians living abroad – in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising indicates that online engagement by migrants might have played an important role in Tunisian online activism. In other contexts in North Africa and the Middle East, however, this kind of cross-border cyberactivism appears to have been less central. This phenomenon has received little scholarly attention, and raises the question:

How can we explain differences in prominence of migrant netizens in online campaigns in the years leading to and during the Arab uprisings ?

The thesis compares the relative prominence and influence of migrants in their respective blogospheres across two cases, Tunisia and Morocco. Its primary goal is to contribute to the understanding of internet activism in authoritarian contexts. Furthermore, it aims at understanding if and how agency is a function of structural constraints, by studying similar internet activists in a non-authoritarian envi-

ronment, that is activists based in the diaspora. Finally, the comparison between the Tunisian and the Moroccan netizen communities in a most similar case design seeks to explore how relatively similar political regimes employ distinct strategies with regards to freedom of online speech, thereby influencing what the kind of discourse and resistance develops online.

while the Arab uprisings provide the backdrop for this thesis, my primary goal is not to explain the causes of success or failure in the Arab Spring, but possible overtures for overseas citizens to partake in political mobilizations in their home countries. Second, the difference in legitimacy of the regime may have an impact on the form that protest takes, but will not necessarily alter the substantive goal of the protesters, which is to overcome the arbitrariness, corruption and lack of freedom of the authoritarian state.

To answer the research question of this thesis – namely, how we can explain differences in prominence of migrant netizens across two cases in online campaigns in the years leading to and during the Arab uprisings – this thesis draws on several concepts deriving from different strands of sociology, most prominently from the literature on contentious politics, . In what follows, I will present the key concepts deriving from the literature on diaspora, contentious politics and cyberactivism, to subsequently derive hypotheses from the relevant literature.

2.1 MIGRANT NETIZENS

In line with the rise of migration flows, coupled with the transportation and communication revolution following the end of the Cold War, a growing body of literature on migration, diasporas, transnationalism, translocalism and transnational communities emerged, treating similar phenomena from slightly different perspectives. The most consequential body of research focuses on diasporas, which derives from Greek *diaspeirein*, "to sow" or "to disperse" and was originally applied to groups dispersed by force, namely the Jewish and the Armenian diasporas. More recently, the term has been applied more broadly to an increasing number of transnational migrant communities. As a result, we observe two competing dynamics with regards to the concept. On the one hand, many migrant communities embraced the term, adopting it as a self-denomination. On the other, the increasing ubiquity of the concept provoked a protracted academic debate on its definition and relevance.

Indeed, rising migration flows and their multidirectional nature have heightened the interest of politics and academia in diasporic communities, as they are deemed increasingly relevant to international affairs. The rich literature on diasporas high-

lights the opportunities afforded to overseas populations in their dealings with the politics of their home country. In a first strand of literature on the subject, diasporas were predominantly identified with threats to domestic and international security. Prominent studies, like the large-N statistical analysis by World Bank researcher Paul Collier, for example, indicate that the presence of a large organized diaspora in the United States increases the likelihood of conflict in the homeland, with possible spill-over effects to neighboring countries (P. Collier, 2000; P. Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). Research on the role of diasporas in conflict resolution found that diaspora communities may directly financially support warring factions, or remittances sent to families might be misused by warring parties for military purposes, either through taxation or coercion (Kaldor, 2001). Diasporas might also lobby the international community and public opinion for intervention, and avert conflict resolution, even when their countrymen are willing to achieve a settlement (M. B. Anderson, 1999). Newer studies highlight potentially constructive contributions of diasporas in the promotion of liberal values, economic development, conflict resolution and peace building (Hear et al., 2004). These new studies stress the high social and financial capital that diasporas can invest in their home countries, for example through the combination of knowledge of the opportunities in their countries of origin with skills and networks they have acquired abroad (Gillespie et al., 1999).

On the other hand, the surge of studies on the relationship of diasporas with their countries of origin since the 1990s (Demmers, 2002, p. 86) has resulted in a fierce debate on terminology and definitions, since related terms like "refugee", "expatriates", "exile", "immigrant" and "ethnic community" overlap (Clifford, 1994). The main fault line proved to be whether objective (e.g. the dispersion to two or more countries) and subjective (e.g. the presence of a group consciousness) criteria are paramount to determine if a group qualifies as a diaspora or not, with the most frequently cited definitions of diaspora providing a list of both objective and subjective criteria to be fulfilled (Safran, 1991; Cohen, 1997). According to Safran, for example, diasporas are transnational communities characterized by their dispersion to two or more countries, the maintenance of a collective memory or myth of the homeland, a certain alienation from the host country, the will to return home when deemed appropriate, a commitment to the restoration or maintenance of it, and a continuous relationship to the home country that defines group consciousness and solidarity (1991, p. 83-84). Another widely used definition was proposed by Sheffer, who defines modern diasporas as "ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries, but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homelands." (1986, p. 3).

Critics of this approach argue that there is a tendency to reify and essentialize the diaspora as a given social entity longing for a distant home country. Partially as a response to this problem, a literature on transnational communities or transnationalism that eschews the notion of diaspora has gained traction. It does so on the grounds that the concept implies a level of cohesion in terms of its identity and its composition that is not representative of today's migrant communities (Vertovec, 1999; Al-Ali and Koser, 2002, e.g.). In addition to this, the term evokes a desire to maintain an identity distinctive from the society in the country of residence, which might not necessarily be present in contemporary transnational communities (Adamson, 2012, p. 31). There have, however, also been attempts to address these issues within the field of diaspora studies proper. Martin Sökefeld (2006) proposes to analyze its formation as a result of mobilization processes. His definition combines an 'objective' with a 'subjective' criterion, defining a diaspora as "a transnationally dispersed collectivity that distinguishes itself by clear self-imagination as community." (Sökefeld, 2006, p. 267) This novel focus on how diasporas are imagined – emphasizing the importance of a shared identity – has the advantage to disconnect dispersal and imagination, turning them into independent variables. Thus a diasporic community is not an automatic result of migration, but emerges through an imagination of community analogous with Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" (1991), which might form years after the act of migration proper. Finally, his approach underscores the importance of a diasporic discourse, given that the existence of a diaspora 'consciousness' is difficult to operationalize in empirical research (Ibid.).

For the purpose of this study, I will adopt a conceptualization of diaspora indebted to this strand of literature based on constructivist approaches, notably on the definition proposed by Shain and Barth (2003). They define diaspora as

> "a people with a common origin who reside, more or less on a permanent basis, outside the borders of their ethnic or religious homeland — whether that homeland is real or symbolic, independent or under foreign control. Diaspora members identify themselves, or are identified by others — inside and out-side their homeland — as part of the homeland's national community, and as such are often called upon to participate, or are entangled, in homeland-related affairs." (Shain and Barth, 2003, p. 452)

This definition readily accommodates the internal diversity and power relations that characterize the activist networks under study. Rather than seeing diasporas as a static group bound together by an inevitable ethnicity, the proliferation of

the term suggests its political salience, enabling political entrepreneurs to revert to it to make claims and to mobilize under its banner (Adamson and Demetriou, 2007, p. 498; Tölölyan, 1991, p. 3). For instance, some scholars have argued that political exiles differ from other diaspora members insofar as they constantly fight for their return and refrain from establishing their life abroad as a sustainable option (Shain and Ahram, 2003). However, political exiles might indeed serve as political entrepreneurs, attempting to mobilize their compatriots at home and abroad. Also, politicization can occur after immigration and political exiles are not the only engaged in political campaigns directed at their countries of origin, often resulting in presence of "competing stances" within the same community (Brubaker, 2005).

Using insights from the literature on diasporas, this thesis examines a subset of actors, namely bloggers and cyberactivists that consider themselves and are considered by others as part of the community of bloggers of their country of origin. This affiliation is established first and foremost through hyperlinks, that is through the inclusion of their websites and blogs on the blogrolls, i.e. the list of blogs a blogger considers important. However, while they clearly reside at a physical distance outside the state, whether these actors choose to adopt the label "diaspora" and mobilize under its banner is part of the questions to be examined. Yet, the objective criterion of whether a blogger lives abroad or in the country at which the political activism is directed matters, because – especially in the context of authoritarianism – bloggers may experience certain limitations that colleagues living abroad might not. In order to highlight the fact that a diasporic identity and claim is not a given in the cases examined, I used the more descriptive term "migrant netizen" both in the title as well as in many instances in this dissertation. It pairs the portmanteau of the words internet and citizen as in "citizen of the net", netizen, with the objective criterion of migration. However, the question of how these bloggers perceive themselves and are perceived by others will be explored as well, using the literature on identity formation that has been central in the literature on diasporas as well as in the literature on contentious politics.

2.2 CONTENTIOUS POLITICS

The present study heavily relies on insights from the literature on contentious politics for its conceptual and analytical framework. Rather disconnected from the literature on democratization and the persistence of authoritarianism, the field of "contentious politics" has built a sophisticated toolkit designed to explain why episodes of popular contention occur, the forms they take as well as their potential

social, cultural and political consequences. Spearheaded by prominent scholars in the United States – Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow and Dough McAdam – this current has steered political science beyond the study of institutionalized politics towards the inclusion of informal collective action. Through their efforts, the formerly compartmentalized studies on political struggle ranging from strikes, revolutions and social movements are united under the umbrella of contentious politics, showing how different forms of contention feature recurrent mechanisms and processes.

The initial studies of contentious politics – hitherto studied under the lens of collective behavior – presumed a direct relation between discontent and protest, viewing contentious politics such as riots or mob violence as random occurrences of aggrieved individuals reacting to situations beyond their control. Soon, however, it became clear that discontent is ubiquitous, hence not a sufficient condition to generate protest. In response, approaches stressing the importance of resources and opportunities for the likelihood of success of a political action gained ground. These approaches are grounded in rational choice theory, suggesting that political opportunities and available resources are crucial factors to propel discontented actors into action.

2.2.1 *Social movements in authoritarian states and state response*

Social movements, following Diani (1992), can be defined as "networks of informal interaction between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict on the basis of a shared collective identity" (Diani, 1992, p. 13). Given the structuralist approach that characterized much of the early works on democratization, social movements were seen as minor actors in transition processes. Instead, economic development was at the heart of Lipset's (1959) work, leaving little room for the role social movements might play in the process of democratization. For Huntington (1991), on the other hand, mobilization especially of the working class appears to be potentially harmful to democratization. Transitologists, on the other hand, with their focus on elite behavior and strategies, are more inclined to take the agency of civil society into consideration (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Higley and Gunther, 1992). Yet, the role played by civil society during transition processes is seen by and large as temporary: "regardless of its intensity and of the background from which it emerges, this popular upsurge is always ephemeral" (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986, p.55-56). Linz and Stepan's (1996) model of extended transition pays more attention to civil society in democratization processes, and suggest that "A robust civil society, with the capacity to generate political alternatives and to monitor government and

state can help transitions get started, help resist reversals, help push transitions to their completion, help consolidate, and help deepen democracy. At all stages of the democratization process, therefore, a lively and independent civil society is invaluable" (Linz and Stepan, 1996, p.9). Nevertheless, social movements do not feature prominently in their empirical part, underlining the fact that transitology acknowledges the dynamic character of the democratization process, but ultimately bargaining processes among individual members of the political elite in a context of uncertainty are front and center.

On the other hand, social movement theory has not been applied frequently in authoritarian regimes despite attempts to unite the separate literatures on political struggle including strikes, revolutions and social movements under the umbrella of contentious politics. Notable exceptions to this rule are applications of social movement theory to religious groups in the Middle East (Quentin Wiktorowicz, 2004; Hafez, 2003; Gunning, 2008). Now the so-called Arab Spring has opened an avenue to further fill this gap (see Della Porta, 2014). The idea that social movements do not emerge in a vacuum, but have to be studied in relation to the state they operate in is probably the most evident in contexts where the state is particularly potent and present such as authoritarian regimes.

2.2.2 *Political opportunity structures in authoritarian regimes*

We are only beginning to understand how episodes of contentious politics emerge in the context of political authoritarianism and societal norms barring people from speaking out. While the main focus of this thesis lies on characteristics of the membership of a group of activists, exogenous factors structure their choices. To analyze the impact of these exogenous factors, the literature on contentious politics developed the political process framework. Fully formulated for the first time in McAdam's Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970 (1982) and further developed in Tarrow's Power in Movement (1998), it centers on the concept of political opportunity structure (POS). While specific definitions vary, the general sense is that "political opportunity structures influence the choice of protest strategies and the impact of social movements on their environment" (Kitschelt, 1986, p. 58) and most scholarship focuses on "the opening and closing of political space and its institutional and substantive location" (Gamson and Meyer, 1996, p. 277). It thus serves to explain why social movement contention rises and grows in some contexts and periods and not in others, and why the applied structures and strategies vary. Historically, research on social movements had been divided between a European macro-theoretical tradition that focuses on

broad social-structural changes to explain the emergence of social movements on the one hand, and an American micro-theoretical tradition that emphasizes individual motivations to join social movement organizations, on the other. Nevertheless, the development of the "political opportunity structure" concept provided a common ground (Kriesi et al., 1995, p. 238), although its popularity and various applications in social movement studies makes "consensus regarding the term 'political opportunity' (...) elusive" (McAdam, McCarthy, and M. N. Zald, 1996, p. 24).

The most prevalent variables used in the literature to establish the degree of access to the political sphere comprise the degree of formal and informal access to political institutions and decision-making processes, the degree to which the political system accommodates challengers, the institutional strength of the state, the availability of allies and adversaries, the strength or vulnerability of the ruling elite coalition, and the nature of state repression (Tilly, 1978; Kitschelt, 1986; Tarrow, 1998; McAdam, McCarthy, and M. N. Zald, 1996). Summing up previous studies, Tilly and Tarrow suggest in Contentious Politics (2015) that political opportunity structures are influenced by "the multiplicity of independent centers of power within it, its openness to new actors, the instability of current political alignments, the availability of influential allies or supporters for challenges and the extent to which the regime represses or facilitates collective claim making" (p. 59). Finally, it is important to stress that while opportunities and threats are objective and external to the actor, movement responses to them depend on their recognition and interpretation, as well as their "beliefs about the opportunities." (Elster, 1989, p. 20).

Thus, while the majority of episodes of contentious politics takes place in non-democratic regimes, the theorization of political opportunity structures is largely based on contentious episodes in liberal democracies. Tarrow acknowledges this limitation in the second edition of his groundbreaking *Power in Movement*, conceding that "political process models were seldom systematically applied outside the liberal democracies of the West" (1998, p. 19). Since then, the awareness of this gap in the literature has spread, and the Dynamics of Contention research program (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2001) improved the applicability of POS in undemocratic settings by including high-risk factors and focusing on regularities found in contentious episodes instead of searching for general laws. The literature applying social movement theory to authoritarian regimes and democratic transitions is growing. Thus, Middle East scholars have applied it to religious movements in an authoritarian context (Quentin Wiktorowicz, 2004; Hafez, 2003; Gunning, 2008), and particularly with the unraveling of the Arab uprisings, this particular gap in

the social movement literature has begun to be filled (see for example Della Porta, 2014). However, the desire to provide an all-encompassing framework including a wide range of contentious episodes in every possible regime type can prove problematic. Thus, Tilly's "Crude Regime Types" – with their distinction between the degree of state capacity and democracy – provides a simple scheme with four possible combinations. However, this clarity comes at the expense of a clearer differentiation between various forms of high-capacity undemocratic regimes. For example, Morocco appears as an example of a high-capacity undemocratic regime, of which it is said that it "features both clandestine oppositions and brief confrontations that usually end in repression" (Tilly, 2006, p. 58). Tunisia, where the level of control of society bordered on the totalitarian, would feature in the same category. This example shows how a synthetic model aspiring to encompass a wide range of situations, such as the political process model, can struggle to provide a more granulated perspective, which would account for cases with extreme forms of repression.

2.2.3 *Repression, toleration and facilitation*

As Tilly (1995) pointed out, the modern social movement repertoire emerged in tandem with the development of the modern nation-state and centralized decision-making. For Tilly, repression, toleration and facilitation are important elements in the political opportunity structure. Repression of social movements, usually understood as "the attempt by a state or its agents against challengers in order to end their challenge by arresting them, harassing them, or destroying their organizations" is assumed to raise the cost of collective action (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015, p. 37). Facilitation is said to occur when the cost of collective action is lowered, either indirectly (for example, by giving a group space to operate) or more directly (for example, by lending it strategic expertise). Toleration, however, is located between repression and facilitation. An example would be a government allowing a movement to operate within certain boundaries without engaging with it (Tilly, 1978, p. 107). Thus, states enjoy considerable discretion regarding the degree and target of repression. Repression thus reflects a strategic assessment of the threat emanating from a specific form of collective action or a group or an individual activist. Now, even in the most repressive settings, the regime will encourage certain public performances more than others. For example, in totalitarian settings some public performances meant to signal the allegiance of the population to the regime become mandatory. However, even in authoritarian regimes the public display of

allegiance – such as through a massive turnout at public appearances of the leader – are deemed desirable.

It must be said that the field has, over time, focused primarily on the dichotomy of repression/facilitation, largely leaving toleration aside. However, in the case of authoritarian states toleration regains its relevance given that, depending on the degree of authoritarianism, regime stability will set close boundaries to facilitation, although the regime might indeed choose to empower one group to weaken another. Also, although repression is multifaceted the field has tended to focus on violent, state-based forms of repression of protest events such as demonstrations. This conception of repression was so prevalent that it was often viewed as synonymous with state-based violence, even by Tilly himself (see, for example Tilly, 2005). However, it is important to note that on the one hand, the state is not the unique actor of repression, but repression can also be exerted by non-state actors such as counter-movements (Earl, 2004). On the other hand, even when the state is the primary actor of repression, controlling a movement is not limited to physical repression and a range of measures can be adopted to discourage dissent in the present and to encourage demobilization by dissuading future activities (Boykoff, 2007, p. 35).

Figure 1, reproduced from (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015), presents a list of different forms of what Boykoff summarizes under the term "suppression." While Boykoff compiled the list in the context of the United States, the same techniques are applied in Middle Eastern authoritarian states as well. Political activists – but also bloggers – have been harassed, denigrated in the media and sued for defamation. Oftentimes activists experience great difficulties finding employment. Repression strategies that Boykoff does not mention but which are also used in several authoritarian countries include smear campaigns. These are typically linked to aspects of individual activists' private lives and to legal prosecution for actual and alleged crimes unrelated to

Modes of suppression employed by states and the mass media

- Mass media underestimation of challengers
- Mass media depreciation of challengers
- Demonization of challengers or the group they come from
- Mass media manipulation
- Extraordinary rules and laws
- Harassment and harassment arrests
- Creating false documents purporting to come from challengers
- Infiltration of challenger groups and use of agent provocateurs
- Surveillance and break-ins
- Employment deprivation
- Prosecutions and hearings
- Direct violence [repression]

Figure 1.: Modes of suppression (Boykoff 2007)

their activism (such as tax evasion or the possession of cannabis) in order to intimidate and silence them.

In the field of social movement studies, there is little agreement concerning the effects of state repression on movement behavior. One school believes that there is a linear relationship between repression and mobilization, with repression increasing the cost of collective action. According to this view, high levels of repression ultimately lead to demobilization (Snyder and Tilly, 1972; Hibbs, 1973; Oliver, 1980). Others, however, take psychological factors into account to argue that repression has the opposite effect, predicting that it creates frustration and aggression, thereby increasing the level of mobilization to fight the "unjust" oppressor (Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina, 1982; White, 1989). Studies grounded in large-N analyses have produced a multitude of models over the years, but suffer from methodological problems such as the reliance on undercomplex data sources and the will to condense the effects of a wide variety of variables into one single curve (Johnston, 2011, p.108-112). In efforts to understand the seemingly contradictory effects of repression on mobilization, subsequent studies have investigated how varying levels of repression (Gurr, 1970), its timing (Snyder, 1976), its perceived illegitimacy (Opp and Roehl, 1990), its target (Mason and Krane, 1989) or a combination of these factors (Della Porta, 1996) influence the level of mobilization. As a whole, these studies suggest that repression is multidimensional, with each dimension generating variables explaining different outcomes. More recently, scholars have proposed to focus on clarifying these various dimensions of repression to understand how they boost or discourage movement strategies (Hafez and Quintan Wiktorowicz, 2004).

Particularly relevant for this study is the impact of selective or indiscriminate repression. Still grounded in rational choice theory, Mason and Krane spell out the impact of death-squad violence on different groups within the opposition in authoritarian regimes. Here, reactions vary according to whether the regime targets leaders, rank-and-file members or randomly selected groups of the population not affiliated with the opposition (1989). They find that the repression of the leadership is the earliest and most common form of death-squad violence, resulting in the reduction of active support of the opposition amongst the larger population because opposition to the regime appears ineffective. Subsequently, new leaders emerging from the rank-and-file change tactics, eschewing actions that expose them to repression in favor of those promising to overcome free-rider effects, for example by mobilizing. These tactics include the mobilization of a different part of the population or actions with lower expected costs of participation (Ibid., p.180). However,

if the regime starts repressing the rank-and-file, in turn, because their mobilization has become too effective, it might intimidate some of them and radicalize others, driving them to violent actions. The more arbitrary the violent repression is applied, the more the regime risks to convince formerly unsympathetic peasants to actively support the insurgents (Ibid., p.181). While bloggers usually do not face death squads, Mason and Krane's distinction between targeted and indiscriminate repression might still explain why different groups inside the cyberactivist sphere radicalize or change tactics.

2.2.4 *Collective action in authoritarian states*

Authoritarian regimes muster considerable resources to control their populations, raising the cost of non-state-sponsored (or otherwise tolerated) collective action to levels that are unbearable for the majority of the population most of the time. Hence proponents of collective action do not have the same opportunities to mobilize compared to their equivalents in liberal democracies. Thus, the collective action repertoire or repertoire of contention – that is, the form collective action takes, or in Tilly's definition, the "whole set of means [a group] has for making claims of different types on different individuals" (1986, p. 2) – is shaped by these circumstances, but also by local particularities. For instance, recent literature on mobilization in authoritarian contexts emphasizes the importance of unobtrusive protest events (including hit-and-run protests), event seizures (such as the shouting of anti-police slogans during football matches (Chomiak, 2013)) as well as free spaces and oppositional speech acts (Johnston, 2011). Given the frequent ban on collective action by authoritarian regimes, individualized forms of protest such as hunger strikes have become a recurrent if extreme feature of the collective action repertoire in many Middle Eastern countries, as has public suicide, which was to play a major role in the ignition of the Arab uprisings.

However, repressive states not only restrict the abilities of their citizens to mobilize, but also often inhibit communication channels that are taken for granted in democratic context. One of the characteristics of authoritarian states is a tightly-policed public sphere, were public debate on government policies and potential alternatives – the lifeblood of every democracy – is either restricted or does not take place at all. If an oppositional press is officially allowed to operate, their ability to reach large strata of the population is usually fairly limited. Even the most basic tenants of communication – such as a simple comment or complaint – can have severe consequences for the speaker and her family in the most repressive regimes. Talking about social and political issues carries such a high cost that

activists often refer to a "wall of fear" inhibiting the population from speaking out. As a result, it has been argued that talking as an act of resistance should be considered equivalent to acting in a democratic context, as it serves as a basis or 'preparatory laboratory' from which a later movement can emerge (Johnston, 2005, p. 108).

Instead of taking place in the actual or imaginary coffee house, political debates are transferred to more or less contained pockets permitting oppositional speech – so-called free spaces. Contrary to the public sphere, free spaces are places in which people congregate and talk under the premise of mutual trust. The concept of free spaces first referred to voluntary associations such as social clubs or civic and ethnic groups that provide their members with the skills necessary to enact social change, such as black churches in the US civil rights movement. Free spaces are defined as "settings between private lives and large scale institutions where ordinary citizens can act with dignity, independence and vision" (Evans and Boyte, 1986, p. 17). While the concept is far from flawless, with a wide range of usages in a variety of contexts, most authors agree that "freedom from the surveillance of authorities is essential" (Polletta, 1999, p. 6). Adapting the concept to authoritarian contexts, Johnston defines it as "gathering places where intimate association foments collective identity, shared grievances, oppositional frames, and tactical innovation" (2005, p. 110).

The main difference between democracies and authoritarian states in this regard is that in the former free spaces such as small organizations enjoy legal protection and can operate freely, whereas repression in the latter often renders open, free, and structured organizations impossible. While their forms and prevalence vary, these spaces do exist, to a certain degree, even in the most repressive settings. However, despite the fact that their main characteristic is their escape from direct government control and surveillance, this does not mean they are perfectly secure. In this context, seeking to gauge whether it is safe to speak and taking into account that speaking about politics is an act in itself, Johnston claims that *oppositional speech acts* are the most fundamental free space in authoritarian regimes. Transposing James Scott's (1990) study of oppositional speech in peasant societies to authoritarian regimes, Johnston claims that free spaces are not necessarily physical places, but can be a situation where participants of a conversation use codes, double entendre, jokes and symbolism to express their opinions. According to Johnston, oppositional speech acts are crucial because "when political opportunities are severely constricted, much of the *doing* of contentious politics is *talking* about it" (author's emphasis) (Johnston, 2005, p. 108). Adapting a term coined by Polletta (1999), he states that oppositional speech acts are "prefigurative free

spaces (...) that create a microcosm of a future society in which free and open communication is possible, but with an authoritarian caveat that one must always be careful of spies and agents provocateurs" (2011, p. 114). According to this view, speech acts and other coded expressions of discontent ultimately serve as the groundwork for mobilization once state repression recedes.

2.2.5 *The internet as a resource*

In investigating the use of digital tools by members of the diaspora to achieve change in the authoritarian home country, my study contributes to an emerging field investigating the internet's impact on politics and democratization processes (Kalathil and Boas, 2003; Howard, 2010; Farrell, 2012; Trechsel, 2003, e.g.). This relationship has been discussed controversially, as the use of web tools by protests movements in authoritarian countries, for example in Moldova in 2009 (the first alleged "Twitter revolution" (Morozov, 2009b)), nourished hopes that these so-called "liberation technologies" might serve to undermine authoritarian regimes' control of public discourse and eventually contribute to their breakdown. *Twitter* was also portrayed as a critical tool for organizing the resistance of the Green Movement following the 2009 elections in Iran. Following the failure of the movement to make a sizable impact, scholars pointed out that Western media had heavily relied on the tool for information, however, given the shutdown of the internet and low user numbers in the country, the sources for these English language tweets were Iranians living abroad. This has been interpreted as an argument to dismiss the role played by the internet in popular mobilization (Morozov, 2009a). Similarly, in the context of the Arab Uprisings[1], the use of internet tools by activists was received enthusiastically by the Western press. Yet, as before, the main focus of investigation was on innovative uses of internet tools by activists on the ground. The use of the internet in demonstrations is, however, only one facet of internet activism.

1 Throughout the thesis, the events which took place in the Arab world starting in late December 2010 will be referred to as "Arab uprisings". Other denominations, such as "Arab Revolutions", "Arab Spring" and "Arab Awakening" have been discarded as inappropriate terms to describe the events, for the following reasons. Firstly, the term "Arab Revolutions" (of Dignity) has been largely favored by the activists on the ground. Eventually, however, the majority of the Arab Uprisings did not lead to regime change, and as authoritarian regimes return to power, the term is falling out of favor. The term "Arab Spring", on the other hand, originated in the West. Marc Lynch first applied it to describe the 2011 events, taking up a terminology used by neo-conservative commentators expecting a "democratic domino effect" in the wake of the elections in Iraq in 2005 (Lynch, 2011). It also evokes the image of an awakening after a long winter sleep, or transitional moments in history which were halted soon after. Similarly, the term "Arab Awakening" presumes dormant societies on the eve of December 2010. As this study intends to prove, however, societies in the Arab world have been far from dormant, and the processes culminating in the uprisings of 2011 have been underway for many years.

To turn grievances into a campaign or even a revolution, much more than a simple call for action on an internet forum is needed. Even if mobilizations can appear and spread more rapidly than before, a sustained mobilization requires strategic planning.

Internet activism has been predominantly studied through the lens of resource mobilization theory. The approach was developed in opposition to traditional collective behavior theory in the 1970s, most prominently by McCarthy and Zald (1973; 1977). While theorists of collective behavior see social movements as motivated by grievances, high levels of deprivation or social strain, resource mobilization theory stresses the importance of social movements to account for the emergence of protest campaigns. The theory acknowledges the significance of political context and grievances, but emphasizes that social movements require certain resources to emerge. Grievances are assumed to be ubiquitous, hence differences and changes in resources, group organization and opportunities explain the formation of social movements. The novelty of the approach at the time was to assume that social movements are rational actors engaging in a strategic effort to enact social and political change, characterized by structures and patterns that can be studied (Jenkins, 1983). Rooted in rational choice theory, this strand of social movement literature highlights that costs vary according to protest activity, so activities requiring lower levels of commitment and risk present a lower participation threshold. Resources thought to be critical to the success of social movements can be material or immaterial, such as the availability of funding, property and equipment and access to media, but also people's time and organizational skills. The theory faced several criticisms, notably in its inability to explain successful mobilization of groups with limited resources. Scholars continue, however, to apply and modify resource mobilization theory, for example to explain the use of computer-mediated communication by social movements. From this perspective, internet tools are primarily interpreted as facilitating the internal and external communication of social movements by radically reducing participation costs, thereby enabling small organizations with limited financial resources to organize more efficiently and to reach their target audience (Laer and Aelst, 2010, p. 6).

As social movement studies were developed before the mass adoption of the internet, adapting its theories to explain the effects to the growing use of modern information technologies in social movements presents a challenge. Most investigations of the matter draw a strict line between online and offline protest.[2] Studies of the relation between social movements and the internet point out how, on the

2 Given the great variety of efficient tools provided online, coupled with the growing ubiquity of the internet, which increases the reach internet campaigns can have, it is questionable if this strict distinction between online and offline tactics will persist in the future. Most social movements

one hand, online tools serve to augment classic offline collective action through the facilitation of organization, mobilization and transnationalization, and on the other, lead to the emergence of new, purely internet-based activities, complementing current social movements' repertoire of collective action. Typologies of the digital repertoire of contention aiming at accounting for different forms of internet activism typically divide it between facilitation of offline protest and pure online activism.

From digital augmentation of protest to new modes of digitally enabled collective action

The most elaborate typology has been presented by Earl et al. (2010). It suggests that websites can serve as a form of *brochureware*, through which organizations distribute logistical information, information about the cause or on the organization itself, their issue framing or their ideology, but also suggests they do not offer other ways of becoming involved in their activities directly online (online donations constitute a wide-spread exception to this rule). Furthermore, websites can serve to coordinate offline protest by providing information to potential participants, which Earl at al. term *Online Facilitation of Offline Activism*. A movement's website would, for example, offer information such as the time and place of the next protest event, offer downloadable signs for printing and information concerning logistics. Scholars have argued that in this case the relatively low costs associated with the use of the internet leads to a scale-change, enabling the movement to spread its message internationally and to build a global network of support. The underlying dynamics of its struggle, however, are not altered (Earl, Kimport, et al., 2010, p. 431).

Potentially model-changing uses of digital tools include what Earl et al. call *Online Participation*. These activities range from online petitions, so-called email bombings (the overload of mailboxes through the sending of enormous volumes of email to a single address), the temporary shutdown of websites through Distributed Denial of Service attacks, to hacking the websites of large companies, organizations or governments. In this form of online activism, scholars have found certain aspects which differ from findings of classical social movement studies. For example, Brunsting and Postmes (2002) argue that online activists are more motivated by the perceived effectiveness of their actions than by group solidarity. On the other hand, the ability to considerably lower the threshold for participation has raised concerns about the commitment of participants in online "flash campaigns",

today resort to a mixture of offline and online strategies, leading certain scholars to argue that the distinction should be completely abandoned (Bimber, 2000).

also termed "five-minute activists" (D. Bennett and Fielding, 1999). In this, social network sites play an important role, because through their working mechanism (notably the so-called newsfeed), chances of reaching beyond the already committed members are higher than via mailing lists. Especially in authoritarian regimes, activism on social network sites can be important since the blurring of the distinction between public and private spaces in social networks like *Facebook* can lead to so-called information cascades (Lohmann, 1994). These are related to the inherent coordination problems in an authoritarian context, in which information on other actors' intentions is limited, since those disagreeing with the regime fear repression. By highlighting that acquaintances or a friend's friend approves a certain political statement, oppositional views become increasingly visible online, and previously intimidated bystanders might lose fear and are encouraged to voice their dissent as well.

Earl et al.'s category *Online Organizing*, refers to campaigns and movements that emerge and are organized solely online, such as vote swapping in American presidential elections (Schussman and Earl, 2004). In this context, Earl and Schussman discovered that leaders of online movements tend to have technical backgrounds (such as Web masters, computer scientists etc.) and are less likely to have prior activist experience (Schussman and Earl, 2004, pp. 448-450). Other studies highlight that internet-based cause-oriented campaigns can arise instantly as a response to grievances (Gurak and Logie, 2003). Central movement leadership is in this context far less important, as predicted by Manuel Castells (1997). Earl and Kimport conclude from these studies that such online developments go beyond scale-related changes and instead demand theoretical changes in social movement theory (2011). They find that the ease with which online campaigns are launched significantly reduces the importance of resources necessary for the emergence, growth, and success of social movements in certain contexts, thereby questioning the relevance of research mobilization theory as put forward by McCarthy and Zald (1977).

2.3 DIGITALLY ENABLED DIASPORA ACTIVISM

Another aspect highlighted by Earl and Kimport (2011) is the decreased need for co-presence in online supported political campaigns. These are characterized by the fact that they act together, such as working on a campaign or signing an online petition, physical and temporal co-presence is not required anymore (ch.6). Time and space of protest events are decoupled, enabling participants to join protest activities at different locales at different moments in time. This aspect is particularly relevant for campaigns addressing issues transcending borders like the Global Jus-

tice Movement, but also for dispersed groups like diasporas. Previous research has found that internet tools allow members of the diaspora to build distinct online networks in order to negotiate their identities, spread their culture, influence politics in their home- and host societies and to discuss subjects of common interest (Alonso and Oiarzabal, 2010, p. 11). These networks have been called either 'digital diasporas' or 'e-diasporas', whereby the main difference between the terms constitutes the attempt of the latter to avoid associations with related buzzwords like 'digital natives' or 'digital immigrants', which denote whether a person grew up during the internet era or not (Diminescu, 2012). The collaborative, so-called Web 2.0 can be characterized as an "info-sphere constitut[ing] a postnational or global media that transcends national boundaries, creating a deterritorialized space or cyberspace", realizing the utopia of internet pioneers envisioning "deterritorialized communities, bounded by common interests and not by space or time" (Licklider and Taylor, 1968, cited in Alonso and Oiarzabal 2010, p. 8).

2.3.1 *Collective identity in online communities*

In the study of diaspora, cognitive aspects such as a group consciousness and the maintenance of a collective memory or myth of their homeland, are at the core of its very definition. Analyses of the use of the internet by members of the diaspora have, so far, focused on its potential to facilitate the collective expression of diasporic identities, which in a second step enables them to engage in collective action both in their host and their home countries. Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, in her study *Digital Diasporas: Identity and Transnational Engagement* (2009), emphasizes the internet's influence in fostering the development of a diasporan hybrid identity. This "in-between", arising from the mixing of cultural traits of the home and the host country (in the context of the tolerance of cultural diversity by the host society, such as the United States' tolerance for hyphenization), is deemed to enable members of the diaspora to conserve cultural practices compatible with liberalism and, in addition, to adopt values of the host country like pluralism, democracy, and human rights, through socialization and integration (Shain, 1999, p. 22)(as cited in Brinkerhoff 2009). This in turn would turn them into likely proponents of democratization processes, as opposed to earlier studies highlighting diasporas' role as a security threat.

The concept of collective identity has equally been used by social movement scholars seeking to explain how social movements emerge and manage to maintain commitment and cohesion over time. According to Alberto Melucci, collective identity is "an interactive process through which several individuals or groups de-

fine the meaning of their action and the field of opportunities and constraints for such an action." (Melucci, 1989, p. 793). Collective identity is thought to alleviate the possibly negative repercussions of the participation in social movements, like social stigmatization and other risks associated with protests (Fantasia, 1988). In classical social movement theory, collective identity is often presented as requiring face-to-face interaction in shared spaces. Early theorists of the internet stressed that being online meant being in another place, similar to the *agora* of political theory or in the literature on deliberative democracy and the public sphere (Habermas, 1991). This literature pointed out that sending an email to a friend, commenting on a blog, and posting on newsgroups or a social network site all constitute social interactions. These exchanges – sometimes random and sporadic, sometimes prolonged and regular – can foster a sense of community and lead to the emergence of virtual communities, first described by Howard Rheingold: "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on [...] public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold, 2000, p. 5). Contemporary, decentralized, informal and self-governing online fora have in common the fact that they gather internet users, who have not, for the most part, met in person. Written conversations disconnect the participants from the constraints of time or place, as one can join or leave a conversation at any moment. Nevertheless, thick, virtual communities can emerge, which enable people to empathize with each other, similar to physical communities. Online communities can provide online emotional support during a stroke of fate, while on the other hand they are recurrently afflicted with gratuitous, and deliberately disruptive conflicts (Rheingold, 2000). The interaction in those spaces remains, despite its computer-mediation, social, and it can lead to the creation of a collective identity and subsequent collective action.

2.3.2 *Collective identity in cyberactivism*

Recently, some research challenges the notion that online participants in chat rooms are able to build a collective identity online (e.g., Ayres, 1999; Nip, 2004). Other sociologists of the web have questioned the idea of the necessity of a collective identity in the context of internet-based collective action. As most cyberactivism does not require co-presence, Earl and Kimport suggest that building a collective identity is not critical to what they call e-tactical participation, that is entirely online movements such as online petitions (2011, p. 144). They argue that e-tactics are neither dangerous nor costly and rather episodic, therefore the barriers for participation are low, and a collective identity less important. While this

might be true for online activism in Western contexts, I argue that in authoritarian contexts characterized by intensive online monitoring and control, this is not the case. Instead, here, the online world can be a free space akin to "duplicitous groups," that is official civil society groups in authoritarian states whose activities provide citizens with a space in which they can speak without fear of reprisals, such as church groups or cultural associations (Johnston, 2011, p. 116-119). The establishment of this free space involves the building of trust between the participants, which precludes some kind of collective identity.

The question here is, however, what kind of collective identity will evolve. Current research assumes that members of the diaspora use the internet to form a distinct collective identity necessary for subsequent collective action directed at the home country. It portrays diaspora engagement in a unilateral manner: the diaspora community as an isolated group engages in a concerted action towards the society in the homeland. This might be true on discussion boards which have been the object of Brinkerhoff's study (2009). This viewpoint overlooks, however, the interaction that occurs between those abroad and those remaining in the country of origin, and common initiatives that may emerge. The many-to-many communication enabled by internet tools (as opposed to one-to-many communication of traditional media like television, radio and the press) allows diasporic communities not only to keep up with developments in their country through a potentially greater offer of online news coverage, but also to maintain ties and to engage in a conversation with people remaining in the home country, overcoming the isolation from fellow countrymen pre-internet diasporic communities often suffered from. One way this can be achieved is by participating actively in the home state's national blogosphere, the virtual universe that assembles all blogs from a given country.

2.4 INVESTIGATING ONLINE ACTIVISM POWER STRUCTURES

As we have seen, cyberactivism can take different forms ranging from offline actions accompanied by information online to purely online activism. Given that in an authoritarian context, the former is likely to provoke state repression, this thesis focuses on campaigns and movements that emerge and are organized entirely online, and in particular on the leaders of its blogospheres.

Technically, a blog is defined as a webpage with a list of articles in reverse-chronological order (i.e. the newest is at the top) written by a single author or an author collective, even though the chronological order of the entries is often spurious (Ringmar, 2007, p. 17). Blogs are enhanced with tools facilitating linking

to other pages, such as blogrolls, permalinks and trackbacks allowing bloggers to easily follow conversations in their networks. Today, blogs are often used as an easy way to set up one's own website. In the early days of the internet, setting up a website was a cumbersome process, because it necessitated to learn how to write HTML code. Blogs were the first manifestation of the rise of so-called user-generated content, whose other forms include wikis, images, video and audio files produced by users and published using dedicated web services. The popularization of tools facilitating the publication of user-generated content is one of the features of the so-called Web 2.0 (Graham, 2005).

If discussion boards usually feature rules of conduct and etiquette, which may include a ban on certain taboo topics or the omission of strong language, the advantage of a blog is that the user decides the issues he wants to address and the tone he wants to employ. These characteristics have made blogging a nearly costless way to address a worldwide audience, amounting to what Ringmar calls a "self-publishing revolution" (2007). The ease of self-publishing has made interlinked communities of blogs, or blogospheres, one of the main scenes of online activism, next to social network sites. This can be linked to the absence of credible and reliable media outlets in many Arab countries, hamstrung by state regulation and censorship - Reporters without Border's pre-uprising 2009 Press Freedom Index lists the majority of Arab countries at the bottom of its ranking (Reporters without Borders, 2009). Despite the fact that commercial social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter gain in importance in cyberactivist campaigns, many of the most committed activists continue to entertain their own websites. But who are those committed activists? This leads to my first exploratory subquestion:

> **1. What are the power structures in the selected online activism spheres? Who are the leading figures?**

The subquestion asks for the identification of opinion leaders. In the physical world, studies have found that advice from friends, family and experts matters when a person makes decisions. Those individuals whose experiences, opinions, and suggestions are sought after have been termed "influentials" (Keller and Berry, 2003). The question of opinion leadership in specific groups is not new. Already in 1955, Lazarsfeld and Katz published their theory on information flows and personal influence on individual decision-making (1955). Contrary to the state of research at that time, which assumed a direct influence of the mass media on atomized individuals, they found what they called the Two-step flow of communication, in which the majority of people form their opinions influenced by opinion leaders, who are in turn influenced by the mass media. They found that the individuals

that were identified by their peers as having influenced them in a decision-making process shared certain characteristics. They were respected members of the community, and even though they were not part of the mass media, they had a greater exposure to them than the other members of the group. Lazarsfeld and Katz concluded that opinion leaders were avid consumers of media and subsequently shared their interpretation of media messages with others.

It has been argued that the ease of setting up a blog will result in the deposition of traditional elites by allowing everyone with internet access to publish their views to a wide audience, leading to the democratization of the public debate. The most prominent proponents of this claim among media scholars are Shirky (2008) and Papacharissi (2010). It has also emerged, however, that blogospheres develop hierarchical structures as they grow. In fact, the readership and hyperlinks blogs receive are unequally distributed, meaning that only a small number of leading bloggers attracts the majority of the traffic, whereas the majority of blogs have hardly any readers, following a power law distribution.

> "A new social system starts, and seems delightfully free of the elitism and cliquishness of the existing system. Then, as the new system grows, problems of scale set it. Not everyone can participate in every conversation. Not everyone gets to be heard. Some core group seems more connected than the rest of us, and so on." (Shirky, 2003)

Similarly, social network scholars, investigating the growth of the internet as a whole, revealed that it grows through what they termed "preferential attachment", where "older [...] vertices increase their connectivity at the expense of the younger [...] ones, leading over time to some vertices that are highly connected, a "rich-get-richer" phenomenon" (Barabasi and Albert, 1999, p. 6). This is a variation of the "Matthew effect", a term coined by sociologist Robert K. Merton to describe the phenomenon that established scholars will receive more credit for their work than relatively unknown scientists, even if their work is comparable (Merton, 1968).

Empirical studies of the internet have concluded that contrary to the expectation of equal opportunities to be heard and read online, the structures are hierarchical, even though the mechanisms leading to this hierarchy are not yet fully understood. Computer scientists Adamic and Huberman (2000), for example, claim that preferential attachment is not sufficient to explain the phenomenon, otherwise all highly connected nodes would have to be older nodes. Instead, they suggest that every website has its intrinsic growth rate, possibly depending on factors such as quality, interest, or investment in money (Adamic and Huberman, 2000). This second mechanism was later included in the Albert and Barabasi model. This means that

not every new node is destined to remain unread relative to older nodes. Applied to the blogosphere, it means that a large number of incoming and outgoing links of a blog increases the probability of acquiring new incoming and outgoing links, respectively. From these premises, I assume that

> Hypothesis 1.1: **The studied blogospheres are characterized by hierarchical structures.**

In terms of political blogging, the importance of a resonating topic, a captivating writing style and regular contributions appear to explain a successful blog. On the other hand, the literature on the growth of the web indicates that authorities in the studied blogospheres will be the most connected. The hierarchical structure of the network linking blogs impedes the sudden surge to prominence of a newcomer, unless they are promoted through being referenced by one of the more widely-read bloggers. Unless a blogger decides to be less active, that is, to be less dedicated to blogging, we can expect that his prominence will prevail. As such, the most dedicated early adopters of blogging are likely to remain prominent.

> Hypothesis 1.2: **In the blogospheres, the nodes with the highest in-degree are likely to be older nodes.**

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks in the United States, it soon emerged that the terrorist network al-Qaeda had made extensive use of the internet for organizational purposes (Filiu, 2009). Given the fact that the terrorists lived and studied in Western countries prior to the attacks, coupled with the surge of so-called homegrown terrorism carried out by descendants of immigrants, the use of the internet by members of the diaspora became the focus of public attention. The use of internet tools in more recent terror attacks in Europe as well as by migrants during the so-called European refugee crisis fuel a primarily securitarian perspective among state authorities.

In an attempt to nuance this view, academics have advanced the capacity of ICTs to foster identity formation, as well as interactions of dispersed populations as "virtual" or "digital" diasporas. So far, there are two book-length examinations of the subject, a comparative study by Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff entitled "Digital Diasporas: Identity and Transnational Engagement" (2009) and an edited volume, "Diasporas in the new media age: Identity, politics and community" (Alonso and Oiarzabal, 2010). Brinkerhoff draws on case studies of nine diaspora organizations from five primarily U.S.-based diasporas (Afghan-Americans, Egyptian Copt-Americans, Tibetan-Americans, Somali-Americans and the Nepali Diaspora), through which she explores how the internet can help build a virtual community

among members of a given diaspora and how they coordinate collective action. The study allows important insights into identity formation online and its centrality in constructing physical migrants into "imagined" diasporans.

Thus, by and large, these studies focus on community building, arguing that the internet provided a means to form a community across several continents separate from their fellow citizens remaining in the country of origin. There is thus a tendency to regard diasporas as monolithic groups, which, in a second step, engage in a concerted action towards the homeland. While this perspective is fairly common in diaspora studies, diasporas, like most other larger groups, are "stratified by class, caste, education, occupation, religious affiliation, cultural interests, urban or rural background" (Werbner, 1999, p. 24). It will therefore be interesting to see whether we find a relative coherent diasporic community or rather a multitude of groups engaging in different ways with the home country, and how this is expressed online. From the literature on diasporas, we expect that the shared identity and interest in the home country would induce bloggers based abroad to link to other bloggers and websites dealing with this issue, resulting in a distinct cluster.

> Hypothesis 1.3: **The diaspora nodes form a cluster distinct from the rest of the blogosphere.**

2.4.1 *The place of migrants in the cyberactivism spheres*

In the context of new technology like the internet, the adoption of which necessitates computer hardware and literacy, initial users were a select group who could afford it or who were granted early access due to professional reasons. Throughout the world, academics belonged to the latter group, as the internet developed primarily as a tool for resource sharing among universities. Likewise, developing countries connected their research institutions to the network first, long before the more user-friendly World Wide Web existed.[3] At that moment, computer experts, engineers, scientists and librarians were mainly using the system. Besides this select group of professionals, access to the internet remained restricted until the early 1990s. (Leiner et al., 2009)

> **2. How can we account for migrants taking up prominent roles in their respective political blogosphere?**

When the internet was eventually opened to the broader public, it was quickly embraced by a growing part of the populations of the USA, Europe and Asia,

3 The World Wide Web was invented by the English computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee in 1989 while being employed at CERN in Switzerland.

although differences in technology adoption persisted, a phenomenon termed the "digital divide" by Pippa Norris (2001). In this now classical critique, researchers argued that the use of the internet is linked to one's educational and socio-economic background (access issues) as well unequally-distributed fears and risks associated with the technology (skill issues). The literature on the digital divide found that internet access continues to depend on economic circumstances, education, race and age. That means, younger, higher educated and wealthier individuals were overrepresented among internet users.

Supposing similar mechanisms at work in the migrant population, it nevertheless emerges that internet activists living abroad were more likely to be early internet adopters than those living in developing countries. This is particularly true in the so-called developing countries, including the Middle East, where internet access was reserved to elites despite numerous efforts of local governments to encourage its use (Abdulla, 2007). The low degree of internet penetration in countries with a large migrant population living in Europe and North America might have resulted in the prevalence of these migrants in their ethnic virtual communities, and later in the blogosphere. The different rates of internet use result in the fact that migrants were part of a digital vanguard in home societies, even if in the host country context they were part of the mainstream. Therefore, migrants and members of the diaspora have a comparative advantage over their peers at home, with considerable resources at their disposal in terms of early access and computer skills, enabling them to take up leading positions in the cyberactivist sphere.

> Hypothesis 2.1: **Migrants and members of the diaspora were overrepresented in the digital vanguard in their home countries.**

The internet can serve as a platform for the promotion of oppositional speech, especially in countries that strictly monitor this medium and prosecute bloggers. In addition to actual technical censorship, activists on the ground face possible personal consequences, such as the loss of their employment or the harassment of their families, or even imprisonment. The risk taken in an individual case depends on the personal situation of the activist. Following rational choice theory – which made its entry into the field of study of collective action with Mancur Olson's (1963) thesis on its irrationality – there are high costs associated with challenging a repressive state, and actors weigh the costs and benefits of protest. Perceived high costs can induce internet users in the home country to be cautious. Applying caution from daily life into acts online, they use symbolism and underground humor and jokes, following tacitly understood rules of speech about what is appropriate to criticize the regime during *oppositional speech situations* (Johnston and

Mueller, 2001, p. 115). The diaspora activist, if well established in the host country (such as having a residence permit or even citizenship), does not suffer directly from the negative effects of her activism. She can be relatively free from fear in expressing her political opinions online in the context of internet monitoring and censorship. Despite attempts by government to control citizens beyond national borders, members of the diaspora of highly repressive regimes living in liberal democracies benefit from their relative immunity from state repression. Therefore, they benefit from an opportunity structure that is more open than in their country of origin, influencing their strategic choices (Kriesi, 2004).

> Hypothesis 2.2: **The relative absence of repression, both online and offline, facilitates dissident migrant cyberactivism.**

If the activist plans, however, to return to his or her home country, either to visit or to relocate permanently, he or she might adapt her activist behavior to avoid harassment on the return. Possible tactics include to remain anonymous, to moderate one's discourse or to disguise the message instead of the messenger. This can give way to a witty, indirect and coded style where keywords possibly attracting censors are substituted with references to symbols of the regime. Finally, cyberactivists' anonymity, may not solely be linked to fears of personal persecution, but the result of fear that relatives might suffer from their political activities as well. When netizens have the impression that they are immune to state repression, or able to play on both sides, they might adopt a more outgoing approach, aiming at openly promoting themselves and their cause. This might be the case for long established opposition leaders, who live abroad but wish to maintain their appeal to their audience in their home country.

> Hypothesis 2.3: **Strategies employed vary according to the perception of risk and rewards involved.**

2.4.2 *Diaspora cyberactivist categories*

> **3. Which diaspora activists will be most prominent in the respective contexts?**

Migrant populations are diverse. They comprise individuals whose reasons to emigrate vary, just as well as the length of absence from their home country, displaying a diversity of political views (Zunzer, 2004, p. 26). The differences in the definitions also touch upon the question whether diasporas should be studied according

to apparently objective criteria. The literature on diasporas has emphasized the importance of identity for the maintenance of diasporas, a longing for the homeland in the imagination of an individual is a key marker that he or she belongs to a diaspora (Safran, 1991; Cohen, 1997). Members of the diaspora differ in their identity from those remaining in the home country, but they also vary in the degree of the assimilation to their host society and their identification with the homeland, as well among generations of settlement and the identification with subcultures like clans and ethnicities of their homeland (Brinkerhoff, 2009, p. 32). Previous studies on online diasporic communities suggested that online conversations about identity are also shaped by the physical location of their participants. The language used can also serve as a marker of the "virtual performance of ethnicity" (Alonso and Oiarzabal, 2010, p. 115). From these premises, we can expect the following politically active groups inside an online diasporic community:

1. **Exiles**
   Exiles are, by definition, opposed to the regime that induced their exile. Given their prior political record, we can expect exiles to be particularly active in the political realm.

2. **Recent migrants and students**
   Exposure to a radically different political system might lead to political activism. In the context of encapsulated media in an authoritarian regime, access to information abroad, unavailable in the home country, can lead to the creation of political awareness. Examples from recent history show the confrontation with a radically different political system, for example through a prolonged stay abroad in a Western country, can deeply influence one's stance towards the situation in the home country. Notable examples include Sayyid Qutb, whose three-year stay at the Colorado State Teachers College in the United States was the turning point in his radicalization. Disturbed by what he viewed as American materialistic greed and moral and spiritual degeneracy, he developed a radical vision of Islam in his Islamic manifesto Ma'alim fi-l-Tariq (Milestones), justifying the overthrow of misguided governments (Calvert, 2000).

3. **Second generation immigrants**
   It has been suggested that while first generation immigrants are keen to maintain strong ties to their homelands, their children are less inclined to do so (Kasinitz et al., 2008). On the other hand, we have noted that Kim Butler requires at least two immigrant generations to qualify a community as diasporic as opposed to a temporary exile (2001, p. 192). That said, children of

> immigrants grow up in a transnational social field influenced by their parents' origins. Their interest in their parents' home country might stem from a disconnection with their own experiences in their societies, or a search for their roots. Studies suggest that while the majority of children of immigrants readily adopt the norms and institutions of the country where they grow up, a minority are more deeply influenced by their parents' culture. According to Kasinitz (2008) certain groups, such as women and those living with a partner from the same ethnicity, as well as avid consumers of ethnic media were more likely to engage in transnational activities. Finally, Levitt (2009, p. 1239) underlines the importance of class, with upper- and middle-class families being able to exploit advantages in their respective home and host country due to their social and cultural capital. She finds that religion can be a driving force as well.

From this we can assume that

> Hypothesis 3.1: **Exiles will be the most active among cyberactivists living abroad.**

Another aspect to consider is the degree of institutionalization of diaspora activism. Throughout history, migrants have formed physical migrant communities in their host countries. Migrant or diaspora organizations offered networks of solidarity, helping newly arrived members to find employment in the community, for example. On the other hand, they also help migrants to maintain the cultural identity of their country of origin, by providing language classes to their children and social activities aiming at creating a sense of community. Historically, these diaspora associations have been a source of social capital (Wescott and Brinkerhoff, 2006, p.12). Prior studies have also highlighted potential constructive contributions of diasporas in the promotion of liberal values, economic development, conflict resolution and peace building in their home countries (Hear et al., 2004). They emphasize the comparative advantages of diaspora groups in terms of access to networks and information on the ground, making them potential watchdogs of human rights abuses and policy implementations of homeland governments (Brainard and Brinkerhoff, 2006).

As a result, networks of oppositional politicians or activists – spreading to like-minded activists in their host countries – constitute a part of a diaspora organization's social capital, which can serve as a resource for further mobilization against the regime in their home country. The spread of internet access presents an opportunity for the formation of additional online communities. Its capability

of communication beyond borders and community building makes it particularly valuable for dispersed communities like diasporas. Brinkerhoff's work highlights precisely the adoption of technology by physical diaspora associations and, in parallel, the formation of diaspora communities existing entirely online (Brinkerhoff, 2009). However, in highly authoritarian contexts governments might attempt to control formal diaspora organizations, thereby potentially rendering them uninteresting for politically-inclined migrants. When the government seeks to extend its control to the population living abroad, diasporic organizations might not appear as a viable conduit for political debate and action. When the participation in associations is perceived as futile because they cannot act on the ground in the country of origin, citizens living abroad might chose to become online activists in matters regarding their home societies, as a substitute to engagement in formal diaspora organizations.

> Hypothesis 3.2: **The majority of political diaspora bloggers in the context of severe governmental control is not affiliated with a formal diaspora organization.**

2.4.3 *Questions of identity and framing*

As we saw earlier, collective identity is an important element both in social movements and in diasporas. If we assume that migrants actively take part in their home country's blogosphere, the question is how this participation is framed. Developing a strong diaspora identity might be perceived as an impediment to the development of a powerful, unified social movement.

> **4. How do diaspora activists frame their political engagement?**

Investigating mobilization of members of the diaspora on online discussion boards, Brinkerhoff found that they used the online space to strengthen their diasporic identity. It appears sensible that the identification with the home country is a necessary condition for diaspora mobilization, but it does not preclude success. On the contrary, political exiles and members of the diaspora are frequently considered as being detached from the reality in their home country (M. B. Anderson, 1999). To increase the chances for the success of a campaign led by members of the diaspora, the interpretations of the situation in their homeland as proposed by the organization should resonate with the grievances felt by those still living there. In the blogosphere, the display of a strong diaspora identity can be perceived as

problematic by the bloggers who stayed in the home country. Even though a subcommunity of diaspora bloggers might exist, those wanting to integrate or lead a national campaign might chose to adopt a more inclusive identity.

> Hypothesis 4.1: **Cyberactivists living abroad engaged in political action directed at their home societies will downplay their diasporic identity.**

2.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have laid out the subquestions and hypotheses guiding my research, in the quest to explain different patterns in migrant cyberactivism in the years leading to the Arab uprisings. To answer the various subquestions and to assess the validity of my hypotheses, the concepts and theories developed in the literature on contentious politics will be central to this thesis. Given that the thesis analyzes how online movements operate in authoritarian states, the concept of political opportunity structures will help us to understand how exogenous factor such as the threat of repression structure the choices actors make. In view of these restraints, dissidents retreat to free spaces such as the internet to debate issues of social and political nature. For citizens of particularly severe authoritarian states, the internet becomes one of the few places where these debates can take place. Whereas in the literature on social movements, the emphasis has been to assess how the internet helps small organizations with limited financial resources to organize more efficiently and mobilize their target audience, new research highlights its potential for campaigns and movements that originate online. However, while the internet lowers entrance barriers due to the low cost of communication, hierarchical structures emerge online as well and influence whose voice will be heard. Furthermore, the question remains whether this form of online campaigns requires the formation of a collective identity or whether the nature of online organizing renders it obsolete. Collective identity is also at the core of the literature on diasporas, conceptualized as a transnational imagined community. Given that bloggers engage directly with other bloggers remaining in the country of origin, the development and projection of a strong diasporic identity is unlikely. In the next chapter, I will present the methodology and methods used to test the hypotheses presented here.

3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research design and specific methodology adopted by this study to examine political activities of citizens living abroad, directed at their country of origin. The chapter consists of three sections: Section 3.1 details the methodology of this study; section 3.2 outlines the methods and procedures for data collection and analysis, and finally section 3.3 explains the case selection.

3.1 METHODOLOGY

The diffusion of digital media and the need of social scientists to make sense of their impact on society has led to the development of a new set of techniques for the social sciences, which competes with traditional methods of quantitative and qualitative sociology. These are called *digital methods*, which have been chiefly developed by the *Digital Methods Initiative* at the University of Amsterdam (Rogers, 2010). The main principle of this approach resides in studying internet phenomena by using the data the medium relies on, such as links, tags, spheres, search engines and websites (Rogers, 2009). Using the internet itself as a source, as opposed to treating it as a mere object of study, digital methods thus advocate an ontological shift. While the tools grouped under this label have so far been very heterogeneous, they are all based on digital artifacts as a source of information for the study of social phenomena.

Prior to this development, the internet was primarily studied using methods imported from the humanities and the social sciences. Online surveys, interviews, as well as online field observations and participant-observation, known as *virtual methods*, were developed chiefly by the Virtual Society Program (1997-2002) based at the University of Oxford. In the context of a discourse portraying the internet as a virtual realm apart, research in this period aimed at showing that real life differences condition how individuals interact with the medium. Today, the advent of so-called Big Data – that is, of vast amounts of digital information gener-

ated by people and their electronic devices – coupled with the automation of data collection and analysis heralds a new era of internet research. The accessibility of massive data sets entails news challenges as well, ranging from questions of reliability over inflated expectations of the data's objectivity to the claim that correlations based on a vast amount of raw data suffice themselves, rendering social theory obsolete (Boyd and Crawford, 2012).

While these recent developments in the field reflect the undeniable ubiquity of digital media in everyday life, internet research does not have to be preoccupied with the divide between the real and the virtual to take both into account. Notably, most data on the internet is ephemeral. As Joi Ito, the director of the MIT Media Lab, points out, "Big Data is about exactly right now, with no historical context that is predictive" (Bollier, 2010, p. 19). Thus, despite its current allure, Big Data is not going to eclipse internet research based on methods imported from the social sciences. Instead, the combination of these methods will yield the best results when assessing not only what people do online, but also why. Precisely because the online world is not a realm apart, digital artifacts are best complemented, where possible, with evidence about the person behind the website. This avoids any masking of people's intentions when being active online associated with the sheer volume of data and large patterns.

3.2 METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Given this need for a comprehensive analysis of the subject matter, this thesis makes use of a "mixed methods approach ". By studying cyberactivism, it thereby also responds to a "call for a more ambitious and strategic mix of qualitative and quantitative research strategies in the study of social movements and contention " (McAdam, 2003, p.5), which is, so far, dominated by qualitative methods. The methods employed range from link analysis, web mapping, multiple regression to interviews with key actors.

3.2.1 *Link analysis and graph visualization*

In order to answer subquestion 1, which relates to the identification of leading figures in online activism spheres, the analysis of links emitted and received by the studied blogs appears to be particularly relevant. In fact, web-based media such as blogs, but also websites of traditional media outlets, form networks based on hyperlinks. These references to other websites or data can be mapped and their

linkage patterns analyzed. By proceeding to map the relations between websites, it is possible to detect who is referencing whom, to identify leading figures or hubs, and to uncover patterns of affiliation or aversion.

In social network analysis (SNA), a network is defined as a set of two or more nodes (also named: actors, entities, agents or vertices) connected by links (also named: relations, ties, arcs or edges). SNA has been used to analyze micro-level interactions between people or macro patterns and structures, where the ties or connections refer to interdependencies such as friendship, financial relationships, and common interests. The main goal of the procedure is to identify clusterization and hubs. In recent years, a growing community of researchers studying relational structures and processes has developed, contributing to a growing body of literature with shared concepts and measures (Knoke and Yang, 2007, p.1).

These insights from social network theory have been increasingly applied in the study of blogs. Link analysis is a common method used to analyze relationships (connections) between nodes in a dataset. While in traditional social network literature nodes represent persons or organizations, here, each node represents a website, and the links, representing the form and content of the connection between the nodes, are the hyperlinks connecting the sites. Thus, this is based on the idea that hypertext links between websites can be used as a proxy for social ties. Applied to the world of blogs, this technique is based on two widely observed online social practices:

- Website owners do not cite other websites unless they share a thematic or social interest;
- Website owners do not cite other websites that present a point of view contrary to their own, not even on the same topic.

Whereas the first practice is not unexpected, the second behavior is remarkable. Empirical research has found that internet users who have opposing positions tend to ignore each other online. Negative citations are sparse, instead, bloggers barely cite their opponents at all. One of the first studies revealing this mechanism is the map of the political blogosphere in the Unites States (Adamic and Glance, 2005). On this map, the links between the considered websites create two distinct clusters, the liberal and the conservative blogs. While the practice of ignoring one's opponents is not of benefit of the internet user desiring to gather information on different points of view, it is very useful for scholars researching the web. In fact, homophily – that is, the internet user's preference to connect to link-minded people –underscores the fact that the web is organized according to a voluntary

pattern, as opposed to a random network. By creating links between their own discourse with the discourse of others online, web users establish hierarchies and clusters (Gibson, Kleinberg, and Raghavan, 1998). Social network theory has developed several concepts to analyze these hierarchies, notably the concept of degree centrality, which quantifies a node's number of connections, that is incoming and outgoing links. In the case of networks of websites and blogs, connections are usually directed, meaning that it is possible to distinguish between incoming and outgoing links. For our purpose, the number of incoming links will be of particular interest, since nodes with a large number of incoming links can be interpreted as authorities in the network.

Concretely, these maps are created using two types of tools. The first step involves exploring the web, usually with a *crawler*. A crawler is a computer program that allows navigation through a series of web pages and to scrape the outlinks of the visited websites. Crawlers can be automatic or, more rarely, manual, which enables researchers to perceive the context of links and thus to avoid a black box effect. The operation principle of network crawlers is similar to the mapping of the World Wide Web by search engines like *Google* or *Yahoo*, albeit on a much smaller scale. Commonly used web crawling software developed for the needs of social sciences research are *issuecrawler.net* (automatic) and *Navicrawler* or its successor *Hyphe* (semi-automatic). The *e-Diaspora Project* relies primarily on the web crawler Navicrawler, an add-on for the Firefox internet browser created by Mathieu Jacomy. It is a semi-automatic crawler, which collects the out-links of a given website inside a list, allowing the researcher to manually select the websites to be included in the network or to reject them. Thus, whereas the networks resulting from automatic crawlers can only be amended after the data collection is completed, the semi-automated approach of tools like Navicrawler allows the researcher to take into account the context of a given link, resulting in curated networks. Finally, after the initial selection of the relevant websites, the *e-Diaspora Project* used automatic crawls to establish the strength of the links between the included nodes. Finally, it is important to note that while the *e-Diaspora Project* made its network data openly available online, it does not list which nodes were used as starting points. However, the relevant working papers provided on the project's website mention an exploratory keyword query in a search engine as the first step in the collection of the starting points (Graziano, 2012, p. 12).

Crawlers are a useful tool to map websites, but they face certain limitations. One of these is that nowadays social network sites play a major role in social mobilization. However, crawlers can only trace the openly accessible web, whereas social network sites like Facebook are so-called walled gardens, that is a closed platform

accessible only to registered members. While there have been attempts to explore data on Facebook for research purposes (Rieder, 2013), concerns about user data have induced the platform to heavily restrict the kind of data that can be scraped from it. Thus, conclusive research on Facebook data can only be conducted with direct access to the database, which is generally reserved to in-house researchers or direct cooperation between the company and a research institution. Another oft-cited social network site, Twitter, is comparatively open, but was found to be marginal in the studied cases. The inclusion of certain blogging features such as discussion threads in these platforms results in a blogosphere with fuzzy borders whose actors mutually acknowledge each other. Therefore, it is important to cross-reference the initial decision about whether a person can be considered as a cyberactivist or not with the actors on the ground. This involves the reputational method, during which knowledgeable actors are asked to name members, as well as the event-focused strategy that includes actors in a network according to "participation or interest in one or more events, activities, or concerns ", which in our case involves the participation in specific campaigns (Laumann, Marsden, and Prensky, 1991, p. 72). Thus, while Facebook activists do not appear on the networks used for this thesis, I was able to interview some of them to complement the analysis.

Finally, content on the web is ephemeral, with studies indicating that the average half-life of a website (that is, the time required for half of the defined websites to disappear) is about two years (Koehler, 2004). As a result, web crawls are comparable to snapshots and it is not possible to operate them retroactively (Masanés, 2006, p. 6). Due to the time frame during which this thesis was written, we are going to rely on and adapt web crawls created for a university project, the *e-Diasporas Project* developed at the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris. As we are going to see in chapter 4, the data emanating from this project is not flawless. However, it is the best freely available data collected at a relevant moment in time. While it was not possible to influence the data collection process, a few corrections have been made *ex post*, with a number of nodes removed because they did not conform to the boundaries of the research (i.e. these were not bloggers or diaspora-related websites). For example, blog aggregators, which by design link to a great number of websites without producing any content of their own, were removed from the network. In addition to the removal of nodes, some duplicate nodes were merged. A complete list of included as well as removed and merged nodes is presented in the Appendix. All tables and figures in chapter 4 are the result of this refinement of the data collected by the *e-Diasporas Project*.

Finally, the adapted networks were visualized using the graph manipulation software Gephi[1]. This program's Force Atlas algorithm creates a visual representation of the relationships between nodes by simulating a system of physical forces, combining repulsive and attracting forces until an equilibrium is reached. In addition to the layout of the network, the software integrates a number of key concepts of social network analysis. For this thesis, we will rely mostly on the concept of degree centrality, that is the number of in- and out-links a website or blog receives and emits. Given that the number of in-links serves as a proxy for authority, the size of the nodes in the visualization was rendered proportional to the amount of in-links of a website, that is to say the number of links it receives from other websites in the network. This measure can be considered representative of the authority of the website in the network. Furthermore, nodes were colored in monochrome shades to indicate the location of the blogger in question.

3.2.2 *Regression analysis*

The network data initially provided by the *e-Diasporas Project* was augmented by recording the month and year a blog was created, in order to assess hypothesis 1.2; that is, whether the nodes with the highest number of in-links (or in-degree) are indeed those created earlier than others. Subsequently, this hypothesis was tested on the dataset that most closely follows my own research agenda. In other words, it investigates the relationships between diaspora bloggers and the broader national blogosphere. Using a number of variables, including the date of creation, the location and whether a node represents a blog or a website, several regression models were build using the statistical software *Stata*.

3.2.3 *Semi-structured interviews*

Since web mapping fails to capture the motives and strategies of the actors at stake, other methods were necessary to gather the information necessary to answer my other subquestions. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a select number of internet activists in Tunisia and Morocco and abroad to fill this gap, as well as a content analysis of the most salient online campaigns. The web crawls served as a starting point for the selection of the interviewees. However, given certain shortcomings of the web crawls discussed in chapter 4, such as the absence of important Facebook activists in Tunisia and large parts of the Arabic

1 Gephi is open source graph visualization and manipulation software. https://gephi.org/

language bloggers in Morocco, additional efforts were undertaken to represent their perspectives, notably through snowball sampling.

Many activists that formally lived abroad have since returned to their country of origin, hence interviews were conducted in France and Canada, but also in Tunisia and Morocco. Furthermore, a number of interviews were conducted using video calls or written electronic communication. All in all, 34 bloggers and activists' testimonies were collected for this thesis, out of which 13 were part of the Moroccan and 21 part of the Tunisian internet activist and blogosphere.

Interviewing bloggers

In my quest to speak to as many key activists as possible, I encountered a number of obstacles. Following the departure of Ben Ali in Tunisia and the resignation of Hosni Moubarak in Egypt, bloggers were at the center of media attention and invited to numerous conferences. This was especially true for the Tunisian case, but Moroccan bloggers also told me that they had been invited "all over the place". Some bloggers rose to post-revolutionary fame, hailed as poster boys and girls in newspapers and one of them, Lina Ben Mhenni, was nominated for the Nobel peace prize. She subsequently published a pamphlet entitled "A Tunisian Girl," which was also the title of her blog.[2] Other former cyberactivists created non-governmental organizations with the help of international organizations and Western government agencies. This was particularly true for bloggers having lived abroad. For example, the collective blog Nawaat was turned into an association, and the activist Amira Yahyaoui co-founded the government watchdog Al-Bawsala. As one of my Tunisian interviewees bluntly put it to me, Tunisian cyberactivists receive a high number of interview requests. My only chance to land an interview was to be either be referred by someone else, to study at a prestigious university ("Harvard") or to prove that I had more knowledge about the case than the average researcher. This experience was rather sobering.

In addition to being overwhelmed with interview requests, many activists were, at some point, on the verge of being physically and mentally exhausted because they were continuously engaged in the political struggle in their home country, but also helping their friends and allies across the Arab world in their endeavors . As a result, the willingness of activists to conduct interviews was cyclical. Somebody not answering my inquiries using several channels would answer them a year later. Others would reply in writing detailing why they did not want to be interviewed at all, claiming that it was too long ago and that they found the very idea of

2 "Connectez-vous" in the original version, is inspired by Stéphane Hessel's pamphlet "Indignez-vous" (eng.:"Time for Outrage") that motivated the Spanish *Indignados* movement.

intellectualizing their experience by being part of an academic research project disillusioning, pointing out that it was a "lived experience and not an object of study, so it just doesn't feel right to treat it as something for the archives, rather than the improvisational, revelational, and personal process of discovery that it was" (Eatbees, personal communication, 15 August 2015). Many activists also mentioned growing tired of answering the same questions over and over again.

This is not to say that it was impossible to interview bloggers and cyberactivists. Some of the most coveted bloggers were very responsive and willing to be interviewed. It is also important to remind oneself that blogging was and is a hobby, even though the Arab uprisings have allowed a number of bloggers to become professional activists or journalists. Responding to interview requests is not part of the "job description" of a blogger, and they do not have office hours or a professional phone number. Not everyone has the time to commit him- or herself to blogging, which is probably the reason why there are a large number of students among bloggers. Nevertheless, compared to my experience when interviewing Tunisian expatriate bloggers and Egypt-based bloggers in early 2010 – that is, prior to the Arab uprisings – the difference was striking. Before the revolution, many Tunisian bloggers were fearful of potential governmental reprisals, while Egyptians were relatively open to speak in public. This fear disappeared in the Tunisian case and was also not mentioned in my interviews with Moroccan bloggers, even though in the Moroccan case, many preferred to remain anonymous nevertheless, often citing the wish to separate their online persona from their private and professional life.

3.2.4 *Validity*

Regarding the internal validity of this research, it is important to recognized that the accuracy of a network crawl depends largely of its starting points. To map issue-based online communities, the seed nodes have to relate directly to the topic under study. Seed nodes can be selected using sources of authority, for example official websites of an association dealing with the issue, or by relying on an expert on the subject matter. However, this method uniquely reveals networks between websites at the moment of the crawl, analogous to a snapshot. Given the internet's volatility, with new websites emerging while others lay abandoned, it is not possible to retroactively map a hyperlink network. In order to study networks of the past, a researcher can only rely on crawls operated by other scholars in a given moment of time, analogous to a historic document. This implies the loss of control regarding the choice of seed points. However, it has been shown that dif-

ferent samples of the same blogosphere can differ significantly in size, time span and coverage, while they can nevertheless be consistent in their aggregate network properties (Shi, Tseng, and Adamic, 2007).

Another difficulty arises when a website included in a historical crawl has since ceased to operate. Using the *Internet Archive WayBack Machine*,[3] it is, however, possible to visit a website at a previous moment in time. In this archive, many websites, but not all of them, are available in a stripped-down version. In these versions, occasionally links are dysfunctional, thus the archive is not a reliable tool to perfectly retrace online discussions. However, basic information regarding the moment of establishment of the website and information on the owner can usually be extracted. However, sometimes not even this is possible, because blog owners can request the WayBack Machine to ignore their websites by inserting a short line of code in a file (robot.txt). This practice was particularly common among certain activists to avoid being tracked by governmental agencies. As a result, the date of creation was impossible to determine for two blogs, which were coded as missing values in the dataset.

Regarding external validity, it must be recognized that digital activist networks in repressive environments tend to be context specific. Intervening factors can be external, such as the degree of access to the internet, a country's demographics, the existence and nature of censorship and repression, as well as a country's prior experience with activism. Countries in the Middle East and North Africa share many of these features and furthermore share a language, similar (and sometimes common) media outlets, authoritarian regimes and rapidly increasing levels of technology diffusion. It is therefore expected that my research provides generalizations on how diasporas can engage with digital activism networks in their countries of origin in the Middle East, and possibly beyond.

3.3 CASE SELECTION

While activist networks transcend borders and individual bloggers can reach international audiences, generally speaking blogospheres remain centered within particular countries (Etling et al., 2009). Therefore, mapping national blogospheres including so-called bridge bloggers, who connect a national blogosphere to other, usually broader ones (e.g. the English or the Francophone blogospheres) (Lynch, 2007, p. 11), is crucial to identify opinion leaders. However, the role of diasporas in the cyberactivist sphere cannot be fully understood by focusing exclusively on apparent successes, but cases where diasporas did not play an instrumental

3 http://web.archive.org

role in their respective blogosphere are equally important. Despite a comparable socio-economic situation, an equally sizable diaspora population and the fact that both states faced protest events in 2011, the diaspora involvement differed, just as the outcome of the contention. Thus, according to Przeworski and Teune (1970), Moses and Knutsen (2007) and Tarrow (2010), the "most similar systems design" stems from the idea that "all cases share basic characteristics but vary with respect to some key explanatory factor" (Moses and Knutsen, 2007, p. 98). The rationale behind the selection of the cases of this thesis is, therefore, a comparison of most similar cases. In the following section, I will briefly assess the regime type of the cases examined in this study and subsequently I will lay out why Tunisia and Morocco present ideal cases for this research.

3.3.1 *Regime types*

The spread of democracy across the globe during the so-called third wave of democratization led to the emergence of a notable body of literature on democratic transition and consolidation. Whereas the so-called transitology literature focused primarily on strategic bargaining processes within the elite of a given regime during critical junctures to explain democratization (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Higley and Gunther, 1992; Przeworski, 1992), the consolidation literature concentrated on the institutional setup, such the existence of a parliamentary democracy and proportional representation to explain the consolidation of new democracies (Lijphart, 1991; Linz and Valenzuela, 1994; Frye, 1997). These approaches have been criticized for their emphasis on short term factors, ignoring deeply-rooted causes of democracy such as economic development, income equality and a strong civic culture that might ultimately shape the strategies of decision makers (Lipset, 1959; Boix, 2003; Putnam, 1993). Furthermore, as democratization stalled in many countries of the "third wave " (Huntington, 1991), doubts were cast on the premises of these theories . Of particular interest in these critiques were the teleological tendencies of these theories, which cast democracy as the only conceivable outcome of a transition process. The term authoritarianism was coined and defined on the backdrop of the persistence of a number of pre-Second World War regimes and the collapse of many democracies in Latin American in the 1960s and 1970s (Linz, 1964). Yet, when regimes emerged that combined authoritarian and democratic characteristics, they were not perceived as partially authoritarian but as lower forms of democracy (Levitsky and Way, 2010, p.2-3).

Instead of highlighting the peculiar nature of these emerging regimes, the field largely treated them as If they were still *in transition*. The classification of regimes

developed into a burgeoning subfield, leading to a proliferation of definitions, standards and measurements to determine when a particular regime can be deemed democratic. The need to properly define democracy has not only been felt by academics, but also by policymakers. The publication of yearly rankings by organizations such as Freedom House – which has, since 1973, published an annual Freedom in the World index – attests to this. Generally speaking, there have been two partially overlapping approaches to determine when a regime qualifies as democratic. Many approaches follow a Schumpeterian, minimalist and procedural view that classifies a regime according to whether competitive multiparty elections with an uncertain outcome are held 1947. Other approaches add Dahlian elements of polyarchies, such as freedom of expression and organization as well as working institutions to make those free, fair and competitive elections meaningful (1971). Terms coined by different authors denoting "democracies with adjectives" proliferated, such as 'façade democracies' and 'quasi-democracies' (Finer, 1970), 'electoral democracies' (Diamond, 1999), 'illiberal democracies' (Zakaria, 1997), to name only a few.

Thus, more than a quarter century since the beginning of the third wave of democratization, comparativists still lack consensus regarding the characteristics of democracy and struggle to classify ambiguous regimes. It was at the end of the 1990s that scholars eventually reckoned that these regimes should be defined in terms other than as imperfect democracies (Diamond, 2002; Schedler, 2002; Levitsky and Way, 2002). The benefit of this new approach was the realization that instead of a wave of mass democratization, the end of the twentieth century had witnessed transformation processes not leading necessarily to democratization. As a result, authoritarian regimes came back into view. However, Linz's positive definition of authoritarianism, which ascribes particular characteristics to authoritarian regimes, is not applied in the contemporary academic literature. Instead, it uses the term by and large as a residual category of all regimes that are neither democratic nor totalitarian. However, when the shift away from "democracies with adjectives" (D. Collier and Levitsky, 1997) occurred, scholars returned to the literature on various types of authoritarianism developed in the 1970s, only to find concepts such as military regime, single-party system and sultanistic regime to be inadequate to describe contemporary regimes. Some have called regimes that are neither democratic nor authoritarian in the typical sense of the two terms *competitive authoritarianism* (Levitsky and Way, 2002) or *anocracies* (Fearon and Laitin, 2003). However, it was the term *hybrid regime* that prevailed (see, in particular Karl, 1995; Diamond, 2002; Wigell, 2008).

The term hybrid regime was, as opposed to a residual category for all non- or imperfect democracies, designed a class of "deliberately, carefully constructed and maintained political systems" (Ottoway, 2003, p.7) fusing formally inconsistent democratic and authoritarian institutional traits. Hybrid regimes are characterized by the co-occurrence of formally democratic institutions, such as competitive elections and a multiparty system, with authoritarian practices of governance. In this apparent synthesis, the authoritarian practices lead to the systematic transformation of the rules otherwise guaranteed in democratic regimes (Schedler, 2002; Levitsky and Way, 2002; Ottoway, 2003). While scholars concede that hybrid regimes are not a novelty *per se* (Diamond, 2002, p.23), others point out that hybrid regimes have flourished in the later stage of the third wave of democratization, making them "the modal type of political regime in the developing world" (Brownlee, 2007, p.25), while again others contend that hybrid regimes have been common since the end of the Second World War (Gandhi, 2008).

Both cases selected for this study qualify as hybrid regimes, although they differ in some regards. Pre-2011 Tunisia was a highly closed authoritarian regime with totalitarian traits that did not tolerate open political opposition. At the same time, however, Tunisia featured democratic institutions. It's electoral code of 1969 stipulates that suffrage is "universal, free, direct and secret." However, the first multi-party parliamentary elections were held only in 1981, resulting in an overwhelming victory for President Bourguiba's party. The dominance of Bourguiba's party was so strong that a law reserving 20 percent of the seats for opposition parties and independent candidates was introduced prior to the 1994 elections. The country has only known two presidents in the last forty years, first the leader of the independence struggle against France, Habib Bourguiba, and second his former Prime Minister, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, who deposed the 84 year-old Bourguiba during a bloodless coup. Tunisia's presidential election was formally established as a multi-candidate race in 1999, but usually produced results above 90 percent for the incumbent, Ben Ali. During the final presidential election under President Ben Ali, the supposed challengers from the legal opposition used their allocated television airtime to openly encourage people to vote for the incumbent.

In Morocco, the enthronement of King Mohamed VI raised hopes for an eventual democratization. The young and modern king, married to a commoner, was called to follow the example of King Juan Carlos, who successfully democratized Spain in the aftermath of Franco's death. While Morocco undertook significant reforms, most notably the 2004 reforms of the Moroccan family code (*Moudawana*), granting women significantly more rights in marriage, as well as the establishment of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission to appraise the so-called *Years of Lead*

marked by state violence against political opponents under his father Hassan II, a genuine democratization did not occur. By mid-2000, the comparison with Spain was repeatedly rejected by the monarch himself, who stated that the two monarchies were not comparable, since Moroccans desire a strong executive role for the monarchy (Brouksy, 2014, p.1). Subsequent reforms of the constitution resulted in Morocco's self-identification as a constitutional monarchy, although the executive and the judiciary are dominated and controlled by the monarchy. Elections are held, but the king is not bound by the vote and chooses the prime minister and the members of the government at will. Thus, Morocco is a typical case of "Upgraded Authoritarianism", which describes the strategy of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world that have consolidated their power by promoting liberal-democratic reforms (Heydemann, 2007).

Thus it becomes clear that while both countries organized multiparty parliamentary elections (and in the case of Tunisia, presidential elections), the adopted democratic procedures did not satisfy even the minimalist Schumpeterian criteria. They fared even worse with characteristics of Dahlian polyarchies, most notably freedom of expression, alternative information and associational autonomy. While Ben Ali acceded to power in 1987 with the slogan "Change", promising economic prosperity and democratization, the window of toleration of dissenting viewpoints rapidly closed again. The Human Rights supporters and Islamists that initially welcomed his coup soon realized that there was a great gulf between Ben Ali's statements and the actual behaviour of his government in a tactical move to sway support from the population and of international donors. Subsequently, a closely knit grid of informants and patronage was used by the governing party to control the general population, and harassment of outright political opponents made sure that they did not pose a threat to the regime. In Morocco, there was a degree of freedom of opinion regarding the performance of the government, and the country was known for its rather liberal press code laws (Kavanaugh, 2004, p. 298). However, while criticizing the government was tolerated, questioning the monarchy, the person of the king, the territorial integrity (notably regarding the issue of Western Sahara), the nation and religion were considered red lines, which could result in prison sentences for journalists and bloggers alike (OpenNet Initiative, 2009, p. 1).

Besides their political systems, Morocco and Tunisia share, like many other countries in the region affected by the 2011 uprisings, similar socio-economic challenges, high growth rates in internet connectivity and sizable migrant communities abroad. The socio-economic and political challenges they face included demographic pressures, corrupt authoritarian regimes, and an educated, un- or underemployed, disaffected youth. The age bracket between the ages of 15 and 24, that is those on the

verge of higher education and the job market, represent one fourth of the region's total population (Assaad and Roudi-Fahimi, 2011). This is also the group that is most likely to adopt new technologies, including the internet, which makes them more likely to engage in cyberactivism. In fact, while other demographic groups – notably women – are quickly catching up, the prototype of the active netizen remains close to how Jonathan Katz described the first users of the Web in 1997: "The Digital Nation constitutes a new social class. Its citizens are young, educated, affluent. [...] The members of the Digital Nation are not representative of the population as a whole: they are richer, better educated, and disproportionately white. They have disposable income and available time " (1997). While reliable numbers on the profile of the average internet user in both countries are scarce, the Arab Social Media Report of 2011 shows that 78 percent and 81 percent of Tunisian and Moroccan Facebook users, respectively, were between the ages of 15 and 29 in December 2010. In terms of the gender breakdown, Tunisia sports 58 percent and Morocco 62 percent males (Mourtada and Salem, 2011, p. 7-9). Falling costs of internet connections (combined with the spread of mobile internet access), and the popular sentiment that the internet and especially Facebook are the main location where news can be found, have resulted in an ever-growing number of internet users in the region.

In fact, the Arab world has seen particularly high growth rates in internet connectivity in the 2000s, featuring rates of 1,500 percent for the region at large from 2000 to 2007, and even relatively poor Morocco climbing up to 15 percent, representing a seven-year growth rate of 4,500 percent (Wheeler, 2010, p. 306). Blogging has also been very popular in the Arab world, with an estimated 25,000 blogs in 2006, despite a rather low internet penetration rate compared to developed countries (Lynch, 2007). Three years later, researchers estimated that there were around 35,000 "active" blogs (Etling et al., 2009). The Arab blogosphere in particular is unique because it is trilingual, using Arabic, English and French. Furthermore, Arabic as a common language has resulted in the creation of a transnational blogger community. Although researchers have found that the blogospheres remain structured as predominantly country-based networks, bloggers increasingly communicate across borders. The common language, coupled with similar grievances related to dictatorship and Internet censorship, has led to the emergence of a transnational activist network. This being said, it must be stressed that the relationship between internet penetration and political mobilization is not a simple one. While a low internet penetration makes mobilization using the internet unlikely, a high internet penetration alone is not a guarantee for mobilization, as the cases in the Gulf region show.

Given that the aforementioned factors are comparable in most states in North Africa, selecting countries from this geographical area will ensure the comparability of the case studies. By proceeding this way, it will be possible to single out key features that differ and could explain the differences of prominence of diaspora engagement in the countries under examination. Finally, among the MENA states, North African states in particular have in common that they maintain sizable migrant communities abroad. Out of these, two cases – Tunisia and Morocco, have been selected – due to a substantial emigrant population living, for the greater part, in Europe. The exact number of Tunisians and Moroccans living abroad varies according to different sources. In fact, they are counted on the one hand by the consular services of their countries of origin and on the other by institutions in the country of residence. While consular statistics seek to capture the whole expatriate population – including second and third generation immigrants – statistics in the country of residence usually only count foreign nationals, resulting in considerably lower numbers (MPC Team, 2013a; MPC Team, 2013b). Given that this thesis explores (amongst others) the online political activities of the different strata of the respective expatriate population, the numbers of the country of origin appear to be more relevant. In the Moroccan and Tunisian cases, it appears that roughly ten percent of their respective populations resides outside the country, with a growing tendency.

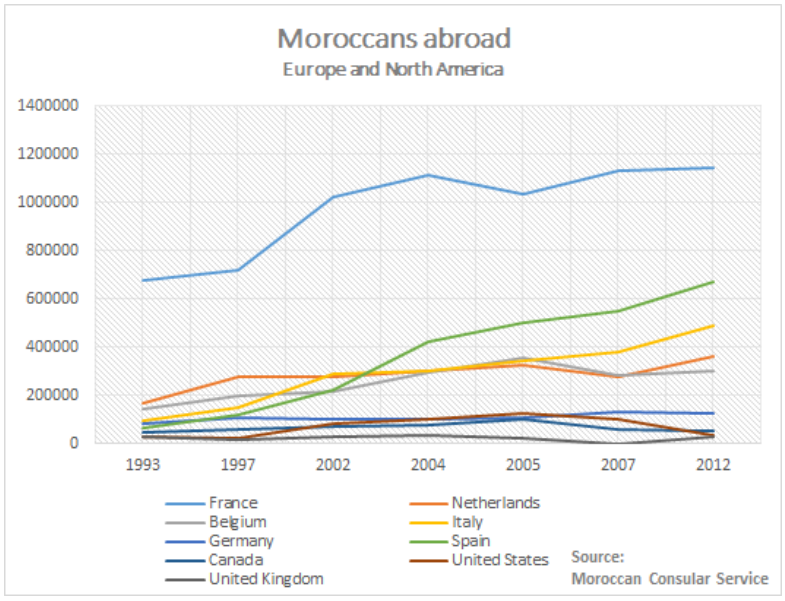

Figure 2.: Number of Moroccans abroad

It must be noted that in the field of Middle East studies, the selection of these two cases in a comparative study was for a long time considered unusual. It was a convention not to compare the authoritarian republics with the usually equally

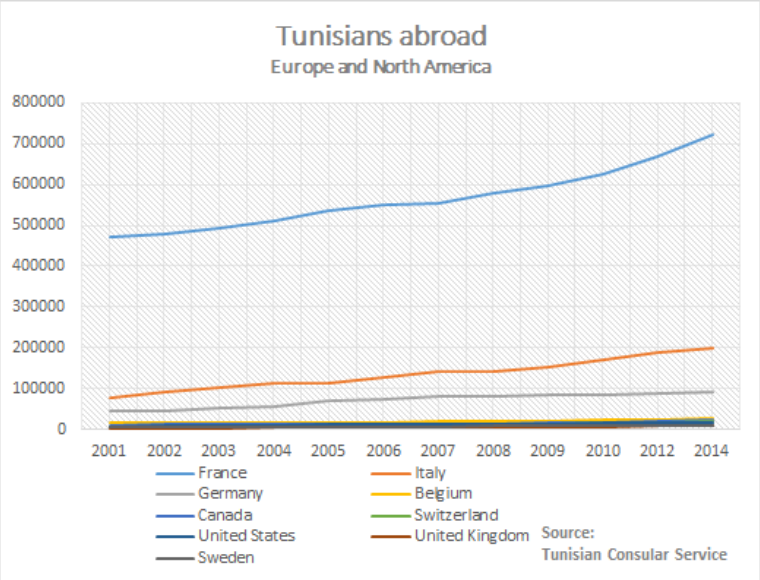

Figure 3.: Number of Tunisians abroad

authoritarian monarchies, because it is assumed that those monarchies possess a legitimacy the republics lack. As we will explored in the chapters to come, the current Alaouite dynasty in Morocco emerged in the seventeenth century and claims direct descent from the Prophet Mohamed. In addition, the king also performs a religious role, as the commander of the faithful in Morocco. Despite these differences, I believe that a comparison of Tunisia and Morocco is useful for this thesis for two reasons. First, while the Arab uprisings provide the backdrop for this thesis, my primary goal is not to explain the causes of success or failure in the Arab Spring, but possible overtures for overseas citizens to partake in political mobilizations in their home countries. Second, the difference in legitimacy of the regime may have an impact on the form that protest takes, but will not necessarily alter the substantive goal of the protesters, which is to overcome the arbitrariness, corruption and lack of freedom of the authoritarian state.

3.3.2 *Tunisia's diasporic community*

The Tunisian blogosphere is particularly relevant. This is because the Arab uprisings were ignited there and, as we will see, bloggers played an important role both in reporting about protests when national mainstream media ignored them, as well as acting as contacts on the ground for international media outlets like *Al Jazeera* (Kallander, 2013, p. 14). In the months following the uprising, the contribution of Nawaat, a collective blog whose founders were based abroad, was recognized

in the form of numerous awards, such as the Reporters Without Borders Netizen Prize, the Index on Censorship Award, as well as the EFF Pioneer Award.

As already observed in figure 3, Tunisia's diasporic community represents approximately one tenth of the country's population; that is, one million migrants living mostly in Europe (France and Italy) compared to a population of roughly ten million living in Tunisia. In 2009, the diaspora in France in comprised roughly 600,000 individuals, or 54.6 percent of the total diaspora, according to the Office of Tunisians Abroad, which includes second and third generation migrants.[4]

The Tunisian diaspora comprises former working migrants that moved to Europe starting from the mid-1960s, embraced by the Tunisian government as a means to alleviate rising unemployment (López García, Planet Contreras, and Ramírez Fernández, 1996, p. 248). Political exiles fleeing political repression represents a second group inside the diaspora. Prominent exiles include the journalists Sihem Bensedrine and Taoufik Ben Brik, the president of the Islamic party Ennahda, Rachid Ghannouchi, human rights activist Moncef Marzouki and many others. Many exiles returned to Tunisia after the revolution to reprise their political activity and stand for election. Tunisians living abroad have been entitled to vote in national elections since 1989, and were called to participate in the first truly democratic election of the country on 23 October 2011, voting for 18 specific representatives in six extraterritorial constituencies in the Constituent Assembly.

Historically, Tunisia's community in France was characterized by strong control through the regime of their country of origin. The Tunisian state entertains an extensive network of consulates in France, with one office for every 11,000 Tunisians, intended mainly to maintain ties with their migrant workers (Gildas, 1979, cited in Brand, 2006). In addition, the "Amicales des Travailleurs Tunisiens" ("Tunisian Workers' Friendship Societies") were created to preserve the ties between emigrants and the home country through sport teams, the celebration of religious festivities and Arabic language courses (Zekri, 2009). Unofficially, the Amicales were tasked to extend the monitoring of the population, as practiced inside Tunisia, to the population abroad. In fact, after the 2011 uprising it was revealed that the former Tunisian Cultural Center in Paris served as the Parisian antenna of the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) party of Ben Ali. Protesters discovered thousands of documents on Tunisians living abroad, including lists of party members

4 It must be noted that migration statistics are contested, due to diverse definitions of who is a migrant and the difficulty of accounting for irregular migration. As such, Tunisian consular records list a higher number of Tunisian abroad than host countries because they include citizens with dual nationality and descendants of migrants. On the other hand, registration with the consulate is neither obligatory nor automatic, and irregular immigrants (who are numerous in Italy) are not allowed to register. Despite this, consular figures are believed to under-estimate the real number of emigrants.

in France, photos and financial documents, information on Tunisian dissidents in exile together with files on French politicians and journalists (Ryan, 2011).

3.3.3 *Morocco's diasporic community*

Following the ouster of the president of Tunisia in January 2011, a series of demonstrations were staged across Morocco by the 20 February Movement. The group used a variety of online tools, including a Facebook page and a YouTube campaign video to mobilize for protests against rising food prices, lack of civil liberties, corruption and a variety of related causes. Contrary to Tunisia, the Moroccan monarchy managed to dissuade growing mobilization by making concessions. On March 9, 2011 – only a few weeks after Ben Ali fled to his Saudi Arabian exile – King Mohammed VI initiated a constitutional reform process, relinquishing some of his powers, and held parliamentary elections in November. The new constitution, confirmed by a referendum in July, makes explicit reference to Moroccans living abroad, protecting their rights as citizens and to participate in Moroccan elections.[5]

Similar to Tunisia, Morocco's community abroad is equal to roughly one tenth of the population, with over three million emigrants on a population of 32 million in Morocco itself in 2012 (see figure 2) At that moment in time, 90.6 percent of Moroccans abroad lived in Europe, mainly in France (28 percent), Spain (17 percent), Italy (12 percent) and the Netherlands (9 percent) and Belgium (7 percent). The country's emigration soared in the 1960s, primarily through bilateral guest worker agreements with European countries such as France, Germany and the Netherlands. After entry limitations were implemented in those countries, Morocco's often irregular migration was redirected towards Spain and Italy since the mid-1980s. Similarly to Tunisia, emigration was perceived as an essential instrument to mitigate pressures on the domestic labor market (Brand, 2006, p. 59).

Besides the growing dependence of the state on emigrant's remittances, the relationship between the Moroccan state and its community abroad was not free of conflict. Europe served as exile for opponents to the monarchy, such as the leftist dissident Mehdi Ben Barka, who was abducted and subsequently 'disappeared' in Paris in 1965. Others were recruited into the struggle as students based in Europe via organizations like the Union Nationale des Etudiants Marocains (UNEM). The growth of an activist student and worker emigrant community coupled with

5 Out-of-country voting was first introduced in 1984 for parliamentary elections, but was abrogated without further explication for the next round in 1993. It was reinstated for the referendum on the amendments of the constitution and for the subsequent parliamentary elections. (Brand, 2014)

a prominent, radical opposition in exile prompted the Moroccan state to increase the monitoring of its citizens abroad. In 1973, Moroccan state security services infiltrated student groups and set up state-sponsored associations, so-called "Amicales des travailleurs et commerçants" ("Workers' and Businessmen's Friendship Societies"), whose number rose to 128 by the early 1990s. Next to serving as liaison offices between the administrations of the two countries and to tie Moroccans abroad to their home country, their goal was to gain a certain control of the community abroad (Brand, 2006, p. 71ff).

3.4 CONCLUSION

In its quest to analyze the dynamics within the online activist communities of Tunisia and Morocco, this thesis employs a combination of digital, qualitative and quantitative methods. The cases were selected due to their similarity in terms of the size of their migrant population coupled with comparable socio-economic and political challenges, which led to social mobilizations in 2011. Digital methods such as webcrawls enable us to trace links between websites and blogs, thereby rendering social ties within the community explicit. Concepts of social network theory such as degree centrality are useful to determine which are the most authoritative actors in a network. A statistical analysis of the relationship between the date of creation of a website or blog and the number of inlinks adds a quantitative layer to the investigation of the blogospheres. Finally, semi-structured interviews with a select number of cyberactivists provide insights on their motives and strategies.

Part II

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

4

MAPPING THE BLOGOSPHERE

This chapter aims at exploring the Tunisian and Moroccan activist blogospheres, tackling the first subquestion of this dissertation, asking for the power structures in the selected online activism sphere and the identification of leading figures. Given that the web crawls of the *e-Diasporas Project* we will use contain also websites of classic diaspora organizations, a first section of the chapter provides a brief overview on the history of Tunisian and Moroccan diaspora activism. As we will see, Tunisian and Moroccan emigration started in the first part of the twentieth century as student and working migration. Overseas communities were initially supportive of the policies of their countries of origin in the first years following independence. However, shortly after these states attempted to extend the control of their population beyond their borders. On the eve of the 2011 uprisings, the Tunisian community abroad was still largely caught in this long-standing authoritarian grip, whereas the Moroccan state had largely diffused conflict there by initiating political reforms and actively courting the Moroccan diaspora. This different relationship between the state and its overseas population also plays out online, as we will see when we analyze the power structures in the web crawls in the second part, attempting to confirm hypothesis 1.1. Whereas the Moroccan state heavily invested in the web to connect to its community abroad, the Tunisian state persisted in its heavy-handed approach, mainly consisting of surveillance. Blogospheres tend to be self-contained communities largely disconnected from institutional and associational websites, in which several actors emerge as authority figures. The visual assessment of the networks will also include a focus on clusterization; that is, whether we can distinguish distinct communities within the greater blogosphere, such as a separate political or diasporic sphere. Finally, we will assess the impact of age and location on the position of blogs in the Tunisian blogosphere in quantitative terms, using linear regressions.

4.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF TUNISIAN AND MOROCCAN MIGRANT ACTIVISM

Given that Tunisian and Moroccan migration to Europe – and especially France – dates to the 1920s, successive waves of workers and students have prompted the creation of a great number of organizations over time. Many of these organizations both from Tunisia and Morocco have a web presence, and as we will see in the course of this chapter, these appear on the web crawls operated by the e-Diasporas Project in between 2010 and 2011. Those appearing in the crawls represent, however, only a fraction of the associational life of both migrant communities. As we will see in this brief section on the history of Tunisian and Moroccan diaspora activism, new groups and objectives evolved with the changing demographics of the emigrant population, whose composition shifted from mainly students to a majority made up of blue-collar workers, to the emergence of a second generation of immigrants. Years of working migration, coupled with the repression of political movements in their home countries and the realization that their presence in Europe was going to be permanent, shifted the main objectives from political activism directed at their home countries towards the fight for more rights in their host societies.

4.1.1 *Student and Working migration*

Starting with Maghrebi organizations such as *L'Etoile Nord Afri-caine* (1926) and the *Association des étudiants musulmans nord-africains* (AEMNA, 1927), the subsequent development of the associational scene mirrors the different phases of Tunisian and Moroccan emigration. In the years prior to their country's independence, Paris emerged as the stage of student political engagement, for Tunisians in particular. They benefited from the fact that they enjoyed greater freedoms to organize in France than in Colonial Tunisia. As such, the newly founded Tunisian student syndicate, l'*UGET* (Union générale des étudiants de Tunisie) held its inaugural congress in Paris. During the years following both countries' independence in 1956, students at home and abroad were highly politicized and enthusiastic about the prospects of development of their countries (Waterbury, 1970, p. 243).

Their enthusiasm and support for the policies of their countries of origin waned, however, in the 1960s. President Bourguiba's policies were met with growing resistance amongst Tunisians studying in Paris, leading to the emergence of leftist groups competing for power inside UGET. In the case of Morocco, King Mohammed V and his successor King Hassan II (from 1961 on) sought to build a constitutional monarchy founded on religious legitimacy, whereas the left party

UNFP aimed at creating a parliamentary monarchy rooted in democratic rules and procedures (Dumont, 2013, p. 158). The ensuing suspension of the 1961 constitution and growing repression of leftist groups after repeated strikes and two coup attempts in the 1970s accelerated the emigration of activists to France. Exiled leaders of the UNFP, together with activists of various political strands then founded (in January 1961) the *Association des Marocains en France*, aiming at supporting the left-wing political parties in Morocco.

In addition to members of the UNFP party, the exodus of leftist students during the so-called Years of Lead was embraced by the Moroccan government as a means to relieve itself of potential agitators (Baroudi, 1978, p. 103-104). In fact, a great number of student militants including the leader of the Marxist-Leninist student organization UNEM (Moroccan Students National Union), Abdelaziz Menehbi, fled to Paris after repression increased following its congress in 1973. Subsequently, associations affiliated with UNEM multiplied in French university cities. In the 1970s, its membership increased to equal that of its French counterpart, UNEF (Geisser, 1997, p. 102), before practically vanishing when it was legalized again in Morocco in 1981. On the other hand, if the departure of leftists was convenient for the Moroccan regime, influential politicians agitating from abroad were not safe from repression, as illustrated by the case of Mehdi Ben Barka, who was abducted and killed in Paris in 1965.[1] Ben Barka's family has remained vocal over the years, calling upon the authorities to shed light on the events and organizing a vigil in Paris every year on the anniversary of his disappearance (Tual and Boucreux, 2015). However, even fifty years after his death, this subject remains a societal taboo.[2]

In addition to student emigration, post-independence Tunisia and Morocco saw economic migration of low skilled workers as a way to alleviate pressures on the domestic labor market. Emigration was seen as the solution to excess labor supply and poverty, thereby preserving political stability. To this effect, both countries concluded bilateral labor conventions with several European countries starting in 1963, when Morocco signed within days conventions with France and Germany, and Tunisia with France later that year. In addition, Morocco signed labor conventions with Belgium (1964) and the Netherlands (1969).[3] In addition to France,

1 The exact circumstances of the disappearance of Ben Barka have never been established. It is thought that this major figure in the Third World movement was assassinated by the Moroccan secret service, with the help and knowledge of other secret services.

2 The art installation *Face au silence* about Ben Barka by artist Mounir Fatmi shown since 2014 at the Museum Mohammed VI of Modern and Contemporary Art might indicate a slow change in the monarchy's approach to the matter.

3 With the end of Europe's "open door" immigration policy after 1973, the kingdom also signed a series of agreements with Arab states, but Moroccan emigration to these states never reached a substantial size.

Tunisia signed agreements with Germany (1965), as well as with Belgium (1969), the Netherlands (1971), Italy (1984) and Libya (1971). In their development plans, Tunisian governments considered temporary jobs abroad equivalent to domestic employment (Brand, 2006, p. 94). As a consequence of these agreements, emigrant workers quickly outnumbered students. Their first encounters with the Tunisian community abroad were often with informal networks based on primordial ties such as to their village of origin or family relations (Dridi, 2013). Subsequently, students, especially Moroccans, sought to mobilize workers, notably after the left was effectively repressed in Morocco after 1973, and remained primarily active in Europe (Dumont, 2013, p. 159). After involvement in a series of car industry and miners' strikes, the Association of Moroccans in France (Association des Marocains en France (AMF)) firmly established itself as a migrant workers' organization, fighting for the equality of French and immigrant workers, morphing into the Moroccan Workers Association in France (Association des Travailleurs Marocains en France (ATMF)) in January 1982. The growing emigrant population, coupled with repression of the left and the student movement induced the creation of initiatives of solidarity and later organizations of support, bringing together political exiles, students and immigrant workers.

4.1.2 *State control beyond borders*

In the face of continued anti-regime activity among the communities abroad, both Tunisia and Morocco developed strategies to control their citizens living abroad. In the Tunisian case, first so-called *Amicales* or *Widdadiyyat* ("friendship societies"), inspired by the Algerian model, were created between 1956 and 1960 in Paris, Lyon, Marseille and Nice. These associations, residing either inside consulate buildings or offices otherwise rented or bought by the state (Gildas, 1979, cited in Brand, 2006), were officially created to preserve the ties between emigrants and the home country through sport teams, the celebration of religious festivities and Arabic language courses (Zekri, 2009). As Geisser points out, the main mission of the Tunisian Amicales was to maintain the myth of return and combat "disastrous" political, associational and syndicalist influences (Geisser, 2012, p. 160). Here, allegiance to the country of origin implied allegiance to the regime and party in power – at first Bourguiba's Socialist Destourian Party and later Ben Ali's Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD). The Amicales, whose presidents were chosen directly by the party, extended the monitoring of the population as practiced inside Tunisia to the population abroad. In the case of Morocco, 1973 was the watershed for the country's relationship with its community abroad. Its persistent activism, coupled

with the fact that even after the disappearance of Ben Barka, other major opposition figures were still based in Europe – who used their resources to support an insurgence in several Moroccan regions (Brand, 2006, p. 70) – highlighted the need for increased control. This was achieved through the penetration of Moroccan student groups by informers, on the one hand, and on the other by the creation of an extensive network of Amicales. This move was welcomed by French industrials to bring the syndicalist activities of Moroccan workers to a halt. By the early 1990s the federation of Moroccan Amicales counted 128 associations in France alone (Brand, 2006, p. 71). Activists identified by consular authorities were arrested on their return to Morocco (Lacroix and Dumont, 2012, p. 3).

4.1.3 *New objectives - the second generation*

The ban on recruitment of foreign labor in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis and relatively liberal family reunion policies reshaped associational life for Tunisian and Moroccan communities in Europe. In the early 1980s, a European-born second generation of Maghrebi claimed their right to define and embrace their identity and their right to be different from the social majority. With a return to the country of origin becoming increasingly improbable, the second generation and their parents living in the disenfranchised suburbs of the big cities turned towards Islam as a vehicle for identity (Kepel, 1991). A new kind of migrant association rose to prominence, answering the call for a new identity, such as the UOIF (Union des associations islamiques en France - Union of Islamic associations in France), in which Tunisians close to the Islamic movement Ennahda played a particularly important role (Rogler, 2014, p.55). Due to their focus on Islam as an identity that transcended community borders, the Islamic organizations were more inward-looking and did not engage in political action directed at a particular country. Instead, in the words of Abdelaziz Chaambi, one of the most prominent figures of the Islamic movement, young Maghrebis aimed to distance themselves from the religious practices of their parents – cutting the umbilical cord linking them with their countries of origin – and to embrace a new Islamic identity transcending nationality (CRI France, 2011).

In the context of this awakening of the second generation of the so-called Beur movement, the political activism of former students permanently settled in France shifted from the struggle against the regimes in their home countries towards immigrant rights in France, such as the fight for recognition of undocumented migrants, campaigns against racism and marginalization, and battles around questions of citizenship (Geisser, 2012, p. 166). This redirected activism was further boosted by the electoral victory of the French Socialist Party under Mitterrand, which imple-

mented public policies addressing many grievances of immigrants and abrogated the 1939 law on foreign associations. This gave a new impetus to immigrant associational life, leading to the creation of ATF (Association des Tunisiens en France) in 1982, congregating several local organizations in other regions of France. This adjusted focus from the immigrant workers' cause towards broader issues such as citizenship is reflected in the renaming of the first proper Tunisian immigrant organization, founded in 1974 as the *Union des Travailleurs Immigrés Tunisiens*, which was twenty years later to become the *Fédération des Tunisiens pour une Citoyenneté des deux Rives*. Finally, the composition and destinations of both the Tunisian and the Moroccan immigrant community at large diversified, with a growing number of students attending France's esteemed "Grandes Ecoles" and migrants going as far as the USA and Canada, leading to the creation of local as well as professional associations there. In addition, formerly labor-exporting countries like Italy and Spain have attracted important irregular immigration flows from Maghreb countries.

Meanwhile, the receiving states – most notably France – were keen to entertain good relations with both the Moroccan and the Tunisian regimes. Especially France, which has deeply rooted economic, political and cultural ties due to its historical bond with the Maghreb, pursued a policy of non-intervention at least until the 1990s (Daguzan, 2002). With regards to Morocco, this attitude of non-interference gradually changed in the 1990s, notably after Gilles Perrault's *Notre ami le Roi*, revealed the Moroccan monarchy's disregard for human rights and democratic processes and denounced the complicity of French elites in promoting sanitized images of what was in practice a corrupt and repressive country (Perrault, 1990). Similarly, in 1999 journalists Jean-Pierre Tuquoi and Nicolas Beau published *Notre ami Ben Ali* about Tunisia, mirroring Perrault's criticism of the French elite's leniency towards King Hassan II. The publication of the book coincided with the implausible 99.4 percent victory of Ben Ali during Tunisian presidential elections, leading to the deterioration of the relationship between the two countries, which culminated in 2001 when political relations were temporarily frozen (Daguzan, 2002, p.139). The book, the obviously fraudulent elections and the hunger strike of journalist Taoufik Ben Brik in April 2000 have been credited with the revival of interest in Tunisia by the general public and the reactivation of civil society in Tunisia and abroad (Ravenel and Lamloum, 2002, p.249-251).

4.1.4 *'Controlling' or 'courting' - The situation at the eve of the 2010-2011 uprisings*

As we have seen in this section, in both cases, migrants engaged politically following similar trajectories. As the case of Ben Barka attests, the relationship of the Moroccan state with its overseas population was at times more confrontational than Tunisia's. During the 1990s, however, the state's grip on civil society loosened. After Morocco's poor human rights record was increasingly criticized by the international community, Hassan II initiated a series of reforms, amongst which was a general amnesty allowing exiled leftist dissidents to return. These reforms culminated in the appointment of Abderrahmane Youssoufi, a leftist exiled in France for fifteen years, as prime minister of a left-center government in 1998. Despite these advances, the reforms remained limited and while the fear of the left faded, the civil war in bordering Algeria turned Islamists into the prime target of state repression, analogous to Ben Ali's policies in Tunisia. In addition to internal reforms, the state reformed its approach towards its citizens abroad, which shifted from 'controlling' towards 'courting' (Haas, 2007). Acknowledging the permanent nature of their settlement abroad while at the same time claiming their continued Moroccan identity, the government changed the official denomination from "Travailleurs Marocains de l'Etranger" (TME, Moroccan workers abroad) to "Résidents marocains à l'Etranger" (RME, Moroccans residing abroad). Actually, in line with the country's wish to preserve its connection with the diaspora, the 2007 reform of its citizenship code extended the right to transmit their nationality to Moroccan women through *ius sanguinis* (Perrin, 2011, p. 12). In addition, Moroccan citizenship is intertwined with the religious belonging and the presumed perpetual allegiance to the King, who is also the religious leader of the country. Thus, while the law formally recognizes the possibility to renounce Moroccan citizenship passed on by blood, it is in fact nearly impossible to do so, which occasionally has put Morocco at odds with countries with significant Moroccan immigrant communities, notably the Netherlands (Qattab, 2008).

Besides reasons linked to Morocco's history and culture, there are monetary incentives to cultivate the relationship with its diaspora. For one, Moroccans living abroad are one of the country's principal sources of foreign currency through remittances, which amounted to nine percent of the country's GDP in 2010 (Tchounand, 2012). The process of courting the diaspora was already initiated under King Hassan II, with the creation of the Hassan II Foundation for Moroccans Residing Abroad, as well as the Ministry in Charge of Moroccans Living Abroad in 1990, deemed to offer support to non-residents while in Morocco and promoting development projects involving Moroccans living abroad. These deliberate policies

were continued by his successor King Muhammad VI, who created the Council for the Moroccan Community Abroad, a consultative body meant to represent the interests of Moroccans living abroad in government policy, in 2007. This changed approach of the Moroccan state with regards to its diaspora went hand in hand with the abandonment of the surveillance via the Amicales (Schüttler, 2008, p. 4). It also coincided with a shift of diaspora engagement from civic and socio-cultural organizations towards development organizations directed at migrants' hometowns (Lacroix and Dumont, 2012, p. 6). These appeals for developmental help by the Moroccan state were met with growing concerns about the absence of the right to vote and of parliamentary representation of the diaspora, voiced during the first campaign on the occasion of the 2002 parliamentary elections. Despite repeated promises, however, the authorities did not make provision for out-of-country voting until July 2011, when the reformed constitution was adopted in reaction to the Arab Uprisings.[4] On the eve of the Arab Uprisings, the chilling effects of government surveillance had waned, however, the emigrants' energy had largely been channeled into development efforts.

As for Tunisia, on the eve of the uprisings in December 2010, the diaspora was largely disaffected. After a wave of enthusiasm during the first years after Ben Ali's take-over in 1987, a rejuvenated Amicales reinstated surveillance of the diaspora community, thereby effectively smothering political activism directed at Tunisia, especially of French-Tunisians. Although the second generation recognized the plight of the political exiles and their status as victims of the regime, they did not recognize themselves in their cause (Geisser, 2012, p. 169). Furthermore, fear of retaliation against their families in Tunisia is mentioned as a reason for inaction (Geisser, 2012, p. 163). This fear was justified, given that after the uprisings in 2011, it was revealed that the "Rassemblement des Tunisiens en France," officially a Tunisian cultural center in Paris, was in fact the headquarters of the RCD in France. After the building was stormed by activists, thousands of documents including photos, financial records, lists of RCD members in France, information on members of the Tunisian opposition, as well as files on French politicians and journalists, were uncovered (Ryan, 2011). Nevertheless, rumors about the abuses of the family in power circulated in the diaspora analogous to Tunisia itself. These stories were substantiated by books written by French journalists like "Notre Ami Ben Ali" or the 2009 "La régente de Carthage"[5], forbidden in Tunisia, and later by the Wikileaks cables published prominently by the website Nawaat in November 2010,

4 At the time of writing in 2015, out-of-country voting has yet to be implemented.

5 Nicolas Beau published the former together with Jean-Pierre Tuquoi and the latter with Catherine Graciet.

causing the gradual delegitimation and demystification of the regime. Therefore, even though only a few notorious leftists in exile continued to protest publicly, a greater part of the diaspora did not believe the regime's claims that the protests in the south of Tunisia were the doings of terrorists and Islamists, and came out to demonstrate in solidarity with the movement. In the aftermath of the revolution, the number of associations exploded, however at the time of writing their number and activities remain to be explored. There are indications that contrary to the past, when Tunisian associations were either in direct opposition to the regime of Ben Ali or affiliated to it, like the Amicales, these new associations emphasize their political independence or even label themselves explicitly as "apolitical", even though their activities revolve around politics (Khamira, 2013).

As we have seen, due to a long history of Tunisian and Moroccan emigration, a plethora of associations of both diaspora communities developed, the majority of which are based in France. According to figures of the Office of Tunisians Abroad (Office des Tunisiens à l'Etranger - OTE), in 2011, there were 154 associations of Tunisians abroad. Of these, 65 were in France, 25 in Italy, 16 in Belgium, 13 in Canada, 8 in Germany, 8 in Switzerland and 7 in Austria OTE/DIRP, 2011.[6] In the case of Morocco, Lacroix and Dumont identify 1605 associations in the French online database of associations, the online *Journal Officiel*. However, a mere 13 of those are listed as "political,' concerned with homeland issues such as Morocco's Western Sahara policy, the country's democratization process or are branches of political parties (Lacroix and Dumont, 2012, p. 4). Even though these numbers necessitate further scrutiny, they make clear that any online political engagement by the overseas population did not develop in a vacuum, but against a backdrop of associational life and surveillance by the country of origin. As we will see in the following section, some of those organizations maintained an online presence, a presence that appears in the web crawls under analysis. However, their interaction with their respective blogosphere varies.

4.2 ANALYSING WEB CRAWLS

Web crawls – that is, maps created by a computer program by following the links connecting one page to the other – can be analyzed using the concepts and tools of social network analysis. There are two kind of linking patterns that are particularly relevant in the analysis of the respective blogospheres in our quest to identify

6 These numbers are to be taken with caution. First, they do not necessarily include all the associations created in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising. Second, they only include the associations recognized by the Tunisian government.

clusterization and leading figures. Nodes emitting and attracting a high number of links are called hubs. An increasing number of hubs leads to a better connectivity of a network, decreasing the distances between the nodes. Clusterization can be identified in the visual representations of the network. In addition, crawls of networks of websites and blogs are characterized by directed connections, meaning that it is possible to distinguish between incoming and outgoing links. The practice of linking to other websites is most prevalent amongst blogs, where the inclusion of a blog into a blogroll can be considered as a recognition of interest. Thus, the number of incoming links a website receives is particularly noteworthy, since it can be interpreted as an authority within the network, similar to frequently cited authors in the academic world. In this context, nodes with a high number of incoming links are an indicator for an authoritative leadership role.

Unfortunately, the crawls used in this study, created by the *e-Diasporas Project*, have several shortcomings, most notably that they did not follow exactly the same methodology in their creation. In fact, the Moroccan case was one of the project's trial studies, therefore its data collection preceded the others, ranging from late 2009 and until May 2010, when the later uprisings were incalculable (Marchandise and Renault, 2011, p. 40). The crawl was updated in July 2011, thus at a moment when the mobilization in Morocco was already beginning to slow down, given that the reformed constitution was confirmed by referendum on 1 July. The primary focus of the first crawl is the investigation of the topology of the Moroccan diaspora online and less the relationship between the diaspora and the blogosphere of the homeland. Therefore, the initial set of websites were selected either because their operators were migrants or because they referred to Moroccan migration as a topic. The follow-up in July 2011 does not add any new nodes, but it updates the links between them, which has some repercussions on the roles of certain actors, but the general patterns remain unchanged. This focus on migration resulted in the under-representation of the blogosphere in the network. Thus, the Moroccan crawl does not lend itself to a conclusive analysis of the Moroccan blogosphere, however, Diminescu and Renault's (2011) data still provides an interesting basis for the study of the relationship between Moroccan state institutions and diaspora associations with bloggers.

The crawl available for Tunisia, on the other hand, was created after the 2011 uprisings, which influenced its focus on the connections and roles taken by migrants in relation to the political blogosphere of their country of origin. While it still focuses on the online presence of the diaspora, it takes political activism as a starting point. As we have established in the previous chapter on research methods and design, the choice of starting points determines the outcome and ac-

curacy of a network crawl. In this particular case, the investigator Teresa Graziano (2012) used a series of keywords in a search engine to find websites operated by Tunisians dealing with political affairs, between April 2011 and July 2011. Using the semi-automatic web crawler Navicrawler and two subsequent automatic crawls, she constructed a corpus of websites highlighting the connections between the Tunisian diaspora and the homeland in terms of political activism.

4.2.1 *Tunisia - Overall structure*

The Tunisian network, as provided on the website of the *e-Diasporas Project*, originally comprised 162 nodes connected by 1039 links. The crawl was subsequently modified by the removal of a number of nodes as well as the merge of duplicates. As such, the blog aggregators `tn-blogs.com`, `tuniblogs.com` and `tn-bloggers.com` were removed, because they increase the connectivity of the network by design through linking to the majority of blogs. Furthermore, a website of a German journalist `sarah-mersch.de` was removed. Finally, due to recurrent censorship, a number of bloggers created duplicates of their websites to ensure their websites were accessible from inside Tunisia. For my analysis, these duplicates were merged, resulting in a final network of 154 nodes and 854 edges. Several attributes have been added to the dataset by Graziano, most importantly the geographical location of the websites. This coding was by and large reliable, however, some locations had to be adjusted (for details on changes in the dataset, see the Appendix).

The Tunisian network consists of a large cluster of connected websites surrounded by a number of isolates; that is, nodes that do not receive or emit any links. Isolates make up 18 percent of the network. As we see in table 1, the average degree – that is, the average number of in-links and out-links – is 5.5. The average path length between any two nodes is 3. Density in social network analysis denotes "the extent to which links that could possibly exist among persons do in fact exist" (Mitchell, 1969, p. 18).

For this graph, the density amounts to 3.6 percent. This is a rather sparse density. However, it must be kept in mind that this is a directed network. A directed network will have half the density of its undirected equivalent, because there are twice as many possible connections, given that we count both inlinks and outlinks. Without the iso-

Table 1.: Descriptive statistics

	Tunisia 2011
Share of blogs	70.8%
Average degree	5.5
Av. path length	3.0
Density	3.6 %
Diameter	9
Number of nodes	154
Edges	854

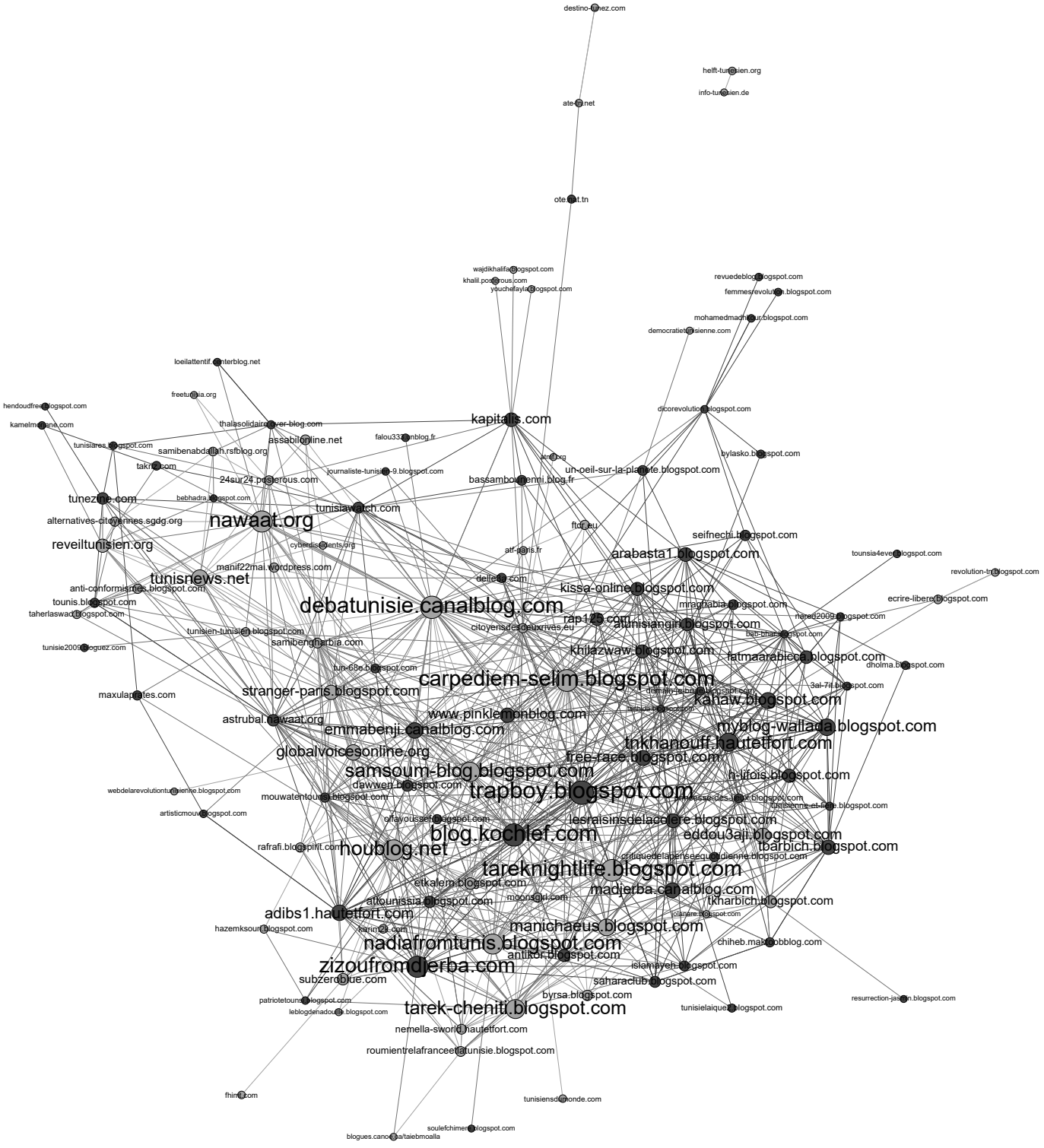

Figure 4.: Tunisian e-diaspora in 2011, light nodes located abroad, dark in Tunisia (based on Graziano, 2011)

lates, the average degree rises to 6.8 and
the graph density to 5.4 percent. Of all
154 nodes, blogs constitute 70.8 percent, whereas roughly 20 percent are websites of institutions and media organizations. The remainder consist of a few collective blogs (amongst which are campaign websites), portals and forums. The diameter denotes the longest of all the shortest (geodesic) paths between any two actors in the network. Given that the networks under study are directed, the shortest paths can only use the paths when they follow the right direction, which leads to a lot of dead ends. Thus, the diameter of this network is 9.

Throughout the network, bloggers based abroad are overrepresented among the nodes receiving the greatest number of inlinks, which we use as a proxy for authority in the network. As we see in table 2, among the top 16 websites in the network, corresponding to the top ten percent of nodes, two thirds (11 out of 16) are based abroad, even though 58 percent of all nodes are located in Tunisia. Out of these, a number of nodes capture our attention, because they are either a hub, an authority or both. Four of them are located at the center of the blog cluster, namely `trapboy.blogspot.com` (29 inbound edges, 20 outbound edges), `blog.kochlef.com` (27 inbound edges, 9 outbound edges), `carpediem-selim.blogspot.com` (26 inbound edges, 42 outbound edges), and `tareknightlife.blogspot.com` (26 inbound edges, 27 outbound edges). These blogs represent the mainstream Tunisian blogosphere, which tend to be cautious in their approach to politics. Big Trap Boy, the most important authority node in the network, started blogging in 2006 and is widely recognized among Tunisian bloggers for his rich and witty writing style. While preferring a cautious approach – avoiding direct indictments of President Ben Ali – his fame among Tunisian bloggers is striking, leading some to grand statements such as "Big Trap Boy is among the best writers in Arabic. I am sure that he was politically more influential than established figures of the opposition, maybe even more than Ennahda" (Arabasta, personal communication, 7 July 2014).

It is important to note that while Big Trap Boy is the most prominent node in the network, there are a number of other nodes that are comparable in influence. Kochlef, who started blogging in 2005, comes a close second with 27 inlinks, making him another authority in the network. Carpe Diem, on the other hand, is a hub, increasing the connectivity of the network as a whole by connecting to a large number of websites. Tareknightlife, on the other hand, is both an authority and a small hub at the same time. The quartet is complemented by the node `zizoufromdjerba.com` (25 inbound edges and 6 outbound edges) in the lower part of the graph, which is an authority node in this part of the graph. Maybe the obvious sign of his influence on his fellow bloggers is that one blogger chose to mimic

Table 2.: Most important nodes - Tunisia 2011

	In-degree	Out-degree	Degree	Country
trapboy.blogspot.com	29	20	49	Tunisia
debatunisie.canalblog.com	27	26	53	France
blog.kochlef.com	27	9	36	Canada
carpediem-selim.blogspot.com	26	42	68	France
tareknightlife.blogspot.com	26	27	53	USA
zizoufromdjerba.com	25	6	31	Tunisia
nawaat.org	25	1	26	Netherlands
houblog.net	24	7	31	Canada
nadiafromtunis.blogspot.com	24	16	40	France
samsoum-blog.blogspot.com	22	12	34	USA
tarek-cheniti.blogspot.com	21	2	23	UK
tnkhanouff.hautetfort.com	20	9	29	Tunisia
manichaeus.blogspot.com	17	16	33	France
myblog-wallada.blogspot.com	17	3	20	Tunisia
kahaw.blogspot.com	16	11	27	Tunisia
tunisnews.net	16	3	19	Sweden

the title of his blog by naming hers "Nadia from Tunis" (Nadia A., personal communication, 1 November 2015). Of these five most important bloggers, three were living abroad before the uprisings, although it must be said that Kochlef moved to Canada in November 2010, just weeks before the uprisings started.

Finally, there is a subcluster on the upper left, which is composed of the most activist blogs and websites. In this subcluster, `nawaat.org`, on the upper left, is an authority node (25 inbound edges, 1 outbound edge). On the right hand of this node, there are also websites such as `tunezine.com`, `reveiltunisien.org`, `takriz.com` and `tunisnews.net`, which were the pioneers of the Tunisian political web in the pre-blog era in the early 2000s. Takriz, TUNeZINE and RéveilTunisien were among the first political websites tackling taboo topics such as religion, sex, human rights, and freedom of expression. Takriz (Tunisian for "fed up") was set up in 1998 as a mailing list before turning into a forum in January 2000, which was characterized by crude humor and satire. Its spinoff TUNeZINE, launched by former Takriz member Zouhair Yahyaoui in July 2001, was a more genuinely political forum going beyond the mocking tone of the former, were caricatures of the president circulated and the regime's newspeak as ridiculed. RéveilTunisien, in turn, was created in 2002 as an online journal complementing TUNeZINE's forums. Finally, `tunisnews.net`, founded in 2000 by Tunisian refugees of the persecuted Islamist Ennahda movement in Sweden, acted as an alternative news outlet where opposi-

tional parties and associations would publish articles and editorials. Finally, there is tunisiawatch.com, the blog of the dissident judge Mokhtar Yahyaoui (the uncle of Zouhair Yahyaoui), who would publish texts denouncing the corruption of the judiciary before he was forced from his job after publishing an open letter to President Ben Ali and put under surveillance. Today, some of these pioneer websites are still online, while others have been abandoned. As the above makes clear, the first political websites in Tunisia were largely intertwined and all were in some degree supported by contributors living abroad. However, their target audience went beyond the diaspora and explicitly aimed at engaging in a conversation involving Tunisians at large.

Nawaat itself was founded in 2004 by a small group of cyberactivists whose blogs samibengharbia.com, astrubal.nawaat.org and stranger-paris.blogspot.com[7] are found in the lower part of the subcluster. This group of activists was characterized by a degree of technical sophistication and overall perseverance at a time when the broader blogosphere largely refused to engage in political discourse, let alone action. It is important to highlight that while Nawaat is the authority node, it is the personal blogs of its contributors that contribute to the connection of the activist subcluster to the broader blogosphere. This indicates that bloggers prefer to link to individual blogs rather than to websites engaged in activism, even if the latter are managed by the very same people. This bridge function of the individual blogs of activists is also performed by the caricaturist -Z- blogging on debatunisie.canalblog.com in the upper left corner of the graph. With 27 inbound edges and 26 outbound edges, it ranks second in terms of authority in the overall graph and serves as a hub as well. The quality of -Z-'s powerful, political and occasionally crude drawings was thus recognized by both the activist and the general blogosphere. This is most likely because he took up the symbolism that emerged among more cautious bloggers to talk about the regime and used it to great effect in his caricatures.

This bridge function of debatunisie.canalblog.com is best exemplified with the node manif22mai.wordpress.com. It is one of a number of websites created uniquely for political campaigns, together with the isolate freearabicca.wordpress.com. As we will see in later chapters, "une manifestation réelle pour une liberté virtuelle" ("a real protest for a virtual freedom") in May 2010 resulted from the eventual synthesis of the activist and the broader blogosphere. The bridge position taken by -Z- indicates that his active participation in the protest might have played a role in the mobilization of other bloggers. More generally, the existence of campaign websites in the network are palpable evidence that Tunisians used the

7 Malek Khadraoui joined the Nawaat team only in 2006.

internet as a resource to protest online, and this, using a variety of tools available to them. The node `freearabicca.wordpress.com` was used as a website to publish calls for the release of a blogger in 2009 (Fatma Arrabicca, whose blog appears in the right side of the overall cluster), in what can be classified as *Online Participation*. The node `manif22mai.wordpress.com`, on the other hand, served as a tool of *Online Facilitation of Offline Activism* by providing information for a demonstration in real life for the end of internet censorship (Earl, Kimport, et al., 2010). It is important to underline that these campaign websites appeared well before the 2011 uprisings. In addition, other campaign websites calling for the fight for freedom of expression were created in prior years, even if they do not appear in the graphs analyzed here (Jansen, 2010).

In addition to the blogs and websites I identified as the authorities of this network, the network hosts a number of isolates, i.e. nodes which are not connected to others. In order to make the network more legible, they have been omitted in the graph. In her paper, Graziano points out that the majority of these nodes are websites of institutions such as the Tunisian embassies in London and Paris, but also of associations like *Tunisiens de Belgique*, *Association d'Amitié Tunisie Canada* or *Asociación de Tunecinos en España*. Their position at the periphery of the graph bears witness to the fact that institutions and formal organizations often keep websites qualifying as *brochureware*; that is, a generally static website with information on the organization (Earl, Kimport, et al., 2010). They are representative of one-way communication without offering their audience opportunities to engage with the organization online. However, Graziano fails to point out two exceptions to this rule, namely the websites of the *Association des Tunisiens en France de Paris (ATF)* `atf-paris.fr` and *Fédération des Tunisiens pour une Citoyenneté des deux Rives* (FTCR) `www.citoyensdesdeuxrives.eu`. These exceptions are notable given that ATF, the oldest Tunisian migrant organization, established its website in 2007, using it to share reports of past events and announcements of future ones, as well as press releases on issues of concern. While it still largely qualifies as a brochureware website, the link section provided hyperlinks to migration-related organizations, media outlets and citizen media websites. Under the section "Solidarité", news on political movements in a growing number of countries is listed, with the latest news also appearing on the main page. Reflecting the prior disaffection of the community with politics in the home country, the first political conflict mentioned in this rubric in February 2007 was not the political situation in Tunisia, but an article on Palestine. Politics in Tunisia was covered only months later on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Ben Ali coming to power. Subsequently, the website serves mainly as an information hub on current events like the uprising in the mine basin

of Gafsa in 2008, amongst others through republished, critical articles by Florence Beaugé, a correspondent for the newspaper Le Monde. In addition, it served as a showcase of the association to the outside, offering few ways to engage directly online, with the exception of a comment function, which was, however, seldom used. Conspicuously sparse are links to the blogosphere, although a visit of the website via the Wayback Machine reveals that post by portals like Nawaat were occasionally republished. In the *e-Diasporas Project* crawl, however, the ATF receives a mere two inlinks from `houblog.org` and `carpediem-selim.blogspot.com`, and it sends a unique link to the remainder of the corpus, that is to the website of the *Fédération des Tunisiens pour une Citoyenneté des deux Rives*.

In contrast to ATF, the website of the FTCR, created in 2009, is well connected to the main cluster, sending out a total of 34 links to other websites, ranking third among the websites in terms of out-degree (behind `carpediem-selim.blogspot.com` (42) and `samibengharbia.com` (35)). The majority of these links point towards blogs, although this is not because articles of the blogosphere are being discussed prominently on its main page. The website's focus, similarly to ATF, lies on announcements of events such as solidarity protests, press releases calling for action, as well as news on migration politics in France and events in the home country. The links to the blogosphere appear to originate from a dedicated section with the title "La planète blogs," listing a number of Tunisian blogs on the right frame of the website, analogous to a similar section on the Tunisian press. This list is not exhaustive and the mechanisms and criteria leading to the inclusion of a blog on the aforementioned list are unclear. The section appeared after a re-design of the website was launched in 2009. Before this restructuration, blogs such as Tunezine and Nawaat were mentioned on a list with links to Tunisian websites, itself a subcategory of a page dedicated to weblinks. Accessing this list necessitated two clicks, hence blogs were much less visible on the association's website. In addition to these links, however, the association occasionally took up news stories from blogs. For example, the Wayback machine reveals that the website republished an article from Nawaat on a scandal involving the theft of yachts by a member of the President's family, explicitly noting *seen on "Nawaat"* (vu sur "Nawaat") in February 2010 (FTCR, 2010). The mention of the name of the blog in the title also indicates that Nawaat was, at that moment, considered to be known to the FTCR public. Also, a query of the website's search function reveals that FTCR took notice of a protest against internet censorship on 22 May 2010, without calling for participation in the solidarity protest in front of the embassy of Tunisia in Paris, however. Compared to the high number of links going out to the blogosphere, the number of incoming hyperlinks is relatively small. Only four websites link to *Citoyens*

des deux Rives, in addition to the aforementioned ATF link, there are two blogs (`tnkhanouff.hautetfort.com` and `lesraisinsdelacolere.blogspot.com`) and the *Association des Travailleurs Maghrébins de France*.

4.2.2 *Morocco - Overall structure*

The Moroccan network, as created in 2010, features originally 156 nodes and 397 edges. A few nodes were removed before the analysis because their activity does not conform to the boundaries set for my study. Contrary to the Tunisian crawl, the nodes removed were not connected to the network, thus while the total drops to 152 nodes, the number of edges remains unchanged at 397.

Table 3.: Descriptive statistics

	Morocco 2010	**Morocco 2011**
Share of blogs	30.9%	30.9%
Average degree	2.6	3.2
Av. path length	3.2	3.5
Density	1.7 %	2.1 %
Diameter	8	9
Number of nodes	152	152
Edges	397	481

The main difference between the Tunisian and the Moroccan network – namely, that the Moroccan is polycentric whereas the Tunisian is a rather dense cluster – is obvious at first glance. This is partly the result of the focus on websites dedicated to the diaspora, as decided by Diminescu and Renault, which is reflected by the ratio of blogs in the network, amounting to nearly 31 percent, whereas 33 percent of the nodes are categorized as websites of associations, 14 percent as institutional and 13 percent as community forums. The remainder of nodes are composed of media, cultural and business websites. As we see in table 3, the average degree of the nodes in the graph (i.e. the average number of the sum of incoming and outgoing links of each node) is 2.6, which is considerably smaller than the 5.5 we saw in the Tunisian case, indicating a much sparser network. This is confirmed by the density metric, which at 1.7 is half the density we found in Tunisia (3.6). The diameter of the network, with 8, is slightly smaller than that of the Tunisian network, indicating that the Moroccan network is somewhat more compact.

As we see in the graphical representation of the network in figure 5, the cluster of the Moroccan blogosphere – or Blogoma – is relatively contained, linking primarily to itself with few exceptions. However, this is a feature of blogospheres in general and not specific of the ones under study here. The most important node

Table 4.: Most important nodes - Morocco May 2010

	In-degree	Out-degree	Degree	Country
larbi.org	24	10	34	France
yabiladi.com	17	2	19	Morocco
www.marocainsdumonde.gov.ma	16	9	25	Morocco
alwatan.ma	12	0	12	Morocco
bladi.net	12	0	12	Morocco
moroccoboard.com	11	17	28	USA
louladekhmissbatata.wordpress.com	10	12	22	Canada
lemythe.com	10	1	11	France
www.eatbees.com/blog	9	18	27	Morocco
lailalalami.com	9	4	13	USA
labelash.blogspot.com	8	11	19	Spain
blogreda.blogspot.com	8	10	18	Morocco
monagora.fr	8	0	8	France
cabalamuse.wordpress.com	7	12	19	other
murmures.net	6	15	21	Canada
wafin.com	6	8	14	USA
Average degree: 2.6				

of the network is `larbi.org`, a blog located in France created in October 2004, to which most of the other blogs link. With an in-degree of 24 and an out-degree of 10, it can be considered the main authority of the graph. Larbi's inlinks almost exclusively stem from other blogs. In fact, out of a total of 46 other blogs, more than half (24) emit an outlink to Larbi, attesting to his influence within the French-language blogosphere. According to Citoyen_Hmida, a retired bank director who started blogging in 2005, Larbi had "more than a certain talent" in writing on social and political issues from a left-wing point of view. The personal nature of writing on personal blogs contributed to the development of a discourse characterized by the personal experiences and leanings of individuals. Thus, "Larbi considered himself Lenin, or Che Guevara. I, due to my old age, was the wise man, and Ibn Kafka [a lawyer] considered himself to be the blogosphere's Minister of justice" (Citoyen_Hmida, personal communication, 31 October 2015). Unfortunately, the absence of both Citoyen_Hmida and Ibn Kafka in the dataset compiled by Diminescu and Renault is an indicator of a flawed dataset. Within the other blogs in the blog cluster, `louladekhmissbatata.wordpress.com` and `lemythe.com` only receive 10 inlinks, highlighting how comparatively influential Larbi is. Among the top ten percent of nodes, 10 out of 16 are based abroad. Out of this total of websites

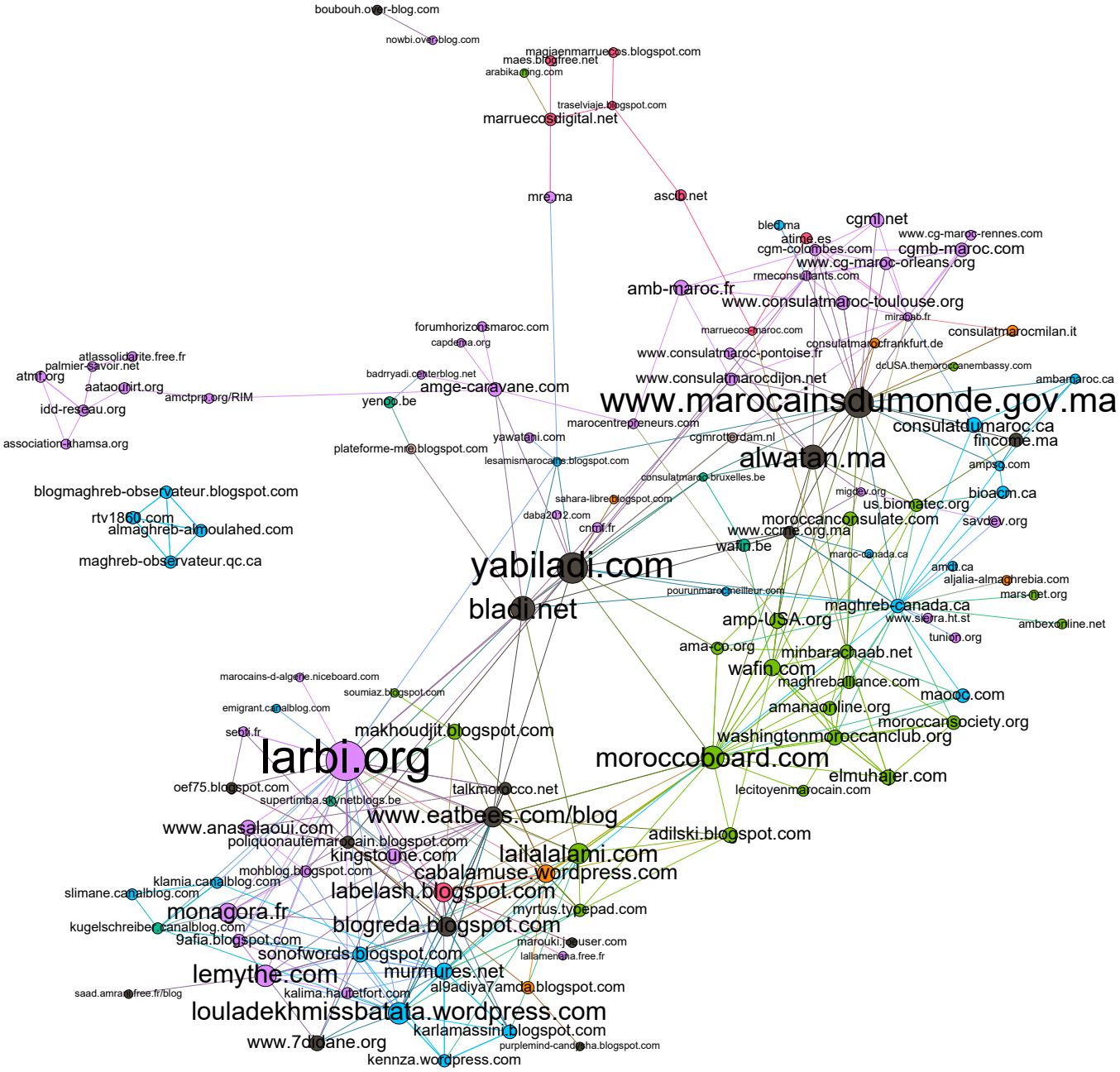

Figure 5.: Moroccan e-diaspora in 2010, light nodes located abroad, dark in Morocco (based on Diminescu and Renault, 2010)

based abroad, ten are blogs, while the other six are either message boards or other websites serving the diaspora community.

While Citoyen_Hmida considered Larbi to be among the most political bloggers in the Blogoma, we do not witness a separate activist cluster like in the Tunisian

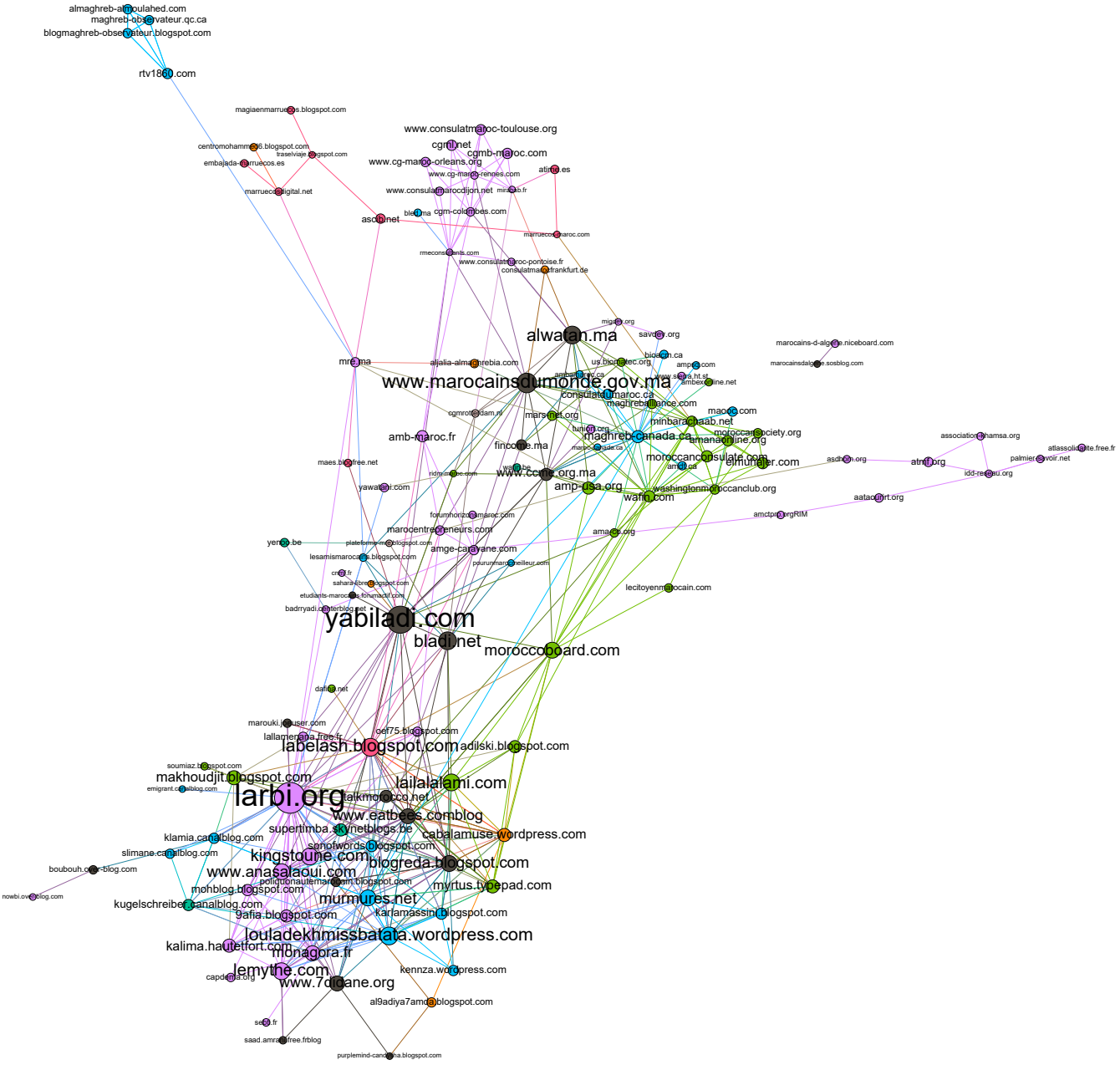

Figure 6.: Rerun Moroccan e-diaspora in 2011, light nodes located abroad, dark in Morocco (based on Diminescu and Renault, 2011)

case. In fact, within the French-language Blogoma especially the tone was generally apolitical and navel-gazing, dominated by intimist online diaries and commentaries on current affairs (Ibn Kafka, personal communication, August 21, 2015). Occasionally, blogs would be the scene of political outrage and ad hoc cyberactivist activities, however, contrary to the Tunisian case, there were very few Moroccan bloggers who would dedicate their writing solely to political affairs. There is

one website in the blog cluster, which represents an effort to bridge the gap between the various linguistic and political communities within the Blogoma, namely talkmorocco.com. Talk Morocco was founded in 2009 by Moroccan cyberactivist Hisham Almiraat (whose blog almiraatblog.wordpress.com is unfortunately not present in this graph) and American activist Jillian C. York with the explicit aim of creating a shared platform to debate issues of common interest. However, Talk Morocco only receives three inlinks, at least in this web crawl. Even though one of them from Larbi is powerful, potentially driving a number of his visitors to Talk Morocco, it indicates that at the moment of the initial data collection in May 2010, Talk Morocco did not necessarily achieve its aim of uniting the Moroccan blogosphere.

Contrary to the Tunisian network, the Moroccan network is characterized by the presence of a great number of associational and governmental websites. To better illustrate the connections between the different spheres, figure 7 represents the categories of websites in different shapes, with institutional websites being represented as circles, blogs as triangles, websites of associations as squares, community websites (i.e. forums) as pentagons and finally media websites as hexagons. This form of visualization reveals that the upper right part of the network is populated mainly by institutional websites, in fact primarily Moroccan consulates, as well as websites of diaspora associations, which are well connected internally through the governmental websites www.marocainsdumonde.gov.ma and www.alwatan.ma, which appear as large dark grey circle nodes at the center of the subcluster. These nodes are the websites of the Hassan II Foundation for Moroccans Residing Abroad and the Ministry in Charge of Moroccans Living Abroad, respectively. The upper black circle represents the website of the Foundation, which is more proactive than the Ministry's, with nine outlinks going almost exclusively to consulates in various countries, and receiving inlinks mainly from consulates, but also a few associational websites and blogs. The website of the Ministry, however, solely receives links from consulates and does not send any link to the other websites.

The behavior of these websites is plausible, given that the Hassan II Foundation, for example, aims to provide services to the community. One of these services is to provide links to websites relevant to the community, such as consulates. The Ministry's website, on the other hand, is a mere showcase presenting the Ministry's policies, comparable to brochureware as described by Earl (2010). This property of institutional websites explains as well why associational websites tend to link more to institutional websites than the other way around. The linking strategies employed by the Moroccan institutions speaks to the policies pursued by Moroccan governments since the 1990s, that is to accumulate know-how and remittances

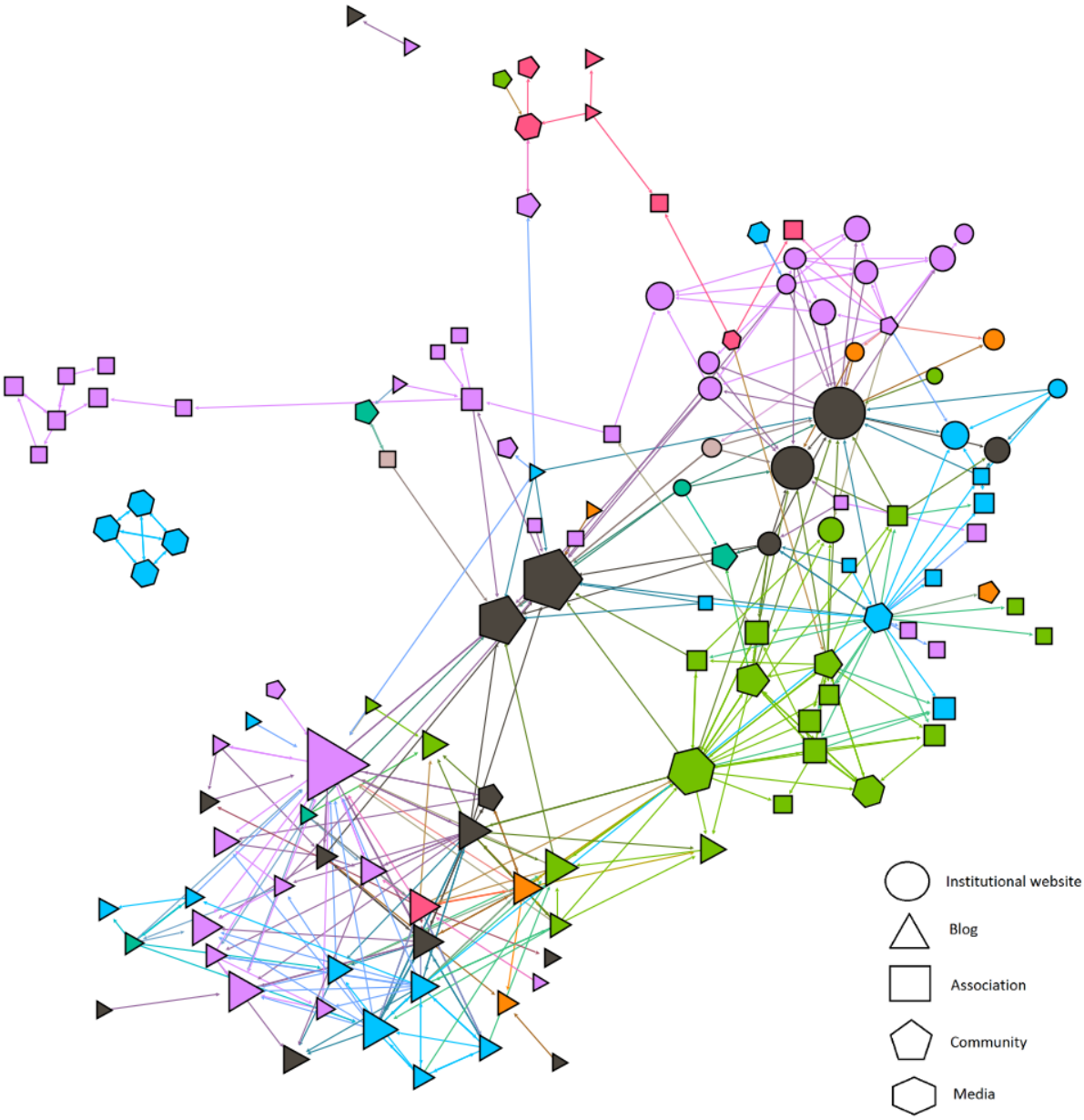

Figure 7.: Moroccan e-diaspora in 2010, light nodes located abroad, dark in Morocco (based on Diminescu and Renault, 2010)

from the diaspora for development purposes, as also suggested by Renault and Marchandise (2011, p. 42). They are not, however, leading actors beyond their institutional and associational subclusters.

As a result of the linking strategies of websites inside the institutional subcluster, there are very few if any direct links to the blogosphere. Instead, two so-called community sites, `yabiladi.com` (17 inlinks and 2 outlinks) and `bladi.net` (12 inlinks and 0 outlinks), serve as brokers between these distinct spheres. Both websites are well-established francophone news sites aimed at a diaspora audience, created in

2002. They are, however, based in Morocco. In their function as authorities, they receive inlinks almost exclusively and do not link back. The main source of inlinks for Yabiladi ("oh my country") and Bladi ("my country") are institutional websites scattered in the vicinity. However, blogs link to these community websites as well, which indicates that these websites are recognized both by the associations and the blogs as important actors. For example, Larbi (represented by the largest triangle in the blog subcluster) links to both websites, but they do not link back. While the institutional websites do not link to the blogosphere at all, the cluster gathering websites of associations is connected to the Blogoma via the media website `www.moroccoboard.com` on the right side of the network. Around this node, a number of mainly US-based, English-language association and community websites cluster. However, MoroccoBoard links to US-based blogs as well, which are otherwise well integrated in the blog cluster in the lower half of the network.

Table 5.: Most important nodes - Morocco July 2011

	In-degree	Out-degree	Degree	Country
larbi.org	26	30	56	France
yabiladi.com	22	2	24	Morocco
www.marocainsdumonde.gov.ma	14	3	17	Morocco
labelash.blogspot.com	12	21	33	Spain
louladekhmissbatata.wordpress.com	12	15	27	Canada
alwatan.ma	12	0	12	Morocco
bladi.net	12	0	12	Morocco
lemythe.com	11	5	16	France
lailalalami.com	11	3	14	USA
kingstoune.com	11	3	14	France
blogreda.blogspot.com	10	19	29	Morocco
murmures.net	10	15	25	Canada
moroccoboard.com	10	5	15	USA
www.anasalaoui.com	10	5	15	France
www.eatbees.com/blog	9	20	29	Morocco
monagora.fr	9	18	27	France
Average degree: 3.2				

The 2011 rerun was not an update of the growth of the blogosphere, but served to update the power relations between the nodes included in the 2010 graph. Indeed, we notice that the connections between the nodes have increased, rising from 397 to 481. The number of websites based abroad rises from 13 to 15 and the average degree rises considerably as well, from 2.6 to 3.2. Although blogging had entered secular decline globally by 2011, due to the rise of social network platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, this updated graph attests to the vitality of

the Blogoma between 2010 and 2011. In fact, the connectivity between blogs rose considerably, leading to a total of eleven blogs appearing in the top ten percent of the most connected nodes, all but two located in the diaspora. The increase in links affects the power structures as well, as visible in figure 6. Larbi, already the most connected node in 2010, moves towards the center of the blog cluster. This shift of Larbi's node is due to the fact that a greater number of blogs of the blog cluster link to the bridge node `yabiladi.com`. As we see in table 5, the number of inlinks to Yabiladi increases from 17 to 22, with the increase stemming entirely from the blogosphere. Whereas in 2010, four blogs linked to Yabiladi, in 2011, this number rises to nine, indicating that the portal played an increasingly important role as a news source during the period between May 2010 and July 2011 for the blogosphere and possibly beyond. This contrasts markedly with the other bridge, Bladi, whose number of inlinks remains unchanged. Furthermore, the political platform Talk Morocco doubled its inlinks from three to six, thereby advancing towards the core of the part of the Moroccan blogosphere represented in this graph. This development equally signals that the platform's recognition among bloggers increased over time. Finally, there are also some minor actors such as the student forum `amge-caravane.com`, whose slightly changed linking behaviour causes the attached subcluster of associational websites to change their position from the left to the right of the graph. Furthermore, small groups of nodes that were previously self-contained are now connected to the main cluster.

The visual assessment of the networks, complemented with the investigation of their structure through the analysis of in-coming and out-going links, supports hypothesis 1.1, namely that the studied blogospheres are characterized by hierarchical structures. In fact, we note the presence of several clusters as well as nodes attracting a particularly high number of inlinks, indicating that they serve as the networks' authorities. Furthermore, hypothesis 1.3, namely that diaspora nodes form a cluster distinct from the rest of the blogosphere, was not confirmed. While there are clusters of blogs dealing with politics in Tunisia and clusters of institutional websites in Morocco, blogs based in the diaspora do not form a distinct cluster. It is worth mentioning, however, that a number of websites of diaspora associations link to each other in the Moroccan network, thereby forming a subcluster. In the next section, we will explore which languages bloggers use and where they are based.

Language and location

The pronounced focus on websites and blogs based in the diaspora in the Moroccan crawl as opposed to a focus on the blogosphere as a whole becomes imme-

diately apparent during the analysis of the languages used. Concerning specific attributes of the websites included in this graph, we see on table 6 that 69.1 percent of them use French as their main language, 14.5 percent use English and 8 percent Spanish. Whereas a separate attribute on all languages used indicates that 7.9 percent combine French and Arabic, only a mere 4 percent use the latter as their main language. This thus represents a striking absence of a sizable group of websites or blogs primarily using Arabic. Unfortunately, this shortcoming indicates that the sample is representative only of one specific sphere of the Moroccan blogosphere; that is, its non-Arabic part. As my interviewees pointed out, the Moroccan blogosphere was split along language lines, thus there are very few blogs that link to blogs written in Arabic and blogs written in French. Whereas the Arabic blogosphere was more important in numbers, the Francophone part was more visible to the outer world and "believed in the illusion of representativeness" (Lbadikho, personal communication, August 30, 2015). Hence, the omission of the Arabic part of the blogosphere can be explained by the absence of links between the two groups, but also by the focus of the study. Given that Morocco served as a test case at the very beginning of the project, the primary focus was on the diaspora, while the diaspora's connection to the blogosphere in the motherland was secondary (contrary to the Tunisian crawl where this connection was a primary object). Finally, while the omission of the Arabic-language blogs impacts the representativeness of the crawl regarding the blogosphere, it can be forgiven, given that even bloggers themselves struggle to keep the overview, as Lbadikho points out, "it is impossible to say that one knows the entire blogosphere because there are plenty of micro clusters and often these clusters don't know of each other, and every member of every cluster believes that he knows everybody" (Lbadikho, personal communication, August 30, 2015).

Compared to the absence of Arabic websites in the Moroccan crawl, the Tunisian crawl appears to be slightly more balanced, even though French language blogs largely dominate. More than half of the websites in the Tunisian web crawl either use French (almost 45 percent) or combine French with Arabic (27.9 percent). Arabic as the sole language is used by a minority of 11 percent (Graziano did not record the main language used, but recorded all languages on a given website). What is striking when comparing the two cases is the greater variety of languages in the Moroccan case. While this is related to the inclusion of a great number of websites of embassies in a variety of countries, this does not explain the prominence of English and Spanish. The use of the latter is the heritage of the Spanish influence and protectorate in Morocco. English, however, appears in the crawl on message boards of the Moroccan diaspora, but also on individual blogs. On the

Table 6.: Attributes

	Tunisia	Morocco
State of residence	Tunisia 57.1% France 19.5% Canada 4.6% USA 3.3% UK 2% Spain 2.6% Germany 2% France/Tunisia 1.3% Belgium 1.3% other 6.5%	France 35.5% USA 15.8% Canada 15.1% Morocco 12.5% Spain 6.6% Belgium 4.6% Netherlands 2% other 7.9%
Languages	French 44.8% French/Arabic 27.9% Arabic 11% Fr/Ar/Eng 4.6% English 3.3% French/English 3.3% German 2% Spanish 1.3% other 2%	French 69.1% English 14.5% Spanish 7.9% Arabic 4% Dutch 1.3% other 3.3%
Number of nodes	154	152

one hand, this is reflective of a dispersion of the diaspora to a multitude of countries as opposed to the high concentration of the Tunisian diaspora in France. On the other, it also reflects an attachment to the French cultural and political sphere that seems to be slightly less pronounced in Morocco than in Tunisia.

With regard to the websites' location, the original data collected by Matthieu Renault relied on a query of the website's registration data using WHOIS[8]. While the use of this method produces reliable results because the data is easily retrievable from online resources, it gravely lacks in accuracy. For instance, the Moroccan embassy in Norway registered its website in Denmark, and the Moroccan consulate of Pontoise, France, registered its website in Germany. The use of WHOIS to determine a website's location is particularly ill-suited for blogs, given that their WHOIS is going to be equivalent to the place where their blogging platform is registered, which means, for example, that all Blogspot blogs are "located" in Mountain View, California. Thus, in an effort to correct this flawed method, the location of the websites and blogs was corrected by gathering information on the location of the owner on the website directly or by inquiries among the owners themselves or among fellow bloggers.

Given that Diminescu and Renault focused on the diaspora, it should not be surprising that only a minority of the nodes are based in Morocco, that is 12.5 percent. This contrasts to the Tunisian crawl, in which roughly 57 percent of all nodes are located in Tunisia. Given the sizable communities in the former metropolis, France comes second in both cases, with 35.5 percent for the Moroccan crawl and 19.5 percent for the Tunisian. However, it is notable that the Moroccan online community is much more widely dispersed, with a much greater number of blogs and websites located in Canada and in the USA (15.1 percent and 15.8 percent) compared to the Tunisian community (4.6 and 3.3 percent respectively).

4.2.3 *Determinants of degree centrality*

Following this morphological study of the networks, the data produced by the networks also lends itself to quantitative analysis in order to investigate whether the age of a node influences its position inside the network (as predicted by hypothesis 1.2). As laid out in the chapter on theoretical approaches, one of the theories attempting to explain the accumulation of inlinks of a website is "preferential attachment", where "(...) vertices increase their connectivity at the expense of the younger (...) ones, leading over time to some vertices that are highly connected, a

8 WHOIS (pronounced *who is*) is a protocol used for searching databases containing registration details of Internet resources.

"rich-get-richer" phenomenon" (Barabasi and Albert, 1999, p. 6). Meanwhile other studies, such as Adamic and Humberman (2000) claim that preferential attachment is not sufficient to explain why some nodes attract more inlinks than others, with every website sporting its own intrinsic growth rate based on factors like the quality of writing and the interest the website generates, amongst others.

It would be interesting to analyze to what extent the age of a website affects its in-degree given that I was able to identify the month of creation of almost every website in the Tunisian data set (there are two missing values), and whether this effect varies according to the location of the website. The reason to examine only the Tunisian case is that, as mentioned before, institutional and associational websites are overrepresented, while blogs are underrepresented, in the Moroccan dataset. There are three variables of interest – in-degree (a continuous variable, ranging from 0 to 29), the number of months between creation of the website to the date of the data collection in April 2011 (age), as well as the location (a binary variable "diaspora", with websites located abroad coded as 1 and websites in Tunisia coded as 0). Also, I seek to investigate if this effect is more pronounced for bloggers, given that the practice of linking to other websites is particularly prevalent amongst them.

Table 7.: Dependent Variable: In-degree

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
age	0.07***	0.09***	0.02	0.07***	0.11***	0.03
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.04)
blog		5.24***	-0.68			-1.05
		(1.32)	(1.97)			(2.67)
blog#c.age			0.12***			0.13*
			(0.03)			(0.05)
diaspora				-0.40	2.36	0.49
				(1.20)	(1.90)	(3.47)
diaspora#c.age					-0.07	-0.01
					(0.04)	(0.05)
blog#diaspora						1.23
						(4.10)
blog#diaspora#c.age						-0.02
						(0.07)
cons	2.77**	-2.00	1.75	2.86**	1.60	1.50
	(0.89)	(1.463)	(1.71)	(0.94)	(1.15)	(2.36)
N	152	152	152	152	152	152
R^2	0.10	0.19	0.26	0.10	0.12	0.26

$^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$

As we can see in Model 1 in table 7, the linear regression investigating the effect of age on in-degree returned a significant effect accounting for 10 percent of the variance in the dependent variable. According to the constant, at the age of zero months, a node in the network is expected to receive 2.77 inlinks. The coefficient on age is positive and statistically significant, indicating that with every month, a node is expected to gain 0.07 inlinks. Although the effect is not large, the results confirm hypothesis 1.2, that the older a website, the higher the predicted in-degree.

Adding a dummy variable for blogs in Model 2, the coefficient for age remains positive and statistically significant, with an expected 0.09 inlinks for every additional month in terms of age. The coefficient on blogs is positive and statistically significant as well, which means that blogs (as opposed to websites) have an expected in-degree of 5.24 when aged zero months. Overall, the model accounts for 19 percent of the explained variability in in-degree.

Given that people living in the diaspora had more ready access to technology, thus making it likely for them to be among the first to create websites or to start blogging, we should assess if there is an interaction between diaspora and age. An interaction term was added in Model 3, resulting in the positive coefficients of age and blogs, however they are not statistically significant. The coefficient on the interaction term is positive and statistically significant. It renders the direct effects of age and blog insignificant. This indicates that it is not age or being a blogger per se that increases the in-degree, but the age of bloggers. In other words, only bloggers benefit from age, while websites do not. This model has the largest explanatory power, accounting for 26 percent of the variability in in-degree.

In Model 4 and 5, we investigate the effect of location; that is, whether a website abroad is more likely to receive more inlinks. In this case, the coefficient on age remains positive and statistically significant. However, both in Model 4 without and in Model 5 with an interaction term, the results for diaspora are not statistically significant. This means we cannot rule out the possibility that the effect of location is nil, and we would reject any hypothesis that claimed that nodes located abroad receive more inlinks than those located in Tunisia. Finally, Model 6 contains all variables used before in order to test whether being located in the diaspora matters when controlling for bloggers. However, while the interaction between the variables blog and diaspora is positive, indicating that bloggers in the diaspora have a higher in-degree, the results are not statistically significant, as is the interaction between the variables blog, diaspora and age.

4.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the power structures in the Tunisian and the Moroccan blogospheres as well as identifying the leading figures. Hypothesis 1.1 has been confirmed; contrary to earlier beliefs and hopes, the blogosphere is characterized by hierarchies. Given that linking to fellow blogs is a widespread practice among bloggers to indicate other blogs of interest, we have been able to identify a number of nodes that serve as references in their respective blogospheres. This common linking practice combined with the fact that bloggers primarily provide a personal commentary on current events and matters of interest has induced me to interpret a high number of inlinks served as a proxy for opinion leadership.

In the case of Morocco, it is not possible to make conclusive statements regarding the role played by bloggers living abroad in the larger blogosphere due to a potentially flawed dataset and the general stratification of the Moroccan community of bloggers according to language and political leaning. However, it is clear that among the data collected, the blogger Larbi was undeniably the leading voice in the French-language blogosphere. Over time, his influence grew, as did the role of the platform Talk Morocco, which was created with the aim to bridge the divides between the different linguistic spheres within the Moroccan blogosphere. The Tunisian network, on the other hand, shows a higher number of connections between the blogs, which speaks to a much higher interaction between the actors. While some of the difference can be attributed to a slightly different methodology in the Moroccan case, the difference in average degree remains striking. The presence of a subcluster of blogs and portals dedicated to politics, including several campaign websites, highlights how the internet was used as a resource, primarily in the fight for freedom of expression. However, these political blogs and websites are to be found at the periphery of the blogosphere, even though nodes such as the cartoonist -Z- and the individual blogs of activists connect this subcluster to the general blogosphere.

Furthermore, this chapter revealed that diaspora organizations and blogs written by migrants interact rarely. The Moroccan case displays an extensive cluster of institutional and associational websites, however these associations are largely oblivious to the blogosphere. The high number of development associations and consulates – linked together by government institutions – is an online expression of the government's attempt to mobilize the diaspora for its development efforts in contrast to Tunisia, which before the uprisings conceived its population abroad as more of a threat than an opportunity. The websites bridging the various clusters are recognized as authorities by both, but do not actively engage with the

blogosphere. In contrast, in the Tunisian case, two associations linked to the blogosphere and republished texts, which had appeared on blogs previously. This use of blogs as a source of information for association highlights that blogs performed an important function in the context of a highly restrained public sphere in the home country. While the Tunisian associations were not on the forefront of the battle against Ben Ali, they maintained a loose connection to the activist strata of the Tunisian blogosphere.

From the regressions, we can confirm hypothesis 1.2, namely that there is an observable effect of the month of creation on the number of inlinks a website receives. This indicates that the "rich-get-richer" phenomenon is at play here, as predicted. However, this effect is not very pronounced. The impact of the month of creation on the amounts of inlinks was revealed to be higher for blogs than for all websites confounded. Thus, the model predicts that the older a blog is, the more inlinks it will have accumulated. This result is sensible, given that the practice of linking to other blogs is one of the characteristics of the blogosphere. Interestingly, according to the statistical analysis, the fact of living abroad did neither influence the number of inlinks, nor did this fact intervene with the other variables.

Finally, hypothesis 1.3, which assumed that diaspora nodes form a cluster distinct from the rest of the blogosphere, was not confirmed, at least in the case of Tunisia (the section of the Moroccan blogosphere in the dataset is too incomplete to draw such a conclusion). On the contrary, blogs located in Tunisia and abroad are interconnected and do not constitute separate spheres, thus, we do not see a distinct diasporic community. However, there is a group of political websites, which entertains fewer connections with the general blogosphere. In the next chapter, we will focus on this group of political bloggers, part of whom lived abroad and therefore potentially benefited from political freedoms their fellow bloggers in their country of origin lacked.

5

POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES AND STRATEGIC CHOICES

In this chapter, we will attempt to answer sub-question two; namely, how we can account for migrants taking up prominent roles in their respective cyberactivist communities. We will focus on the role of repression in shaping the protest activities undertaken by bloggers and seek to confirm my hypothesis that the relative absence of repression, both online and offline, enables dissident migrants to act more freely and to take on the role of radical mobilizers. To prove this point, we will concentrate on how the perception of risk of repression forces activists to take certain decisions regarding the extent of their activism. In a first part, we will revisit how the internet can serve as a free space in authoritarian regimes; namely, a place relatively free from state intrusion. However, this online freedom is only relative and partial because most states do intervene, mostly through internet censorship. In the second part of this chapter, we will see how differing political opportunity structures conditioned the online activities of bloggers and activist in Morocco and Tunisia.

5.1 A FREE SPACE IN AUTHORITARIAN CONTEXTS

The increasing ubiquity of internet access across the world led to its entrenchment in contemporary lives, and it serves a number of functions depending on the political context. Although it is increasingly used by mainstream political actors to fuel their election campaigns, social movements of all kinds use it as a channel for alternative information and to mobilize, given ease of access and its rapid spread of information to wide audiences, even in democratic settings. While the internet as a means of communication to spread news can be conceptualized as a resource, it also serves as a place where people who are otherwise barred from speaking their minds about politics can congregate and exchange their ideas. It is, thus, a form of a free space, analogous to those small-scale, secluded settings beyond the direct control of the government or dominant groups in which dissent has always

flourished, and performs important cultural functions in social movements. In the most severe cases of authoritarianism, where discussion of anything remotely political is relegated to the private sphere, where the tight bounds put on interaction with others and the ban placed on voluntary associations can lead to an atomized society, the internet can serve as a space between the private and the public where the lines of what can be said are not as clearly drawn, compared to "real life". In these cases, internet fora can help build the groundwork for future mobilizations by allowing its participants to envision alternative models of society and reflect on strategies to enact them.

From its early days, the internet was occupied by political dissidents and oppositional groups, serving as a source for information that was otherwise difficult or impossible to obtain. However, from the beginning, the internet was more than a virtual newspaper stand, because its interactive features provided a means to actively engage in political discussions. Of course, the actual place where debate occurred shifted over time, moving from mailing lists in the early days of the internet to blogs, and finally social network sites. On mailing lists, usually thematically linked to the issue of human rights, members would reply to long threads of emails, discussing human-rights abuses and strategies to publicize them. Blogging, on the other hand, is characterized by frequent references to other bloggers' writings, the inclusion of like-minded blogs in blogrolls (hyperlinks to other blogs in a dedicated section), as well as frequent visits and oftentimes vivid discussions in the comments section at the bottom of the page. The very term "blogosphere," while referring to the connections formed between blogs, implies a network of people and their online conversations, and not computers. The fact that bloggers almost exclusively link to like-minded blogs while ignoring blogs of other political leanings, as shown by Adamic and Glance (2005), reinforces the notion that blogospheres, despite being public, are closer to a community of the like-minded than a public sphere as such. Finally, social network websites, while changing the nature of online debates through their design, gather a large part of one's potential audience on the same platform, making it much easier to distribute one's message through a growing network of followers.

Just like the free spaces Johnston identified in his studies of resistance in the Soviet Union, however, there is an awareness that this space is not perfectly shielded from surveillance, that there are spies and agents provocateurs. In many authoritarian countries with limited political opportunity structures, cyber-dissidents are subject to those same "real life" modes of repression like other activists, including prison sentences, as well as several forms of repression of online activism, most readily reflected in the blocking of a website in a given country, i.e. online censor-

ship. Technically, online censorship is accomplished by either instructing or forcing internet service providers to block access to specific websites, or it is done directly by the government when the entire internet infrastructure is state-owned (as is the case in Tunisia). Many countries in the world, including democracies, block access to certain websites or require search engines to display certain results under the premise of them being unlawful or harmful, such as child pornography websites. In authoritarian states, it is also fairly common to block websites that themselves facilitate circumvention of internet censorship, in addition to politically critical websites, and they are transparent about it to varying degrees. Whereas censorship in democracies is legitimized through court orders, it is usually enacted without such judicial procedures in authoritarian states.

The impact of online censorship is multifaceted. On the one hand, its efficiency is limited, given that there are numerous ways to circumvent it.[1] However, while knowledge about the availability of these circumvention techniques is increasingly widespread, it cannot be assumed that every internet user is aware of them. More importantly, through the censorship of websites, the state signals which online speech is permissible and which is considered as crossing the line. The precision of online censorship of a predetermined list of websites makes this signal particularly strong. As for the impact of censorship on bloggers themselves, they often perceive internet censorship as a badge of honor indicating their own relevance to the authorities. Given that censorship means that bloggers lose their audience, the most common reaction is to create a new blog under a different address. As for the general public, they are usually unaware of concrete online censorship cases. As long as the government targets bloggers that write openly about politics, censorship is likely to be perceived as legitimate by a population accustomed to limits to what can be said in public. This truce between authoritarian regimes and the population they rule is part of an implicit social contract linking the promise of economic development and political stability. Thus even when censorship becomes public, it signals that the blogger violated the implicit social contract by crossing a red line and those not opposed to the government will say that they "deserved" to be silenced. However, similar to the mechanisms uncovered by Mason and Krane (1989), if the government proceeds to censor indiscriminately; namely, when its target shifts to less politically-vocal internet users or

1 The ease of circumvention is due to the interconnectivity of the internet itself, with the servers controlling access displaying the website as censored only if they receive queries from a certain location. Given that these nodes also serve as relays for the global internet network, they let other traffic pass on to the desired website. Thus, by masking one's location through the use of an intermediary web server or proxy located in another country, internet censorship is relatively easily circumvented.

those avoiding politics completely, the perception of the legitimacy of censorship changes, because the politically uninvolved can no longer expect to be immune to repression by evading politics in their writings.

5.1.1 *Strategic decisions in the face of repression*

There are, to date, few studies dealing specifically with repression in the internet age, most notably Morozov (2011), and by and large they follow the linear rational choice models predicting that the enhanced state capacity to repress dissidents will raise the cost of mobilization and eventually lead to demobilization. While the internet is perceived by its users as a free space, or at least as freer than anywhere else in real life, the threat of repression, both of online discourse and in "real life", influences how cyberactivists perceive political opportunities and thus which strategies they adopt. These strategic decisions are taken amid a tension between the need to protect themselves and to be a widely-read blog perceived as credible. The literature on framing processes stresses the importance of credibility of a frame to be effective or to "resonate," and one of the factors is the credibility of the frame articulators or claim-makers (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 619). In that sense, credibility is paramount for bloggers as well, as it ensures that their writing is accepted as truthful, trustworthy, and persuasive. The use of one's own name contributes to the credibility of the political message, but at the same time it exposes the writer to repression. Thus, the first strategic decision of a cyberactivist involves the option of writing under the cloak of anonymity.

Following hypothesis 2.2, the relative absence of repression, both online and offline, facilitates dissident migrant cyberactivism. In fact, the risk of repression depends on a number of factors, such as the political positions the activist defends, but also their personal exposure to regime repression. This encompass the many ways a regime can influence activists' lives by physically getting hold of them in order to interrogate them, arrest them, break into their homes, intimidate their families, or threaten their employers. This immediate power of the regime over activists can be diminished by high individual social or economic status, and especially through well-positioned allies inside the administration. Ultimately, however, if the regime perceives the activists as a threat, they can expect to be repressed. The fact of living abroad permanently, thereby removed from the authoritarian regime's direct control, is a factor in this calculation. Dissidents abroad are not only physically out of reach of the security apparatus, but also more generally their livelihood cannot be easily affected by an authoritarian regime, for example by pressuring an employer to lay his activist employee off. Therefore, the fact of

living abroad could confer on activists a sense of security, enabling them to use their real name. At the same time, this freedom from repression is not absolute, since activists might still be targeted during visits or their families might be intimidated. Also, the very fact of living abroad might diminish the activists' credibility to speak out against the authoritarian regime, given that they do not endure the looming threat of repression that activists living in the home country must endure.

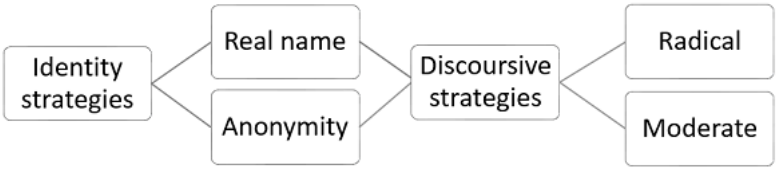

Figure 8.: ***Strategic decisions***

Given the tangible threat of physical repression for activists living in the country of origin as well as the potential threat of online censorship and physical harm of relatives for those living abroad, we expect cyberactivists to rationally weigh the risks they incur. The strategic decisions to counter these threats to their freedom of expression and physical integrity are laid out in figure 8. Hypothesis 2.3 states that strategies employed vary according to the perception of risk and rewards involved. The first strategic decision, as laid out in figure 8, pertains to the choice of an activist's online identity. In an authoritarian context, writing about political subjects under one's real name is potentially risky. Confronted with this risk, an activist might arrive at the conclusion that they outweigh the potential benefits of heightened credibility, but nevertheless want to discuss political issues online anyway. Indeed, depending on both the strategies employed by the activist and the state investment in surveillance capabilities, identifying the person behind a specific blog or commentary can be difficult. Thus, if the risk is perceived as high, detection can be inhibited by the use of a pseudonym. The use of pseudonyms was wide-spread in the early days of the internet and it has been described as one of the key aspects allowing free personal expression online by freeing the individual from identity boundaries (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 16). Today, online anonymity is often associated with cyberbullying and identity fraud, but this beneficial side of hiding the speaker to allow him to speak true to his mind is crucial in authoritarian contexts. Pseudonyms are still wide-spread in certain areas, such as the comment sections of online newspapers, but in other places, such as the social network site Facebook, one of the main loci of online activism at the time of writing, it is highly discouraged. Given that the rules on Facebook are the same for everyone, activists

living in high-risk contexts will go out of their way to circumvent its real-name policy to protect themselves.

The use of a pseudonym is, however, only one step in the quest for online anonymity. In fact, the internet was not designed for anonymity, but built around IP addresses, which are transmitted any time a website or resource is accessed. Thus, for true anonymity it is necessary to avoid transmitting one's own IP address, which is achieved through the use of anonymization software, most notably the Tor network[2] that routes internet users traffic through several relays in order to conceal location and usage patterns. Anonymization software like Tor is advocated by various non-governmental organizations, such as in the Handbook for Bloggers and Cyber-dissidents by Reporters without Borders. By and large, the continuous efforts to develop tools ensuring the safety of activists online are counterbalanced by increasingly sophisticated governmental[3] internet monitoring capabilities, which leads some to argue that instead of enabling activism in authoritarian countries, the internet has made it far more dangerous. These authors point out that the internet provides dictatorships with information that conventional law enforcement or secret services would struggle to acquire, ultimately empowering the state by allowing them to easily identify emerging threats (Morozov, 2011, ch. 4). Hence it follows that despite online anonymity being an important defense strategy, it is rarely absolute, and its use requires great discipline and good judgement as to what to reveal.

After having taken the decision on whether to use the real name or a pseudonym on his or her blog, a second strategic decision involves the kind of discourse to be employed. Here, the same cautions regarding repression apply. While the internet is perceived to be a free space, in which the rules established in real life to not apply to the same degree, internet users are aware that employing a radical discourse clearly naming grievances and shaming those in power might expose them to state repression. If this risk appears to be high, internet users living in the repressive countries might choose to treat online discussions with the same caution they would treat a political debate in real life. This approach is characterized by the evasion of the so-called red lines; namely, taboo topics. In Middle Eastern and North African countries, these usually include critique of religion and religious authorities, calls for the accountability of the political leader, and sex – with the first two taboos directly relating to state power and the latter to a societal taboo enforced by the state. In addition to completely avoiding these issues, bloggers

2 TOR, short for The Onion Router, was first developed to protect U.S. intelligence communications online and continues to receive funding from the U.S. government.

3 Governmental internet monitoring capabilities rely often both on in-house capabilities and private (often Western) companies selling surveillance technologies (Wagner et al., 2015).

might revert to oppositional speech acts using double entendre, metaphors, or humor or satire. The same pressures would not apply to activists living abroad, given that they are out of reach of the authoritarian government. However, if they maintain strong ties to the country by returning frequently, for example, they might opt for a cautious strategy as well.

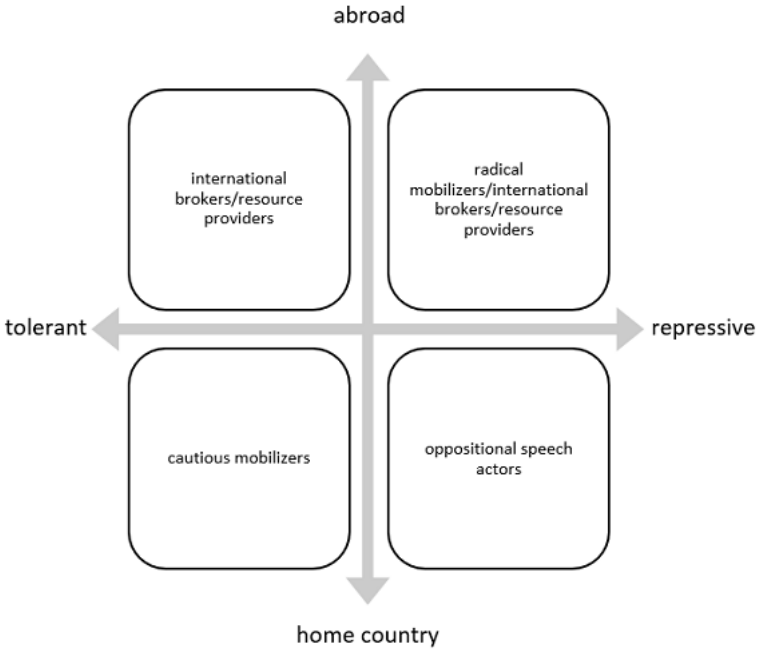

Figure 9.: ***Roles varying according to location***

Due to these variations in political opportunities afforded to bloggers and cyberactivists living abroad and in the home country, we see a tendency to assume different roles inside the community. It should go without saying that these informal roles emerge naturally, given that we are not dealing with organizations with formal structures. The different roles assumed by activists according to their location and the regime's response to activism are laid out in figure 9. These dimensions are represented by two axes: the horizontal axis represents the regime's reaction to dissent, ranging from tolerance to repression, whereas the vertical axis depicts the physical location of the activist in question, that is either abroad or in the country of origin. The upper right quadrant represents cyberactivists and bloggers based abroad, who, due to the absence of repression, are able to take more radical stances compared to their fellow countrymen living in their home countries. They are likely to push for mobilization and, due to their relatively higher wages and immunity to the more subtle economic repression exerted by authoritarian states, provide otherwise scarce resources. With the freedom to communicate and to travel, they also serve as brokers in the international activist community and

are more easily in touch with traditional media. Their countrymen living under a repressive authoritarian regime, represented by the lower right quadrant, tend to be more concerned with repression both online and offline, therefore making them less likely to go beyond oppositional speech acts.

In tolerant – but still authoritarian – regimes, bloggers and activists have more room for maneuver if they limit their actions to the boundaries set by the regime. Thus, non-governmental organizations are able to use the internet to mobilize followers and supporters for demonstrations, and bloggers slowly push boundaries of what can be said online, as represented in the lower left quadrant. In relatively tolerant authoritarian regimes, the advantage for their colleagues living abroad are less pronounced. As seen in the upper left quadrant, they might still be more likely to be able to dispose of more resources and to be able to establish contacts with international actors, but given that their counterparts in the country are capable to mobilize as well, they are less of a pushing force than an equal partner.

5.2 LIGHT-HANDED CONTROL VS. SUFFOCATING ONLINE REPRESSION

From the beginning, both Tunisia and Morocco employed varying degrees of control over their internet infrastructure and users. In both countries, rather than enacting internet-specific laws, control about what is published online is exerted through restrictive press laws, regulating both online speech and traditional journalism. While the ascension of King Mohammed VI to the Moroccan throne in 1999 raised hopes that the country would undergo a process of democratization, journalists and bloggers continue to this day to be harassed, censored, fined, and jailed when they cross so-called red lines. Those taboo topics mirror Morocco's national motto "God, Homeland, King"; namely, to question religion, territorial integrity (notably regarding the issue of Western Sahara), and the monarchy (OpenNet Initiative, 2009, p.1). The Moroccan government would react to breaches of these taboo topics by shutting newspapers shut down as well as having journalists physically attacked or arrested when they attempted to cover demonstrations or trials (*Reporters Without Borders - Morocco* 2007). As a result of these violations of the freedom of the press, in 2009, the non-governmental organization Reporters Without Borders ranked Morocco 127th out of 175 countries in their World Press Freedom Index.

While there were isolated cases of jailed bloggers, Morocco was relatively lenient regarding its control of its citizen's online activities. Internet censorship was at least temporarily applied to websites in support of the Polisario Front, which

advocates for the independence of Western Sahara – annexed by Morocco in 1979.[4] The blogging platform Live Journal was also blocked after hosting blogs supporting the Polisario Front rebels. These restrictions were lifted by 2009, at which point, however, websites run by Islamist opposition groups were blocked instead (OpenNet Initiative, 2009). It is worth noting that these were websites entirely dedicated to one issue on the fringe of the Moroccan blogosphere, contrary to the Tunisian approach of blocking websites that would feature a critique of the government amongst other issues. An exception to this rule was Moroccan regime's blocking of the video sharing website YouTube for six days in 2008 after users had uploaded videos deemed insulting to the king. Despite these red lines regarding the issue of Western Sahara, the authority of the monarchy and the sanctity of Islam, internet access in the country deemed relatively free by Moroccan bloggers such as the pioneer blogger Larbi El Hilali, who stressed in 2008 that "everyone can comment freely on such sensitive topics" (Benhaida, 2008). Not only were Moroccans free to talk in a regime we can qualify as tolerant, but non-governmental human-rights organizations and Islamist groups were also able to spread information about regular protest events using online tools (Moussa, 2011).

Contrary to Morocco's approach, Tunisia's regime used internet censorship in a more heavy-handed fashion. While the constitution officially granted press freedom under "conditions laid down by law," the country was de facto one of the region's most authoritarian regime in regard to civil liberties (Reporters without Borders, 2009). The traditional media were brought into line with the government, putting coverage of the President's every move front and center – the three existing oppositional newspapers were hampered in their production and critical journalists arrested, imprisoned and banned from leaving the country. The politics of denial of free speech extended to its dealings with the internet as well, often under the guise of the fight against terrorism. In fact, the civil war in neighboring Algeria and subsequently the 9/11 attacks served as arguments for the Tunisian government to maintain its repressive practices, especially regarding Islamists. The control of the internet in Tunisia was extensive, as the regime sought to exert tight control, in line with countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran and China. For instance, video sharing websites were censored permanently, as well as a growing list of websites of Western news outlets, blogs and even individual Facebook profiles,

4 The affected websites were arso.org, spsrasd.info, cahiersdusahara.com and wsahara.net, as well as the site anonymiser.com after it was recommended as a tool to circumvent censorship.

earning Tunisia top positions on lists of internet policing by non-governmental organizations like the OpenNet Initiative or Reporters without Borders.[5]

In order to fully understand the implications of the extensive nature of the online surveillance on internet users in Tunisia and the relative advantages enjoyed by those living abroad escaping this system, we need to take a closer look. In fact, from its early beginnings as the first Arab and African country to be connected to the internet in 1991, the web was filtered, enabled by web-caching proxies installed at the main network transit point operated by the Tunisian Agency for the internet (Agence Tunisienne d'internet - ATI). Since all internet traffic used this transit point, every internet connection was affected. In the 2000s, email filtering solutions were added to further control the online activities of known dissidents. Emails of political activists were deviated and read by operators at the ministry of interior, who erased or altered the content and eventually forwarded the emails to the intended recipients. Subsequently, growing internet traffic due to the spread of broadband access necessitated an upgrade of the internet control scheme. Starting from 2007, these tasks were accomplished by the use of the most sophisticated methods available on the market, notably Deep Packet Inspection (DPI). This technology allows for the examination of the data of a packet for sensitive keywords and subsequently suspicious packets can be diverted to a different destination. It allows governments to monitor the online activity of a given person and filter the traffic on the network by removing "undesired" material from the actual body of received emails. (Wagner, 2012)

The Tunisian state invested heavily into monitoring its population, both online and offline. While extreme and visible forms of repression touched only the few daring to take an open political stance, softer forms of police control were omnipresent, and other actors were involved in surveilling the population as well. In this, the Tunisian state not only differed from Morocco, but also from other countries in the region. As such, if talking to taxi drivers in Egypt was a favorite exercise for scholars and journalists alike to gauge popular sentiment, taxi drivers in Tunisia were renowned state informants. Every village, every quarter even, had its own dense network of surveillance comprised of police stations, party cells, neighborhood committees and the local representative of the central administration in the area, the Omda, ensuring that Tunisia's sociopolitical control of its population bordered on the totalitarian (Hibou, 2011, p. 83). However, not even the fact of living abroad was not a guarantee to be shielded from government surveillance.

5 Tunisia was listed on RWB's annual Enemies of the internet list since its first publication in 2006. Tunisia moved to the "Countries under surveillance" list after the revolution in 2011 (Reporters without Borders, 2013).

In fact, the government's reach extended to its institutions abroad, be it embassies or the so-called Amicales. As the blogger Fayla related to me:

> "When I lived abroad, I tried to avoid Tunisians by all means. I used to stick around with Arabs and class mates. In Beirut, all the Tunisians I knew were close to the embassy... when I found out that a girl was attending the 7 November celebrations at the embassy (asking me if I was going, too), I subsequently avoided her." (Fayla, personal communication, April 25, 2015)

In light of this tight societal control, even the restricted freedom of speech online was a well-cherished reprieve. Even greater was the surprise and relief of many a blogger when accessing the web from abroad. In interviews conducted by Romain Lecomte with bloggers like Sami Ben Gharbia, Houeida K. Anouar and Malek Khadraoui, they highlight how using the internet from abroad, devoid of censorship that characterized it in Tunisia, provided them with an unprecedented access to information on their home countries for the first time. Malek Khadraoui asserts: "One can say I suffocated a bit with the lack of freedom in my country. So I left, and the first thing when one leaves to a slightly freer country [...] was to try to get some information, it was the first reflex" (Lecomte, 2009, p. 204-205). As for blogger and activist Sami Ben Gharbia, he stumbled upon dissident websites when he tried to compile his dossier for his application for political asylum. He subsequently became a contributor to the forums popular at that time before creating *Nawaat* and engaging in other dissident activities.

5.2.1 *Anonymity for free expression and defense strategy*

Websites resembling what were later called blogs; namely, a sort of an online diary, whose posts would usually be displayed in reverse-chronological order to show the first on top, existed since the advent of the WWW, with the generally recognized first blog appearing as early as 1994. However, blogging platforms facilitating the creation and maintenance of blogs by providing bloggers with templates sparing them the time and effort to write code started to emerge at the turn of the century, and they became mainstream in 2004. It is important to note that, at that time, the use of online aliases was very much the norm. It was only with the internet becoming increasingly widespread and it's use extending to formal communication that using one's real name became more commonplace. As a result, it should not be surprising that most of the blogs appearing in the webcrawls in the previous chapter were not using real names, both in the Moroccan and in the Tunisian cases.

The use of pseudonyms was not only a protection from governmental reprisals, but also a way to shield its user from intrusion in his private life more generally. Thus, Hisham Almiraat, a Moroccan blogger living abroad at the time and one of the most prominent bloggers in the Moroccan blogosphere, explains his motive as such:

> "My name is Hisham Almiraat. It's a pseudonym. Offline, I'm known as Hisham Khribchi, a medical doctor. I'm a Moroccan blogger living in France and the reason I use a pseudonym has to do with my debuts online. When I first started blogging I wanted my identity to remain secret because I didn't want my online activity to interfere with my professional life. I wanted to keep both as separate as possible. I also wanted to use a fake name because I wrote about politics and I was critical of my own government. A pseudonym would shield me and my family from personal attacks. I wanted to have a comfortable space to express myself freely without having to worry about the police when I visit my family back in Morocco." (Almiraat, 2011)

Hisham's rationale for using a pseudonym is two-fold. The first aspect refers to the culture of pseudonyms at the time and their utility in dissociating a person's online activity from his or her personal and professional life. Writing using an alias provides the writers with the freedom to develop their thoughts unconstrained from fears that they might alienate friends, risk their job or their children being accosted at school because somebody from their direct environment reads their intimate or political writings. The same reasoning is brought forward by Ibn Kafka, a Moroccan lawyer and blogger, who maintains his pseudonym because his opinions are "diametrically opposed to those of my employer," besides his family being "petrified" by the idea of writing on Moroccan politics (Ibn Kafka, personal communication, August 21, 2015). Anonymity as a tool to free oneself from the constraints of one's real life persona is also present in the actions of the anarchic Tunisian collective Takriz, founded in 1998. Describing themselves as a " free, real and anonymous movement" after their resurrection in 2009, their official rationale for anonymity is that it allows its members to renounce the quest for personal reputation and recognition and instead express their authentic selves, even though in reality, this pursuit for notoriety was merely transferred to their aliases (Lecomte, 2013, p. 66).The choice of the pseudonym itself represents the first step in this mode of expression, as Hisham also points out that the name Almiraat (mirror in Arabic): "a mirror is about reflection and amplification, and this is precisely what I like to do most online: reflecting and amplifying other people's voices."

Hisham remains active in the online community up to today and continues to use his pseudonym as a nom de plume.

In addition to keeping his online and his real life persona distinct, Hisham Almiraat chose a pseudonym to avoid harassment to his family or himself. He mentions this concern despite the fact that he did not live in the country and that Morocco's approach to internet censorship and political mobilization can be considered tolerant; that is to say, a wide range of collective behavior within certain boundaries is allowed. In the case of Morocco, direct criticism of the king, religion, or territorial integrity is off limits, with varying degrees of freedom for other topics. Hisham's primary choice of online anonymity reflects the desire to speak his mind freely without the fear of repercussions, be it from individuals or the state. In addition, authoritarian regimes are characterized by uncertainty as to whether unwritten rules about what is permissible to say will change, sometimes overnight. But he also notes that at some point, keeping his real name secret was impractical because real pictures were linked to his online profile. While some Tunisian bloggers like the cartoonist -Z- have resolutely defended their anonymity even after the uprising, Hisham's benevolent reaction to revelation of his real identity indicates that his experience taught him that he was not in immediate danger. Instead, Hisham Almiraat has become the name he is known for online, a sort of a brand. He later, in 2009, co-founded an award-winning English-language online forum advocating free speech, Talk Morocco. There are many other pioneer Moroccan bloggers that chose to mask their full name – one of them is the aforementioned Larbi El Hilali, who is known online simply as "Larbi".

If using a pseudonym was common in Morocco, the sophisticated control of the Tunisian internet meant that this decision was a necessity. The fear of prosecution was palpable and induced Tunisian bloggers to pursue various strategies of dissimulation. The threat to bloggers writing under their own names was substantial before the uprising. According to Threatened Voices, a project of Global Voices[6] advocacy listing all known prosecutions of people due to their online activities, 23 Tunisians were either arrested or threatened with arrest because of their online activities from the first case in 2002 up to the eve of the 2011 uprising, from dedicated cyberactivists like Zouhair Yahyaoui, the first cyber-dissident to be imprisoned, to a feminist retired university professor sentenced to eight months in prison for spreading rumors on Facebook about a rumor of abducted children (for a complete list, see the Appendix). During the same period, only six Moroccans

6 Global Voices is a community of bloggers who seek to "aggregate, curate, and amplify the global conversation online – shining light on places and people other media often ignore" - see globalvoicesonline.org/about/

suffered the same fate. According to these records Tunisia ranks fourth in the Top 10 of repressive countries, below Iran, China, and Egypt until the website was discontinued in 2012.[7] However, the case of Zouhair Yahyaoui highlights that the use of a pseudonym was not necessarily a sufficient precaution. Zouhair Yahyaoui alias Ettounsi, was tracked down and jailed for 16 months despite the use of a pseudonym. He died only 16 months after his conditional release, most likely as a consequence of torture and denial of medical treatment in prison, cementing his martyr status for the blogger community.[8]

Given that bloggers and activists living abroad were out of reach of the regimes of their country of origin, one might assume that they would not feel the need of hiding their identity behind an alias. However, as we have already seen in the case of Hisham Almiraat, the use of pseudonyms by bloggers and activists living abroad was not uncommon, grown out of a concern for the safety of themselves and their families in their countries of origin. This concern was particularly strong amongst Tunisians given that the fear of repression loomed large within the Tunisian community abroad. Thus, the contributors to the website *Tunisnews*, a repository of oppositional articles and communiqués founded by a group of five Tunisian refugees of the forbidden Islamist Ennahda movement in Sweden, explained the reason for their continued anonymity in an interview. "We insist to remain anonymous for personal reasons, to ensure the safety of our families and our relatives in the country." (Ravenel and Lamloum, 2002, p. 250)

In addition to concerns regarding repercussions for family members, critical bloggers living abroad but wishing to occasionally return to the home country would chose to publish using a pseudonym as well. An example of this cautious approach, with the fate of Zouhair Yahyaoui in mind while criticizing the government ferociously, is Riadh Guerfali, or *Astrubal*, a lawyer with whom Sami Ben Gharbia co-founded Nawaat in 2004. Guerfali worked at a university in France for many years before returning permanently to Tunisia in 2009. During these years, he made several trips to Tunisia, thus, contrary to his colleague Ben Gharbia, used a pseudonym. He continued to write for Nawaat, however, after his return to Tunisia, and he took extensive precautions to cover his tracks. Thus, he would not put his own texts online because the Tunisian state controlled the network, but sent them instead to his friend and colleague Ben Gharbia. Also, he stressed that despite these precautions he suspected that he could be arrested at any given moment. He pointed out how he talked to his son about this eventuality and how he

7 Despite the fact that Egypt arrested several bloggers in 2012, the ranking still holds, with 30 Egyptians either arrested or threatened until the 2011 uprisings.

8 After the 2011 uprising, then interim President Moncef Marzouki decreed that the day of Zouhair Yahyaoui's death, March 13, would become the national day of internet freedom.

was relieved when his son left the country to study in France. Finally, for Guerfali, the greatest threat of all was not physical repression, but the power of the regime on the economic livelihood of its citizens. Similar to the point made by Béatrice Hibou on the political economy of repression in Tunisia, Guerfali emphasizes that upon his return, he chose to consume his savings to be independent of the good will of the regime. According to him, this was also the main advantage of activists living abroad (Riadh Guerfali, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

> The financial criterion is what sets the residents abroad apart. (...) The main weapon of the regime was economic. They put people in prison when they did not manage to silence them with this economic weapon. (...) The fact of working abroad immunized me from economic pressures the regime could exert. If in terms of political actions, thanks to the internet, living abroad makes absolutely no difference, however being financially independent, i.e. that one's income does not depend on the goodwill of the oppressive regime, makes all the difference.

On the other hand, it is important to note that radical critique of the Ben Ali regime did not first emerge outside Tunisia. Sami Ben Gharbia explicitly mentions Decepticus, a frequent contributor to Zouhair Yahyaoui's TuneZine, as the first Tunisian cyber-dissident. In fact, Zouhair Yahyaoui's forum was the cradle of online radical critique of the regime, and his imprisonment and subsequent death from a heart attack emboldened the core group of contributors to the forum, who used pseudonyms and were partly living in Tunisia and partly living abroad, to further pursue their political struggle.

5.2.2 *The question of credibility*

The threat of imprisonment or intimidation did not stop all bloggers based in Tunisia from using their real names. Generally speaking, bloggers living in Tunisia were very cautious, but there were also exceptions to the rule, following a more impulsive approach. Amine Kochlef, for example, claims – not without pride – to have been "the first to blog under his real name." However, the choice to write under a real name carried a risk, which Kochlef admits, was for him part of the game. He explains that writing about politics was exciting, that he was aware of the risks but that both the adrenaline and the camaraderie in the blogging community kept him going.

Then, the Tunisian state attempted to dissuade him from writing by intimidation. Amine recalls that his house was burglarized three times, with the only stolen

items being his computer and his camera every time. Other domestic bloggers like Lina Ben Mhenni, Slim Amamou and Sofiene Chourabi were equally victims of such break-ins and followed by secret police, and those intrusions with the removal of usually only a few objects were perceived as a warning by the regime. Amine pointed out that the intimidations built up. They would tell his parents as well as his brother, who was working at the ministry of education, "talk to him, he needs to stop". These threats eventually prompted him to leave the country and to immigrate to Canada when the opportunity presented itself (Amine Kochlef, personal communication, January 11, 2014).[9]

While writing under an alias was fairly common in the Web more generally, Amine's emphasis on the fact that he used his real name demonstrates that this choice carried weight. In an extremely repressive context like Tunisia, disclosing your real name entailed to expose yourself to governmental repression, but for him, it also added an additional layer of credibility to his writing. This quest for trustworthiness was also important in a less dangerous context in Morocco, where Hisham Almiraat's anonymity eroded over time because he did not deem it necessary to rigorously maintain it. He also concluded that keeping his real identity secret was damaging to his position inside the community, feeling that "it was necessary to disclose my real name as confidence was needed to build strong relationships with fellow activists" (Almiraat, 2011).

While writing under one's own name while living in the home country is a decision that might have immediate consequences in the form of repression, cyberactivists permanently living abroad might take this decision more easily. One of the most prominent examples of outspoken activists living abroad is Sami Ben Gharbia. Blogger since 2002 and co-founder of the collective blog *Nawaat* in 2004, Ben Gharbia has been a well-connected freedom of expression activists from the advent of blogging. In addition to his position as a full-time activist as Advocacy Director at the international blogger network Global Voices, he was one of the most vocal bloggers of Tunisian origin. As a political refugee in the Netherlands, he did not expect to return to his home country before the fall of the Ben Ali regime. He himself admitted that "living outside the country made it easier to be an activist in your own name." However, despite the fact that Tunisians were by and large protected from repercussions by the rule of law in their host countries, the use of one's real name was rather the exception than the norm. Indeed, the concerns about the safety of their families remained. Ben Gharbia conceded that his family suffered from his engagement by receiving nightly visits and threats. Nevertheless,

9 Amine Kochlef left just before the uprisings in November 2010.

he stresses that his family respected his political engagement (Sami Ben Gharbia, personal communication, March 14, 2014).

At the same time, using one's own name is not necessarily enough to be a credible activist. Actually, the fact of living abroad can be detrimental to the cause. Thus, Amira Yahyaoui (daughter of Moktar and cousin of Zouhair Yahyaoui), who left the country in 2004, revealed that she hesitated to be vocal about politics because she felt that those living abroad had "less legitimacy" than those living in the country because they did not suffer the consequences of their activism (Amira Yahyaoui, personal communication, 29 December 2015). This reasoning was also brought forward in a heated discussion on political blogging in which Sami Ben Ghabia deplored the lack of political standpoints in the blogosphere. In the discussion to this post, a user calling himself "x" expressed the reasons why bloggers might choose to avoid political statements or chose to stay anonymous:

> "Stop criticizing others if you have chosen exile. We must not forget that there are people amongst us who still frequent Tunisia... I find it silly that a blogger does not preserve his anonymity and at the same time criticizes the government and returns to Tunisia in fear."(Comment on the blog post "Blogs Tunisiens: des zones Touristiques!" on the blog of Ben Gharbia (2005))

5.2.3 *To write or not to write - Political speech vs. Self-censorship*

Whether to use one's real name or a pseudonym is not the only decision to be made. Another strategy, which can be adopted either in conjunction with the use of the pseudonym or by itself, consists of treating the internet more like a situation in real life; namely, to assume the same restrictions to speech that characterize a conversation in public in an authoritarian state. Reactions to this perceived danger range from self-censorship to the heavy reliance on symbolism. Finally, events of censorship and the persecution of bloggers stimulate debates inside the blogosphere on how to deal with censorship and political speech.

In Morocco, the existence of so-called red lines is a secret to none. Thus, while criticizing the government and certain decisions of the king are common, showing open support to the Polisario, promoting atheism or to call for the establishment of a republic crosses those lines. In the case of Polisario, there are websites operated by associations based abroad, such as Solidarité Maroc that is based in France. However, Islam and territorial integrity are central to Moroccan identity, thus to question them by championing atheism and the independence of Western Sahara

removes the speaker far from public consensus. As for the king, the monarchy was and remains very popular in Morocco, and this extends to the Moroccan community living abroad as well. Of the three taboo topics, this is the one that can be more easily debated, but as well within its limits, which are also obvious to Moroccan bloggers living abroad. Thus, when blogger Une Marocaine, living in France, was asked what she would write about if she would return to Morocco definitely, she mused: "I would write more about Morocco (...) but honestly, I could not adopt the tone I allow myself here to criticize the French president, to talk about the king of Morocco" (Une Marocaine, 2009). Thus, while some would prefer a truly constitutional monarchy like in Spain, they will not directly criticize the king.

Censorship was, for a long time, limited to those websites that addressed the widely accepted taboo topics. Thus is why the case of Fouad Mourtada, the first Moroccan persecuted for his online activities, unsettled many in the Moroccan blogosphere, igniting debates on what was permitted to write and what was off-limits. Mourtada was sentenced to three years in prison in 2008 for creating a fake Facebook profile of the Moroccan king's brother Moulay Rachid, interpreted by a Casablanca court as "villainous practices linked to the alleged theft" of the prince's identity, shattered the wide-spread perception that Morocco enjoyed an otherwise "incomparable freedom of expression compared to other countries of the Arab and African world, and that this was especially true for the internet" (Drissi Bakhakhat, 2008). A number of bloggers reacted by closing down their operations, the most prominent case being the closure of the IT blog MoTIC, one of the most popular Moroccan blogs that had been voted Best IT Blog at the Maroc Web Awards in 2008. His owner Mohamed Drissi Bakhkhat, professor of economics at the Abdelmalek Essaâdi University of Tangier, explained his retreat by "the very dangerous and serious turn the Fouad Mourtada affair is taking and the ridiculous reasons for which he was arrested, lynched, tortured and held prisoner without possibility to be released on bail, this does not bode well for bloggers (...) if the creation of a fake Facebook profile warrants this treatment, then the next could be a blogger." The 113 comments on the blog post express regret but also understanding. Contrary to commentators announcing to shut down their blogs to "create a new one that does not criticize anything", Drissi Bakhkhat maintains he "prefers not to write than to write under constraints." (Drissi Bakhakhat, 2008)

In Tunisia, these debates took place much earlier because its first cyberdissident to be imprisoned was Zouhair Yahyaoui in 2000. Given that this case occurred before blogging became popular, it influenced how Tunisians behaved online. Thus, when the blogosphere grew, a conflict emerged on how to deal with political writ-

ing, with activists claiming their space in the global debate while the majority of bloggers, stemming from a society where talking about politics was an absolute taboo, was wary of the consequences of the inclusion of the activists. An example for the tensions existing at this point between those arguing for radical critique of the regime, came to the fore in December 2005, when Houssein Ben Ameur, a computer scientist living in Canada since 1999, refused to list Sami Ben Gharbia's blog on his blog aggregator *Tn-blogs.org*, comparable to a telephone book for blogs. At that time, the number of Tunisian bloggers had risen sharply. The multiplication of blogs was judged critically by some long-established bloggers who deplored the quality and the subjects covered on the new blogs. As in other countries, the democratization of the blogosphere resulted in a diversification of its content, reflecting the interests of the average users. Going beyond topics that agitated the first users of the internet, like computer developments and politics, the new blogs covered various topics including, but not limited to, fashion, poetry, cooking and other hobbies. The avoidance of political issues by the large majority of Tunisian bloggers incited some of the political bloggers to violently criticize this development (Adibs1, 2006). Subsequently, Sami Ben Gharbia wrote a widely commented blog post accusing Ben Ameur of listing only "politically correct" bloggers, and thereby splitting the Tunisian blogging community in two. Gharbia's intuition was proven right when Ben Ameur acknowledged that the reason of the refusal was the political nature of the blog. Ben Ameur's main argument was his fear of seeing his blog censored:

> "I am like many bloggers on *Tn-blogs*, youth who are thirsty for freedom, who are torn between the desire for freedom and their morbid fear, instilled by a system that you know very well. You're right to be angry, be angry with us. I salute your courage and all those who militate openly. I don't have it." (comment on the blog of Ben Gharbia 2005)

When pressed about the issue, Ben Ameur maintains that the reason for his decision was the fear of having his website censored in Tunisia and not repercussions for his family living in the country. He argued that *Tn-blogs.org* aspired to be a directory of all (well, almost all) Tunisian blogs, hence if it was blocked, it would have made itself redundant (Houssein Ben Ameur, personal communication, 6 March 2015). Indeed, one blocked blogger indicated that the censorship of his blog had divided his readership by six (Boukornine, 2010). This initial dispute was eventually resolved and Ben Ameur added a number of dissident blogs, amongst which were Sami Ben Gharbia's and that of the outspoken human rights

activist and Tunisian judge Mokhtar Yahyaoui (the uncle of Zouhair Yahyaoui). *Tn-blogs.org* was eventually blocked at the end of 2010 (Houssein Ben Ameur, personal communication, 6 March 2015).

With time passing, the conflict lines between partisans of confrontational speech and those preferring to keep a low profile and to either avoid politics due to a lack of interest or self-censorship faded away, and netizens living in Tunisia starting to increasingly write about politics in 2008/2009. However, with the expectation of the state and its agents searching the internet for political debates to monitor and possibly censor in mind, they preferentially resorted to oppositional speech acts; namely, a highly-coded language peppered with symbolism and allusions. In the best of cases, the adoption of oppositional speech acts gives way to an indirect and witty style meant to evade the more superficial kind of censorship that searches for certain keywords common in political debates. In Tunisia, this style flourished, with potentially dangerous keywords like "Ben Ali" being substituted with coded references to the regime. For example, bloggers would mention the mauve, the color of the ruling RCD and omnipresent in the idolatry of the regime; ridicule the regime's insistence on "Change" for more than twenty years. Another frequent symbol ridiculed was the number seven, which refers to the date of the "medical coup" against state founder Bourguiba on 7 November 1987, but also lend it name to a television channel (Tunisie7) and an airline (Sevenair). A representative of the coded, witty style was Fatma Arabicca, whose blog was highly appreciated in the Tunisian blogosphere, as she wrote in a very poetic, sometimes sarcastic way. Using a pseudonym and a subtle critique, she avoided censorship. However, the authorities were monitoring her given that she was detained for a few days in November 2009 because she was accused of blogging on a more radical blog, DEBATunisie, whose caricatures use the aforementioned symbolism extensively. She was liberated after -Z-, the blogger behind DEBATunisie, posted a new caricature proving that Fatma Arabicca was not the cartoonist.

This subtle, indirect style also created the mythical image of Ammar. In the heavily monitored and censored Tunisian internet, Ammar refers to the false "404 File not found" error message concealing the actual "403 Access Forbidden" displayed on blocked websites. Ammar is imagined as the impersonation of the censor himself, pictured as a brainless policeman. While the exact origin of the mythical figure is uncertain, one theory is that the "404 File not found" was identified with the driver of a Peugeot 404, a very common car in Tunisia driven by the lower classes. Ammar, a very common name, hence represents a random, lowly police officer in charge of blocking contentious websites who earns just as much as to afford the 404. Over time, the references and artwork featuring Ammar prolifer-

ated. The cartoonist -Z- portrayed Ammar as a policeman in a purple uniform using golden scissors. However, this symbolism and the campaigns build on them were not acceptable to the more outspoken activists, for whom the figure of Ammar was a mere smokescreen hiding the real culprit; namely, the Tunisian police state. Nawaat and their comrades-in-arms sought to "name and shame" the government directly, insisting that it was the Tunisian internet Agency and the regime of Ben Ali and not some mystical figure that were responsible for internet censorship. However, in hindsight, Sami Ben Gharbia concedes that the figure of Ammar did help the cause because it allowed apolitical netizens to talk about censorship, but in his opinion, the tentative nature of the discourse "postponed the revolution" (Sami Ben Gharbia, personal communication, March 14, 2014).

5.3 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have seen that the monitoring practices of the state influenced the behavior of web users in the respective countries. Particularly the variation of political opportunities between bloggers based in Tunisia and those based abroad explain why the most ferocious and persistent critique of the Tunisian regime was voiced by the latter rather than by the former. However, we also saw that the relationship between repression and activism is complex, with bloggers employing various coping strategies, depending on their willingness to take risks and, in the case of the diaspora, whether they expected to return to their home country. Tunisians abroad were not the instigators of radical critique of the regime, but the fact of living abroad facilitated their political activism, because they were not concerned for their physical integrity and their economic livelihood. These relatively favorable conditions enabled them to take on the role of the radical mobilizers, allowing them to persist in their political activism, which involved the investment of time and money.

In the case of Morocco, however, the circumstances were different. While the monitoring of the population in Tunisia was omnipresent and obvious to all, with every conversation remotely touching politics deemed suspicious and dangerous, the so-called red lines in Morocco were subtler, and they were more widely accepted by the population at large. In fact, the web emerged as a space for political debate most prominently in Tunisia, where the space for public debate tightened with the years, whereas the spread of the internet in Morocco coincided with a period of political détende and the expectation that newly-crowned King Mohammed IV would advance the democratization of the country. Discussions about politics in general were permitted if they do not criticize the political system as a whole,

up to the 2011 Arab uprisings, the large majority of bloggers and especially the most widely read and well-known, stuck to these rules. Setbacks like Fouad Mourtada affair incited some bloggers to quit and others to self-censor. However, online speech was considered so free that an oppositional speech act style similar to Tunisia did not emerge. Thus, we can confirm the hypotheses that in the context of high online and offline repression, the relative importance of repression in the diaspora facilitates dissident migrant cyberactivism and that strategies employed vary according to the perception of risk and rewards involved.

6

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

The spread of the internet throughout the world has been accompanied by the expectation that it would serve as a potent tool for democratization. Already before the Arab uprisings, in January 2010, then Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton praised the revolutionary potential of the Internet, poised to advance political transformation worldwide and to fundamentally change the rules of political engagement and action. In her speech, she compared non-violent online political speech with the circulation of pamphlets during the Cold War, which according to her "helped pierce the concrete and concertina wire of the Iron Curtain" (Rodham Clinton, 2010). This is reminiscent of Egyptian *We are all Khaled Said* Facebook group manager Wael Ghonim's "if you want to liberate a government, give them the internet." These appraisals and analogies to previous revolutions are at the heart of many questions scholars of online contention ask, notably to what extent findings on political contention online challenge established tenets of social movement theory, or as Earl and Kimport call it, lead from the adaptation of established theories to the creation of a "theory 2.0" (Earl and Kimport, 2011, p. 27). One of the facets of collective action sought to be affected by the internet is the need for co-presence and, linked to this, for the development of a strong collective identity for collective action to take place.

This chapter will investigate whether a collective identity emerged inside the respective blogosphere and if so, what this collective identity revolves around. While addressing this major question, this chapter will also deal with two related questions; namely, which diaspora activists will be most prominent in the respective contexts and how do diaspora activists frame their political engagement? During this chapter, we will see that while collective action can, today, be spurred by individuals, durable relationships and a collective identity remain important for more protracted campaigns seeking to channel these decentralized initiatives.

6.1 COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND INTERNET ACTIVISM

One of the major benefits of internet-based campaigns beside speed and scale of the spread of information has been that it abolished the need for co-presence for social movements, enabling collective action without being physically being together (Earl and Kimport, 2011, ch.6). As shown in the preceding chapters, blogging and internet activism can take place decoupled from time and space, with actors living thousands of kilometers apart and participating whenever they have time to write their next post. But does this mean that the cultural aspects of social movements, most notably the formation of a collective identity, loose their importance? A collective identity "describes what makes people occupying a category similar", whereas "personal identity is the bundle of traits that we believe makes us unique" (Polletta and Jasper, 2001, p.298). A collective identity thus consists of several individuals' shared identities to form the identity of the specific group. As a result, an individual can associate with several groups and thus hold several social identities, whereas a collective identity consists of an identity shared by many individuals. The concept of collective identity framing was embraced by sociologists seeking to explain why actors form groups and identify with them, a cultural dimension of collective action that resource mobilization theory failed to explain (Johnston and Klandermans, 1995). Instead of focusing on how social movements mobilize resources to pursue their aims, this cultural approach allowed researchers to explain behaviors and motivations of movement actors. Since then, scholars of contentious politics have established that a highly developed collective identity results in a higher inclination of individuals to protest on behalf of that group (De Weerd and Klandermans, 1999). At the same time, it must be stressed that linking a movement with a collective identity does not suppose that the participants sharing this identity are necessarily homogeneous (Della Porta and Diani, 1999, p. 24).

The constructivist approach emphasizing the importance of discursive elements in the formation of social movements has similarly been applied to research on transnational groups like diasporas, which formally focused on more essentialist perspectives in assuming group formation as the automatic result of migration, exile and dispersal. Thus, discursive elements, notably the presence of a group consciousness, were integrated when the definition of diaspora was expanded to groups other than the classic Jewish and Armenian diasporas, and serve as complements to the objective criteria of diasporas in the now widely-used definitions by Safran and Cohen (1991; 1997). Other approaches stress that the importance of a shared identity goes beyond being a mere compliment to essentialist criteria,

with diasporas requiring an effort of construction and imagination of community analogous to Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities." In fact, a strand of literature in the field has used elements of social movement theory to explain the formation of diasporas as a mobilization process (Sökefeld, 2006; Adamson, 2012). With regards to the influence of the internet in the formation of transnational identities, Brinkerhoff (2009) advances that the rootedness of contemporary migrant populations in both their adopted and their inherited cultures enables them to identify with both, thereby become ambassadors in both places. However, this chapter will show that the most committed participants in the respective blogospheres are first generation migrants whose identification with the diaspora is ambivalent. This underscores the question brought up by the literature of transnationalism whether today's migrant communities develop such a high level of cohesion in terms of identity to be grouped together with traditional diasporas (e.g. Al-Ali and Koser, 2002).

With regards to the importance of a collective identity in the age of online mobilization, there are indications that it loses in importance for certain kinds of collective action. Before, the formation of a collective identity through collaboration and co-presence was beneficial to counter the "costs" of protest such as police repression and stigma attached to attending street protests (Melucci, 1989; Fantasia, 1988). At that time, scholarship on the formation of a group consciousness has been largely premised on face-to-face interaction and shared spaces. As we have seen in the previous chapter, however, the internet can serve as a free space in authoritarian regimes where true public spaces have been suffocated. Earl and Kimport cautiously indicate that the development of a collective identity is not necessary for online tactics that are not dangerous (Earl and Kimport, 2011, p. 145). Indeed, one of the aspects the internet seems to have changed in collective action is the empowerment of the individual and the emergence of collective action with relatively little involvement of traditional social movement organizations and weak collective identities. There are examples for one-off online campaigns in democracies, most commonly referred to by their Twitter hashtag, such as the 2013 anti-sexism campaign #Aufschrei in Germany (Eckert and Puschmann, 2013). A notable example for a more durable campaign of this new mode of "connective action" was the *Indignados* movement in Spain, which emphasized a personalized identity and relegated formal organizations to the margins (W. L. Bennett and Segerberg, 2013, p. 20). However, the picture is more complex in authoritarian regimes, towards which the discourse of the internet as a liberation technology is primarily directed (see for example Diamond, 2010). While these decentralized, personalized forms of communication played a major role during the Arab uprisings, they were accom-

panied by efforts to pool the information available to make the communication flows more efficient. These efforts were not undertaken by individuals, but developed as part of conversations among groups of activists who knew each other from previous activities and shared a collective identity.

6.1.1 *Individualist bloggers and collective identity*

Before the domination of social media platforms that is characteristic of today's internet, blogging was hailed as a tool with the potential to revive the public sphere in the West and to enable otherwise impossible conversations about political topics in authoritarian regimes. It was assumed that information circulating online would induce citizens to hold their governments accountable. From this it was implied that the actors on these platforms such as bloggers would be crucial in bringing about social change, and Western governments and organizations devised training programs targeted at bloggers. However, it should not be forgotten that bloggers are primarily simply internet users who choose to publish texts in a specific format. By nature, bloggers – to the extent that they can be considered a group at all – are a very heterogeneous one, and bloggers are not necessarily politicized. In fact, a case could be made that bloggers are not necessarily ideal candidates to form a social movement requiring coordination since they are engaged in a particularly individualistic activity. Despite the features of the blogosphere that make blogging a less solitary and more social activity such as commenting and the blogroll, one of the key characteristics of blogs is their diversity in terms of content and style.

In fact, blogging is rooted in the kinds of intimist accounts of daily life that emerged in the 1990s in the form of online diaries and threads. Most often, these public diaries reported personal accounts of day-to-day activities and were highly individualistic. A blogger can address any number of issues, ranging from literature to personal everyday life experiences to politics. As there was no editor controlling what was being published and writing under a pseudonym was common, bloggers took great liberties in the choice of topics and viewpoints they addressed in their posts. Blogging was a leisurely activity, during which some would write poetry while others would write political pamphlets. More politically-inclined bloggers often embraced either the role of political commentator or that of a citizen-journalist. Citizen-journalism has been defined as either as "when the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another" (Rosen, 2008) or occasionally slammed by journalists as a "pyjama army" of generally anonymous, self-referential amateurs spreading gossip and scandal while considering themselves to be serious journal-

ists (Keen, 2007, p. 47). While this dispute stimulates reflections about whether we can trust the veracity of information online, it should not obscure the fact that this kind of amateur journalism is highly appreciated in countries where traditional journalism fails to inform the population effectively, such as in authoritarian regimes where the media often follows the government line. It should therefore not be a surprise that other definitions directly stem from the experience of bloggers in authoritarian regimes and these definitions presuppose an activist point of view, such as "an alternative and activist form of newsgathering and reporting that functions outside mainstream media institutions, (...) driven by different objectives and ideals and relies on alternative sources of legitimacy than traditional or mainstream journalism" (Radsch, 2013).

While a certain affinity of citizen-journalism and activism cannot be denied, given that reporting on issues that are otherwise ignored in the mainstream media can be considered a critique of these media, effective and sustained political activism requires more than an individual with a dissident stance. Especially in authoritarian contexts, finding reliable allies through collaboration remains key to mounting durable campaigns and to defend against possible repression. The major contribution of the internet in this context is the facilitation of finding like-minded people in the first place. Bloggers are not a monolithic group as they often take on a great variety of viewpoints, but it must be noted that they often do share a common middle-class background given that – especially in developing countries – a certain degree of material wealth and education is necessarily to afford a computer and an internet connection as well as the ability to use them. This common socio-economic background coupled with their common activity of writing makes them more sensitive to certain issues than the general population. As such, the fight for freedom of expression is likely to become a major unifier, the one issue a large share of bloggers can identify with, even more so when it touches them personally. It appears that at this point, the identification with blogging per se supersedes other divisions that may characterize a given blogosphere, thereby contributing to the development of a collective activist identity.

6.2 COMPLEX MODERN TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITIES

Using Social Network Analysis, this thesis started with the realization that a number of actors of the Tunisian and Moroccan blogospheres active during the 2011 uprising had been, in fact, based in Europe. In the subsequent interviews with bloggers and cyberactivists of both Tunisia and Morocco, several differences emerged. For one, at least before the 2011 uprisings, the repressive stance of the Tunisian

state towards its population – both at home and abroad – effectively inhibited the development of a strong diaspora consciousness. As we have seen before in the chapter on repression, mistrust among Tunisians was wide-spread and avoided dealing with Tunisian institutions such as embassies and consulates because they were associated with the repressive regime. In addition, there were several activists in exile, such as Nawaat's Sami Ben Gharbia, who fled Tunisia in 1998 after being persecuted as an Islamist. As he notes in his book, France was not a recommended destination for Tunisian Islamists seeking refuge from persecution, because it was a traditional ally to the Tunisian regime. Thus, it did not recognize their claim to asylum and a number of them were assigned to residence, which is the reason why Tunisian Islamists preferred to claim asylum in other countries such as the UK or Sweden (Ben Gharbia, 2003, p. 233). There was, however, a small community of secular political refugees, among which was, for example, the later interim president Moncef Marzouki. Actually, Marzouki owned a website, but he used it to publish political communiqués and did not engage with other websites or the blogosphere, which in part explains why he did not appear in the network presented in chapter 4. These well-known figures of the Tunisian opposition would regularly gather for party meetings and conferences. However, generally speaking, the new generation of internet activists were not interested in the opposition figures in exile, and the two worlds rarely touched. The opposition parties in exile struggled to attract new, young militants and they rarely entertained online presences. This split between internet activism and traditional associations was not reserved to the community abroad. The number of associations grew considerably under Ben Ali, in part because the regime encouraged associative life because it served as a façade and gave the illusion of a participatory life, while the few unruly associations, such as the Women's Democratic Association (Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates), were harassed (Hibou, 2011, p. 95). As Amira Yahyaoui, cyberactivist and daughter of the prominent Tunisian judge Moktar Yahyaoui points out:

> "A priori, there was a schism between the cyberactivist community and the associations. Most cyberactivists were not engaged in normal political activism. My father was the only one engaged in both. Even Moncef Marzouki did not debate online and was not in contact with cyberactivists." (Amira Yahyaoui, personal communication, 29 December 2015)

It appears that, in the years preceding the 2011 uprising, some politicians of the opposition in exile reached out to bloggers, who were mainly students studying

abroad, but the latter were unwilling to engage in traditional party politics. The relationship between the two camps was dysfunctional at best. There was a general feeling that the opposition had been largely ineffective, preferably churning out one communiqué after another without any sizable effect. Sometimes, this critique was mixed with a pinch of youthful conceit. As such, the blogger Arabasta related to me that "after having written on my blog for two years, more people were interested in what I was writing than them, who had been in politics for fifteen years, affiliated to parties that were largely unknown" (Arabasta, personal communication, 7 July 2014). He also claims that when bloggers organized their first real demonstration in Tunisia including demonstrations in solidarity in Paris, the traditional opposition sought to pocket the event and imprint their own political message on it:

> "When Amira [Yahyaoui] wanted to register the demonstration here in Paris, she realized that this had already been done by others. These were politicized people, whereas we wanted to make it an apolitical demonstration to be able to gather a maximum of people. They chased us, they wanted to pocket this freshness of ours, because we knew how to write for a young public." (Arabasta, personal communication, 7 July 2014)

Thus the relationship between Tunisian politicians in exile and political bloggers was difficult and there was no shared identity. Many of the most active cyberactivists living abroad were exiles, such as Sami Ben Gharbia and Amira Yahyaoui, and they were certainly amonst the most radical activists. However, another group of very active cyberactivists was students, thus, hypothesis 3.1, which states that exiles will be the most active among cyberactivists living abroad, can only be partially confirmed. While the political reason to emigrate makes it more likely that immigrants remain politically involved after their departure, another factor appears to be the person's history of migration, that is whether they are the first generation of immigrants or whether they were born abroad.

The importance of the personal history of migration is particularly palpable in the Moroccan case, because the liberalization of its political system had caused the return of the leftist opposition, whose leaders had fled the country, from exile. As a result, there is no sizable community of Moroccans in exile today, with the exception of assumed atheists, who have begun to be more vocal about their non-belief since the uprisings, notably on social network sites (Dalle, 2016).[1] Thus,

1 Outspoken atheist constitute a marginal group in the Arab world, were citizens are often assumed to be Muslims by birth by default. Those who publicly voice their non-beliefs are regularly sued.

the Moroccan community abroad today comprises primarily economic migrants from the 1960s, their descendants and more recent immigrants, notably students. As a result, there is a group of Moroccans living abroad that developed a modern diasporic identity, which also expresses itself online. Next to the existence of forums catering to the diaspora, the success of `yabiladi.com`, for which there is no Tunisian equivalent, is an indicator for this development. As its founder Mohamed Ezzouak points out, the French-language website successfully filled a niche when it first went online in 2002. Until today, its audience is predominantly based abroad (up to 80 percent), as much attracted by articles on political and social issues in Morocco as by the forums and helpful guides on everyday matters. The articles published on Yabiladi take the specific interests of Moroccans living abroad into account. For example, the website regularly features articles on environmental issues, a topic, Ezzouak explains, that resonates more with Moroccans living abroad than with the local population, linked to the diasporic concern of the preservation of the homeland.

As to the interest the diaspora pays to politics in their country of origin, across both cases, I found that it is closely related the person's history of migration. Yabiladi's founder, who looks back to almost fifteen years of adapting his websites to the needs of his diaspora audience, related to me that the first generation of immigration, which left the country in 1970/80s, remain very attached to Morocco's political landscape. This so-called 'old generation' is the most active group with regards to politics on Yabiladi, reading and commenting on articles on political events in Morocco. According to Ezzouak, they also participate at conferences in their host countries and will join demonstrations. However, the old generation of migrant activists did not join the blogosphere and do not actively use internet tools to mobilize. According to one account, "the old generation is surpassed by the events and by technology; they have developed their way of doing things a long time ago and they struggle to adapt to new technologies" (Mohamed Y, personal communication, 19 July 2014). Consequently, the cyberactivists I encountered were almost exclusively middle class students or young professionals in their twenties or early thirties, born and raised in Morocco or Tunisia. Mohamed Y confirmed this impression, stating that these Moroccan activists typically left the country after having completed high school or first courses at university, and their political consciousness remains firmly attached to their home country. In contrast, the second and third generations are disconnected from political questions in their supposed

Examples include the case of Jabeur Mejri, who was condemned to 7 years in prison for publishing caricatures "insulting Islam" in 2012 (he was freed in 2014), and Kacem El Ghazzali, a Moroccan atheist who sought refuge in Switzerland in 2010 after receiving numerous death threats and suffering from discrimination by agents of the Moroccan state.

homeland – they are generally less well informed about the details in Moroccan political life, less knowledgeable regarding political parties and politicians. Hence, while there might have been second and third generation immigrants at demonstrations in solidarity in Paris and elsewhere, the organizers derived predominantly from the first generation of immigrants. Due to the political climate in Morocco, they often also arrived in Paris with an activist past, thus with a completely different approach towards formal organizations. In fact, Mohamed X, after years of activism in the Moroccan student union, contributed to the creation of a Parisian branch of the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH). It appears that the liberalization of the political system in Morocco allowed Moroccan students not only to become activists in Morocco, but to pursue their activism once they settled abroad. This indicates that hypothesis 3.2, namely that the majority of political diaspora bloggers in the context of severe governmental control is not affiliated with a formal diaspora organization, is correct, although the aversion of Tunisians to formal organizations appears not solely linked to the fear of surveillance, but also to the perceived ineffectiveness of the political parties in exile.

While a strong attachment to the country of origin is primarily a phenomenon of first generation immigrants, there are, of course, exceptions to the rule. For example, there were also a few second-generation participants in the Parisian branch of the February 20 movement in Morocco. However, the coordinator of the February 20 group in Paris pointed out that their interest in the movement seemed to be different. Whereas the first-generation students' priority was significant political change in Morocco, the second generation Franco-Moroccans present at the events were either content with the political situation in Morocco or they wanted the country to become more conservative (Mohamed Y, personal communication, 19 July 2014). Another exception is Hasni, a French-Tunisian based in Paris, who has both nationalities but does not speak any Arabic. His political epiphany occurred after he finished his studies, got his first job and went for a trip to Tunisia. While there he met a journalist who took him home and closed the shutters, at which point Hasni realized the degree to which freedom of expression was stifled in the country. After his return to France, he became one of the leading figures of one of the first Tunisian political forums, *TuneZine* and later *RéveilTunisien*. However, the early Tunisian political web also shows the limits to the construction of a diasporic identity. His lack of knowledge of the Arabic language, combined with the fact that several other managers of the platform were French nationals sympathizing with the Tunisian cause, but without direct ties to the country, caused a fierce controversy when the original manager of the website, Zouhair Yahyaoui was sentenced to prison. The forum and later highly successful collective blog *Nawaat*

was founded at that moment, underlining that it was "100 percent Tunisian", although it was in fact managed by Tunisians living abroad. This episode highlights the fuzzy borders of diasporic identity, in which certain aspects such as language seem to be non-negotiable. It also highlights a similar episode in the post-2011 Constitutional assembly, when Karima Souid, a representative of the diaspora spoke French instead of Arabic in the plenum and caused a controversy (Pouessel, 2015).

The question of belonging to a diasporic community remains complex. Some struggle with the notion of diaspora or the terms their home countries use to categorize them, such as blogger UneMarocaine: "MRE is a label that others, notably the administration, put on us, but I don't mind it, I would not give it away. (...) I am against choosing certain aspects of my identity. (...) I am several things at once and I want to keep this "plurality" and to enrich it as much as possible" (Politoconaute, 2009). Others assume the label more directly by using it in the headlines of their blogs, but for most migrant bloggers, the fact of living abroad is not mentioned specifically. Whether a blogger resides abroad is usually only detectable through anecdotes described in blog posts that contains clues on the location through the mentioning of certain places or customs (TheSanae, personal communication, 2 September 2015). Finally, the new generation of recent immigrants struggles with the desire to return to their countries of origin. While some nurture a diffuse desire to return at some point in their lives, comparable to the first generation of immigrants in the 1960s, the highly politicized are more likely to act on it. Following the departure of Ben Ali, many of the most vocal bloggers in exile returned to Tunisia in a bid to actively participate in the establishment of a true democracy in the country. Nawaat, for example, was transformed into a proper news outlet with paid staff and it also trains citizen-journalists in remote regions of the country. Another cyberactivist, Amira Yahyaoui, co-founded a non-governmental organization monitoring parliamentary votes and debates. While the return of exile bloggers to Tunisia is hardly surprising, four members of the Moroccan activist news website Mamfakinch returned to Morocco as well, enthusiastic to continue their political struggle on the ground.[2]

6.3 DEVELOPING A COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Did these complex transnational personal identities influence the collective identity that evolved in the respective blogospheres? As we have seen in earlier chapters, bloggers living abroad were active members of the blogospheres in their countries of origin. While the crawl of the Moroccan case in chapter 4 was not appropriate

2 Another activist had to leave Morocco again due to political persecution.

to draw conclusions about the state of the Moroccan blogosphere, my interviewees confirmed that Moroccans living abroad were overrepresented in the part of the Moroccan blogosphere that readily discussed political issues (Lbadikho, personal communication, 30 August 2015). However, as we will see, political campaigns were sporadic and the online activist sphere remained comparatively divided. As for Tunisia, we have seen in chapter 5 that there were fights opposing political activists living abroad to most bloggers in Tunisia proper, paralyzed in fear. The eventual emergence of a collective-activist identity in Tunisia, which build the groundwork for much of the 2011 uprising's initiatives, is related to the fight against internet censorship, that became a major rallying point for the Tunisian political web over the years. While the issue of freedom of expression was secondary for the Tunisian population at large, it resonated deeply with bloggers as censorship spread.

6.3.1 *Tunisia's bloggers rally for fight for freedom of expression*

The collective blog Nawaat formed the hard core of the group of cyber dissidents, developing a range of sophisticated campaigns to raise awareness about the repressive nature of the Ben Ali regime. To achieve their goal of attracting the attention of other internet users, they made eclectic use of Web 2.0 tools, using them to spread their texts and video montages, but also for innovative campaigns that were recognized to be at cutting edge of cyberactivism at that time. For example, Astrubal of Nawaat created a video as part of a campaign calling for the boycott of the 2004 presidential elections in Tunisia, which remixed a commercial based on George Orwell's 1984, in which a screen showing Tunisian president Ben Ali speaking is smashed. It has been noted that this was a particularly early example of the now common practice to remix (Zuckerman, 2007). In 2007, the Nawaat made creative use of interactive maps to highlight abuse of presidential power and political repression. The first initiative involved the documentation of the movement of the Tunisian Presidential plane using data from planespotter sites, revealing that Ben Ali's wife secretly used the Presidential airplane for her extensive shopping trips to Europe. The second linked the location of the Tunisian prison with details about the political prisoners' cases and videos showing pleas from their families. The campaigns devised by Nawaat and associates were highly innovative at the time and made Tunisian cyberactivists widely known among their international peers, investigative journalists, and Human Rights organizations (Zuckerman, 2007; Internet.artizans, 2007). In fact, the blogger organization Global Voices contacted Nawaat to inquire about the Prison Map which eventually led to Sami Ben Ghar-

bia's employment in the organization as Advocacy Director (Sami Ben Gharbia, personal communication, 14 March 2014). This provided Sami Ben Gharbia with an income and connected Nawaat with a network of other groups fighting for the freedom of the Internet.

The campaigns developed by Nawaat over the years are also an example for a durable group of committed activists in repressive surroundings. Contrary to short-lived online campaigns such as online petitions or joining a Facebook group that do not require co-presence, Nawaat's projects require a level of trust that is usually built through face-to-face contact. In this case, the internet often is the place of first contact, but whenever possible, bloggers and cyberactivists tend to meet physically, either privately or during so-called meet-ups of a group. As we have seen in chapter 5, physical meetings allowed bloggers inside Tunisia to overcome the fear of repression through the realization that a group of like-minded people existed concretely. One prominent example of the importance of strong relationships for an activist group to persevere over time is Nawaat. This tightly knit group of four activists based abroad, assembling Sami Ben Gharbia, Riadh Guerfali (*Astrubal*) and his brother Sofiene (*Centrist*) as well as Malek Khadraoui (*El Ansari*), were at the center of most Tunisian online campaigns.[3] Sami and Sofiene knew each other personally, and thus by extension Sami knew his brother Riadh, for a long time before launching the collective blog. Riadh points out that choice of alliances mattered greatly in the activist sphere. Often, he says, groups like Nawaat experience infighting and schisms due to the strong egos of the persons involved. The members of the group overcame occasional fights because of great mutual respect, knowing that the reason for the fight was the issue at hand and that it was not personal (Riadh Guerfali, personal communication, October 14, 2014). Thus, while strong relationships between participants are less important for a one-off online protest, protracted collaborations are more likely to emerge around a core group of long-term, dedicated activists that trust each other. According to Riadh Guerfali,

> "Good working relationships are greatly enabled by personal contact. The internet does not replace this, on the contrary, it facilitates it. Human, physical relationships are absolutely indispensable." (Riadh Guerfali, personal communication, October 14, 2014)

While freedom of expression was an important issue for this group of political bloggers, it was by far not the only one. Instead, online censorship was seen as

3 The team also included *Mistral* and *Radical* at the beginning.

one facet of a generally repressive regime, to which they sought to attract attention, not only amongst Tunisians, but also among international public. For example, they seized events during which the attention of the international community was focused on Tunisia to highlight the repressive nature of the regime when they launched the online campaign *Yezzi Fock Ben Ali!* (it translates as "Enough is enough, Ben Ali! " in Tunisian dialect) on the occasion of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Tunis from 16 to 18 November 2005. It aimed at raising awareness on the state of Internet censorship in the country, directing international attention to the fact that the United Nations had chosen a very unsuitable place to hold the second phase of the WSIS. To reach this goal, the "Tunisian Association for the Defense of Cyberspace" (ATPD) was created, assembling a group of sixteen cyberactivists out of which at least eleven were based abroad, among them, Nawaat's co-founders Ben Gharbia and Guerfali.

Yezzi did not culminate in events on the ground, but in a virtual demonstration. Individuals were called to send in pictures of themselves carrying the slogan "Yezzi!" written for example on a placard held by hand or added to the photo using editing software. Also, they called upon Tunisian websites and blogs to show their solidarity by inserting a logo. Many of the roughly hundred demonstrators shown on the site on the day of its launch chose to mask their face to remain anonymous. Despite the fact that the website was blocked inside Tunisia eighteen hours after its launch, the campaign was considered a success since, according to the group, the number of page views rose to a peak of nearly 14,000 connections per day after being only four days online (Nawaat, 2005). After this period, the website was hacked and its content completely erased. The campaign was subsequently moved to Facebook to tap into its growing user base as well as to protect it from future hacks (Ben Gharbia, 2010).

This relatively high number of pageviews was achieved in part because the group had placed ads through the search engine Google, advertising their campaign for a list of keywords related to searches on the WSIS and the situation of freedoms in Tunisia (Nawaat, 2005). The ads were displayed a total of 170,363 times during the ten days around the summit (12-22 November 2005), with adwords displayed on websites relying on income from Google advertisement, including Tunisian news magazines. This strategy succeeded in attracting attention of international media like CNN Arabic and Al Jazeera (Al-Jazeera, 2005). The campaign was also highly publicized on Tunisian association sites, websites of oppositional political parties and blogs. In the years that followed, Yezzi was heralded as the first successful campaign against internet censorship and for freedom of expression in Tunisia. The slogan, close to Egypt's "Kefaya", although not as ubiquitous,

endured over the years and was revived during the 2011 uprisings. The campaign has been credited among one of the first signs of transgression that ultimately incited the Tunisian revolution, figuring among its origin stories (Chomiak, 2014, p. 23).

The Yezzi campaign is an example for the kind of creative and confrontational campaign that was favored by the highly-politicized strand of the Tunisian blogosphere. For this group of activists, the censorship of their websites by the regime was a nuisance, but ultimately it proved to them that they relevant. Many of them apparently saw it as a badge of honor, thus they would quite literally display this information clearly visible on their main page. However, others were opposed to the provocative tone these activists adopted. In fact, the initial conflict between activists based abroad keen to address the issue of censorship full frontal with bloggers living in Tunisia afraid to speak their mind out of fear of repression subsided, to be replaced by a struggle over the choice of the most appropriate strategy to attract the support of the apolitical. A group of cyberactivists, living both in Tunisia and abroad, was concerned that the impact of websites offering a fundamental critique of the Tunisian regime would be limited, given the high likelihood of censorship this strategy entailed. If a political website was censored, it lost its chance to attract a diverse readership because it would be unreachable from Tunisia unless the users used a proxy. However, those using proxies can be considered to be already in defiance with the government, thus writing about politics on a censored website was the equivalent to preaching to the choir.

The group devised a strategy to overcome this problem was to moderate their discourse, or what they called "the middle ground approach", consisting of bloggers engaging with political issues, emphasizing the importance of human rights, and freedom of expression, while at the same time not challenging Ben Ali's regime in a frontal way, could avoid censorship and thereby remain accessible to the uninitiated who did not use technical tools to circumvent the regime's online censorship (Tarek Kahlaoui, personal communication, 23 May, 2015). The schism between moderates and openly critical bloggers also conditioned the kind of cyberactivist campaigns that would emerge. The moderates focused on the fight against online censorship, such as "Je blogue pour la liberté d'expression" (I'm blogging for freedom of expression) in July 2007 and "la journée nationale pour la liberté d'expression" (National Day for Freedom of Expression), which was scheduled to coincide with a court hearing for a trial initiated by the blogger Zied El Heni against the Tunisian Internet Agency for having temporarily blocked Facebook (Ben Mhenni, 2008). Following the public outcry, the Tunisian reversed its decision to block the social network and opted to block individual profile pages instead.

Other online actions in the early days included Blank Post days on 25 December 2006 and on 25 December 2007 (Ben Gharbia, 2008). Eventually, in December 2008, a dozen Tunisian bloggers, including Lina ben Mhenni and Sofiane Chourabi, created a collective website promoting free speech, the "Network of Tunisian Bloggers for Free Blogging," with the number of contributors doubling in 2009, even though enthusiasm dwindled in early 2010.[4] It was here that the meme[5] of "Ammar 404" emerged, in reference to the false "404 File not found" concealing the actual "403 Access Forbidden" displayed on blocked websites. However, the campaigns failed to attract a major following since censorship only concerned a minority of primarily political bloggers.

The eventual radicalization of the moderates

Eventually, the radicalization of the moderates would be driven by a massive censorship campaign that hit the Tunisian web in April 2010. As we have seen in previous chapters, censorship was not new to Tunisia, however contrary to previous waves of censorship it now affected more mainstream websites. In addition to a growing number of blocked blogs, the Tunisian censors added new video share websites to its blacklist, as well as popular websites like the photo sharing portal Flickr. According to the blogger Lina Ben Mhenni

> "past campaigns against censorship were mainly sponsored by elite politicians and rights activists as the blocking was mainly directed at political and news websites, but it has now moved to websites that have nothing to do with politics, including photo, video, and music sharing websites, cooking websites, and even those dealing with arts and theatre." (Dbara, 2010)

The outrage at the extend of Internet censorship induced a group of cyberactivists to plan an anti-censorship demonstration, called "une manifestation rélle pour une liberté virtuelle" ("a real protest for virtual freedom") or "Nhar 3la 3mmar" (the day against Ammar), in Tunis on 22 May 2010. In fact, the event was conceived by activists living abroad, notably Amira Yahyaoui, but also Arabasta and Tarek Kahlaoui. The challenge was to organize an activity in Tunisia itself while they themselves were out of the country. They were aware of the irony that they were rallying for something to be done without being actually capable of doing anything, thus necessitating to "co-opt people who will risk going to prison for us" (Amira Yahyaoui, personal communication, 29 December 2015).

4 http://yatounes.blogspot.it/

5 An Internet meme is a short phrase, picture, or combination of both spread through the Internet, for example via message boards or social networking services like Facebook.

In addition to the demonstration in Tunis, simultaneous protests in solidarity were planned at Tunisian embassies in Paris, Brussels, Bonn, Montreal and at the Mission to the UN in New York. In order to appeal to the average Tunisian citizen afraid to talk about political issues, the event was declared apolitical with the only demand being the abolition of Internet censorship and the unblocking of all censored websites. In addition, to achieve the legality of the protest, two bloggers[6] volunteered to file an official "declaration of gathering" in Tunis, however the authorities declined to accept their declaration in person or by mail (Malek404, 2010). According to fellow blogger Azyz Amami, besides being willing to put themselves in the line of the regime, as middle-class university-educated engineers with children, they also embodied the success story of social rise through education promoted by the Ben Ali regime, making their revolt and spearheading of the protest even more shocking (Azyz Amami, personal communication, 26 May 2015). A few days before the demonstration, a Facebook group called "Ce Samedi, je m'habille en blanc et je vais prendre un café sur l'Avenue!" announced that all those willing to express their solidarity but afraid to demonstrate openly were invited to drink a coffee in one of the numerous coffee shops on Avenue Bourguiba. The day before the announced demonstration, the bloggers were summoned to the Ministry of Interior, held for several hours, and told to call off the rally. The next day, a ten to fifteen people in white t-shirts succeeded to reach the city center, which was blocked by a reinforced police guard patrolling Avenue Bourguiba and surrounding streets (Associated Press, 2010). Tarek Kalahoui, who was active in the student movement before leaving the country to study in the United States, assessed the success of the event as follows:

> "May 22 was not as we planned it, but it was also not worse that what we might have feared. (...) Regular people went, put on white shirts and went to Bourguiba. It was surprising for us. When I was in the student movement, we would be suppressed when we did street demonstrations even inside the university. The moment we tried go outside university, the police would go crazy. I was arrested at least two times in the 1990s because we tried to move the street demonstrations outside of campus. To go to the streets was a red line for Ben Ali and his regime." (Tarek Kahlaoui, personal communication, 23 May, 2015)

The demonstration did not prove an immediate success, and besides the fear of repression, one of the reasons that not more people took to the streets is most likely

6 Slim Amamou and Yassine Ayari, assisted by Lina Ben Mhenni and Azyz Amami

that the fight for freedom of expression did not rank as high on their list of priorities than for the bloggers. An indicator for these different priorities are the slogans used later in the 2011 uprisings, most notably "work, freedom, national dignity" (*'shughl, hurriyya, karama wataniya'*), in which the lack of employment and thus primary needs rank first, even though the desire for freedom and a life in dignity are present as well. Thus, even if the object of the protest might not have resonated as strongly with the general population as it did with bloggers, the implications of the event for the cyberactivist sphere were substantial. In fact, the "Nhar 3la 3mmar" protest was the first campaign that congregated the moderate and the outspoken activists. For Arabasta, who had participated in the organization of the events from abroad, it was a major breaking point:

> "For me, it was the first step, the first time that we moved from the internet to the streets. It was the breaking point that the internet could have an impact on real life, on politics. While I think it had no effect on the regime itself, it was important to us, it was a sign of hope that we could change something." (Arabasta, personal communication, 7 July 2014)

This alliance would endure, forging a community comprised of activist bloggers in Tunisia and beyond. The events created a new collective identity of Tunisian cyberactivists, which surpassed the previous fault lines between moderates and radicals, between Tunisians abroad and in the country. The tools and personal connections established during the May demonstration were used again during the summer, when local activists and Tunisians living abroad on vacation in Tunisia attempted to stage a so-called flashmob in the tourist village of Sidi Bousaid, which was preempted by the authorities. These protracted activities laid the structures that would prove useful during the subsequent uprisings in December 2010.

The road paved for the 2011 uprisings

On 17 December 2010, revolts broke out following the self-immolation of twenty-six-year-old Mohamed Bouazizi in the remote town of Sidi Bouzid on 17 December 2010, and they rapidly spread to other deprived cities in the South before reaching the capital Tunis on 26 December. While the revolt in Sidi Bouzid were spontaneous, they were characterized by a level of organisation and sophistication which indicate the dedication of those involved. In fact, the local sections of the Tunisian union UGTT played an important role in organizing the protests in the Tunisian south, notably during the 2008 uprising in Gafsa (Arieff, 2011, p. 13), and their activists helped organize the protests in Sidi Bouzid and in other cities as well. Self-

immolations had been increasingly common over the last years in Tunisia, thus the main novelty of was that locals found a way to break through the media blackout (Hmed, 2012). The extensive spread of the videos on social media sites was instrumental in mobilizing for protests throughout the country. This indispensable street activism was complemented online on platforms like *Facebook*, where the story of Bouazizi's self-immolation was told. Ironically, the Tunisian government's extensive censorship campaign had resulted in the centralization of the country's social media ecosystem. Unlike dedicated video sharing site like YouTube or Daily Motion and others, Facebook was not censored in Tunisia, thus Tunisian internet users flocked to this website to watch and share videos. It is here that a number of activists started to share videos and eye-witness accounts recorded on cellphones on Facebook. The sharing of these rather unusual photos and videos – notably showing police forces shooting on protesters – unleashed a virtuous circle among regular Tunisian Facebook users who usually would not share this kind of material. According to Mohamed-Ali Razgallah, who was not politically active neither on- or offline before the uprisings but joined a group of cyberactivists after the fall of Ben Ali, in this gradual process, the wall of fear was broken by the activists first, who subsequently emboldened regular Facebook users like himself, following the logic of "they cannot put everybody in prison, and if they come for me, so what" (Mohamed-Ali Razgallah, personal communication, 11 October 2014).

While the regime had succeeded in containing the flow of information in 2008, this time it was unable to do so. Personal relationships between bloggers built in the year preceding the uprisings had been fostered through their first open challenge to the regime in the organization of the "real demonstration for a virtual freedom". This had created a durable network of activists who were ready to use their communication skills to help spread the information at home and abroad. When the police cut off all communication lines to the town, these videos were transported using USB drives. The spread of information was greatly helped by the fact that the blogger Azyz Amami, who had been active during the May 2010 protest, was originally from Sidi Bouzid and received regular updates and videos from friends and family on the ground. He passed on the information to his network of activists, such as the well-connected blogger Slim Amamou (Azyz Amami, personal communication, 26 May 2015). Subsequently, other bloggers like Sofiane Chourabi and Lina Ben Mhenni went to the regions to report on the protests taking place. So even if most of their blogs were blocked in Tunisia – and thus inaccessible to the average Tunisian Internet user – their experience in citizen journalism acquired over the years, coupled with the distributional power of social networks, made their contribution extremely valuable. Finally, in an attempt to win the

"information warfare", that is to gather the attention of international mainstream media, the Nawaat activists, based abroad, assembled all the photos and videos available online in one place and translated online footage in Tunisia's dialect into standard Arabic, French and English for TV channels like Radio France Internationale, France24 and Al Jazeera (Della Ratta and Valeriani, 2012). Notably the latter, barred from opening a bureau in Tunisia by the regime, gave significant airtime to the protest relying on online material they received through a Facebook group linking activists on the ground with journalists working for Al-Jazeera (Tarek Kahlaoui, personal communication, 23 May 2015) as well as through Nawaat (Zuckerman, 2011).

Morocco's fragmentation

Compared to Tunisia's highly repressive censorship regime, access to the internet has been rather liberal in Morocco until the February 20 movement emerged in 2011. There was a liberty of tone unprecedented in the Arab World, which explains why the Moroccan blogosphere produced several political campaigns over the years. These were occasionally in reaction to governmental action, such as the *We are the 9 percent* campaign in response to the censorship of the magazine Tel Quel that had dared to publish a poll on the satisfaction of Moroccan subjects with the reign of their king Mohamed VI. While 91 percent declared to be happy with his reign, the mere publication of a poll on such a matter was judged inadmissible by the regime, hence it was pulled from the newsstands. Other initiatives were standalone campaigns, such as *Bla Francia* (which translates into "without French"), an initiative seeking to promote the use of the Arabic language online. Another campaign sought to increase participation in the legislative elections in 2007, provoking a major debate between potential voters and partisans of a boycott. Questions of the social and economic development of the country were controversially discussed as well, for example the project to install a high-speed train at great expense in a developing country, as well as the dire state of the education system in Morocco, with a petition gathering several hundred signatures. Finally, a few dozens of people launched the secularist Mouvement alternatif pour les libertés individuelles (MALI) calling for freedom of religion (and most notably the freedom from religion), amongst others by calling for a public break-fast during the day in holy month of Ramadan, however, in the end, more policemen "attended" than activists (Goebel, 2010).

Thus, there was a great variety of political campaigns in Morocco that originated online. However, for the most part participation in them was confined to a small

minority of activists. However, in contrast to Tunisia the Moroccan mainstream media occasionally took up discussions and protests of the blogosphere, enlarging the echo chamber and contributing to what the blogosphere considers as its greatest successes. One of these campaigns was the so-called Sniper of Targuist in 2007, which tackled the issue of police abuse and corruption. In the small town of Targuist in the north of Morocco, an anonymous person made videos showing policemen and gendarmerie taking bribes and published them on the video platform YouTube. It was the first campaign that has serious repercussions, because after mainstream media took up the story, the gendarmerie arrested and pursued several of its agents (Bensalah, 2012, p. 104). However, the state also conducted a brutal search to find the activists behind the Targuist Sniper videos and four witnesses faced charges of humiliation of the police institution (Ben Gharbia, 2007). The Blogoma also set up campaigns to protest against censorship when several websites, most notably Google Earth, but also YouTube and several Islamist websites were blocked. The resulting uproar led to traditional media reporting on the issue, according to Mohamed Drissi Bakhkhat, who previously blogged at MoTIC, "the unprecedented reaction throughout the Moroccan blogosphere [on censorship] inspired many articles in almost all of the Moroccan independent press, [as well as in], the two most popular Moroccan newspapers" (Ben Gharbia, 2007).

As we have seen in chapter 5, the physical persecution of bloggers such as the case of Fouad Mourtada, sentenced to prison in 2008 for creating a fake Facebook profile of the Moroccan king's brother, did make an impression on bloggers, notably on Drissi Bakhkhat, who stopped blogging altogether. Subsequently, there were other cases, such as Mohamed Erraji only a few months later, who was condemned to two years in prison for an article criticizing the practice of King Mohamed VI to grant favors such as concessions to run a taxi at will, published on the information website Hespress.[7] On these occasions, Moroccan bloggers would react on their blogs, discussing the issue at hand and denouncing the overreach. Support committees set up websites to rally support, such as `www.helpfouad.com`, proposing to visitors to sign a petition calling for Mourtada's release. They would also adopt forms of protest similar to the ones used in Tunisia, such as the blog strike. Often, mobilizations would take the form of one-off initiatives initiated by individuals. For example, in the Mourtada case, the francophone blogger Larbi would publish pictures with support messages similar to the Yezzi campaign on his own blog, writing "If you would like to show your support and solidarity, wherever you are, please take a picture of yourself with a sign that includes your message of solidarity with Fouad" (Larbi, 2008). Thus, similar to the Tunisian case,

7 His sentence was later acquitted by the court of appeal due to a form error.

the fight against censorship would ignite the Moroccan blogosphere most effectively, and after the first cases, the most politically active bloggers formed a loose, informal group. Whenever a new case emerged, an email would be send among a group of bloggers who would usually intervene to plan the protest (Lbadikho, personal communication, 30 August 2015). However, it must be stressed that the reactions to these cases were not unanimous across the blogosphere. The divisions of the Blogoma operated on two different dimensions, that is on a linguistic and on a political level.

On the one hand, there was relatively little interaction between the French-language and the Arabic-language clusters of the Blogoma, and it bears reminding that in addition to these groups, there are even smaller groups such as the Amazingh community, as well as the Hispanophone community. Indeed, as we have already seen in the chapter 4, the Moroccan blogosphere was characterized by a much greater linguistic diversity due to historical legacies, which led to a great fragmentation along these language divisions. In fact, whereas the use of French is very common in Tunisia, it is much less so in Morocco: according to the 2010 report of the Francophonie, 64 percent in Tunisia know how to speak and write French, compared to only 32 percent of the Moroccan population, (Francophonie, 2010, p. 11, 14). The language used in written communication also reflects socio-economic realities of the Moroccan society. In Morocco, French, together with Classical Arabic, remains the language of education, administration and business. It is associated with middle and upper class urban classes (Ennaji, 2005, p. 103). At the high time of the blogosphere, whose transition to other platforms coincided with the 2011 uprisings, many Francophones perceived writing Arabic on a computer as particularly cumbersome, as many computers had keyboards with only Latin characters. The popularization of smartphones made writing Arabic much easier. This difficulty to write Arabic did not impede reading Arabic-language blogs, of course, but it encumbered commenting on the articles, which is the life-blood of any blogosphere (Politiconaute, personal communication, 26 October 2015).

In addition to these linguistic concerns, the Arabic and the French-language Blogoma had different political tendencies. A study based on research in 2007-2009 suggests that Arabic language bloggers were less likely to discuss the Mourtada and Erraji case, and are also more politically and religiously conservative (Robinson and Parmentier, 2014, p. 195). This religious conservatism finds its online expression in the continuous use of forums, which are otherwise obsolete, such as Mumtadayait, the forum of the members of the Moroccan Islamist association Al Adl wal Ihsane (Justice and Spirituality). Similarly, my interviewees stressed that the general tendency in Francophone Blogoma was more liberal, even though

there were conservative voices here as well. For example, some bloggers rejected the strike when Erraji was arrested, suggesting that Erraji had gone too far and that despite the rather open climate in terms of freedom of expression in Morocco, it was not an absolute right (El Ferdaous, 2008), and there have been Francophones openly critical to the 2011 February 20 movement (most prominently Citoyen Hmida).

In addition to these linguistic and political divisions, the Moroccan blogosphere was not a primary locus of political activism, but even in its most political layers rather a meeting point for political critics and commentaries. The logic of personal diary prevailed, political initiatives derived from this personal approach and interest in a given topic and not from a logic of a collective mobilization (Politiconaute, personal communication, 26 October 2015). The initially very personal outlook of many Moroccan blogs can be exemplified at the title of the well-known francophone blog *Moi, dans tous mes états* (Me, in all my states) by the engineer Mounir Bensalah, before he changed to a more general title with *Des maux à dire, Regards sur l'humanité*. As Moroccan blogger and co-founder of Mamfakinch Lbadikho explains the relative inertia of the Moroccan blogosphere with its relative freedom, especially compared with Tunisia. It was rarely censored, when its bloggers were arrested they were swiftly freed, thus by and large the Moroccan was a lightly persecuted blogosphere. As a result, Moroccan bloggers did not acquire the same political savviness, technical maturity and creativity than their Tunisian colleagues simply because it was not necessary. However, there was an awareness amongst the more politically inclined bloggers that the separate spheres of Morocco's various blogospheres needed a common platform to discuss subjects of common interest. Thus, Talk Morocco was born in December 2009, founded by cyberactivists Hisham Almiraat and Jillian C. York, who had previously covered the Blogoma for Global Voices Online, in a bid to united the fragmented Moroccan blogosphere. It was conceived as a forum to concentrate the debates of the various strands of Moroccan blogosphere by encouraging bloggers of all languages to express themselves on a pre-defined political theme every other month, contributing to "enlightened & free discussions on what matters" (according to the website's subtitle). Interestingly, it also explicitly mentions the diaspora as one of the actors in the Moroccan blogosphere (Almiraat, 2009). Over the months of 2010, subjects such as the dysfunctional freedom of the press in the country, the place of women in Moroccan society, what constitutes modern Moroccan identity and red tape in the Moroccan bureaucracy. While the impact of Talk Morocco on the Moroccan blogosphere as a whole is a matter of debate, it was the rallying point for cyberactivists the Moroccan blogosphere was missing until that point. It also received acclaim in-

ternationally, winning the prestigious 2010 Deutsche Welle Best of Blogs Award for Best English-language blog. More important, however, where the relationships formed through the initiative, which were going to lead to the creation of Mamfakinch, one-stop website catering to the entire blogosphere, in the wake of the Arab uprisings.

Creating a one-stop Moroccan citizen media

As for Morocco, the regional dynamic clearly informed its actions in 2011, even though the origins of the Moroccan movement preceded the events in Tunisia and Egypt. The impetus to form a Moroccan protest movement in 2011 emerged from several parallel initiatives. On the one hand, a number of bloggers, inspired by their Tunisian and Egyptian counterparts, rallied behind a call for extensive political reforms. The blogger Mounir Bensalah published a petition calling for democratic reforms in Morocco, on a petition platform. The call initially gathered 32 signatories, mainly bloggers, leftists and human rights activists, which were followed by 139 others who signed up using the petition website. The demands centred on the archival of full citizenship, decrying the stalled democratization process, rampant nepotism, the king's omnipotence and Morocco's rent economy. The demands were controversial in their direct naming of contentious issues, several activists who would later emerge as vocal activists of the 20 February movement retroactively withdrew their signatures (Bensalah, 2012, p. 126). In addition to this online initiative, the impetus to create a Moroccan protest movement in the wake of the Arab Spring emerged after the same activists, who coordinated through a Facebook group, repeatedly met at sit-ins organized in solidarity with the movement in Egypt in front of the embassy in Rabat (Hamza Mahfoud, personal communication, 23 December 2014). The repression of these sit-ins induced the activists present to develop a campaign advocating a more democratic and equal Morocco.

One aspect that set the Moroccan movement apart from its counterpart in Tunisia was the role played by traditional civil society organizations. In Tunisia, the rank and file of the country's union UGTT were actively engaged in the uprisings, but the leaders of the union UGTT hesitated to embrace the revolts and the country's formerly proud human rights organizations were in shambles. In Morocco, however, a first press conference of the February 20 movement was held at the office of the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH) in Rabat. The February 20 Movement had a strong internet component. Local events were mainly organized via Facebook groups, with one general page for the movement as a whole, complemented by pages coordinating the protest events in the various cities. The main group, whose number of subscribers rose to 20,000 by February 20th (Rah-

man, 2012, p. 6), made an effort to reflect the country's linguistic diversity on the page and in the videos it used to mobilize for the demonstrations. However, the Moroccan press close to the regime attempted to suppress the movement by reporting leading smear campaigns against its organizers and subsequently reporting low attendance of protests. Thus, for the largest demonstration in front of the Parliament in the capital, the organizers claimed a turnout of 20,000 protesters, Associated Press reported 3,000 to 5,000, while the Moroccan news agency MAP reported a "weak turnout" of 2,000 (Alaoui, 2011). At this point, the more experienced cyberactivists, notably TalkMorocco's Hisham Almiraat and Lbadikho, launched the website *Mamfakinch* (meaning "we will never give up"), to create a medial counterweight, aggregating the content produced by the various branches of the movement. Theirs is another example for the importance of strong personal relationships in long-term cyberactivist initiatives. Actually, plans to launch such a website, explicitly taking Nawaat as a model, was discussed among the bloggers of the English-language platform Talk Morocco for half a year, starting in June 2010. Mamfakinch thus emerged from a group of bloggers who already knew each other from prior collaborations and in many cases had met personally. In fact, Hisham Almiraat proposed the project to fellow blogger Lbadikho during a visit.

> We were frustrated by the reactivity of the media, but also by the activists and human rights associations, who used the internet in a rather ineffective way, publishing their press releases here and there, so we needed a one-stop alternative media outlet. Mamfakinch did not call for demonstrations, but it was designed to be a powerful media weapon. (Lbadikho, personal communication, 30 August 2015)

For the founders of Mamfakinch, Tunisia's Nawaat served as a direct model, and they adopted some of the same tools on the same platforms, such as raw news feed. The initiators subsequently made the deliberate choice to recruit widely, forming a team composed of long-time militants for Moroccan Human Rights associations alongside a number of bloggers to ensure close contact with the associations involved on the ground. At first, Mamfakinch's members were mainly based abroad, but soon activists in Morocco proper were included to collect information on the ground.

According to members of Mamfakinch I interviewed, living the mobilizations from abroad was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the fact of being removed from the action was personally dissatisfactory, so whenever they could afford it, activists would travel to Morocco to personally attend a demonstration and to contribute to the mobilization effort on the ground. On the other hand,

being removed from the action was advantageous to their work. The work on the ground in Morocco was very time consuming, and eventually better carried out by activists engrained in the local communities.

> Being at a distance was important because it allows you not to be too preoccupied by the preparation of press releases, or by what happens on the ground. (...) Being here allowed us to take the time to cover the protests, to aggregate information, to do things properly and to take a step back. It was important to have one part abroad and one part in Morocco. (Mohamed X, personal communication, 10 July 2014)

Being in Western countries, on the other hand, insured a good internet connection, which often was not the case for local activists. Thus, finding and aggregating videos from the various places all over the country was more efficiently done from abroad (Lbadikho, personal communication, 30 August 2015). Many activists invested themselves heavily, putting other parts of their lives aside, such as Mohamed X, who admits "honestly, during one year of my doctoral thesis, I didn't do anything, I wasted, I dedicated one year of my thesis to activism and Mamfakinch" (Mohamed X, personal communication, 10 July 2014).

As to whether the fact that its initiators lived abroad was problematic for activists in Morocco proper, Mounir Bensalah, who was part of the redaction committee, was very pragmatic about it, saying "we needed to create a citizen-oriented media, whether people were based in Morocco or Stockholm did not matter, the internet solved that problem." (Mounir Bensalah, personal communication, 10 September 2015)

The track record of Mamfakinch was mixed. According to the members' accounts, the website exceeded their expectations in terms of audience, effectively allowing the public to verify the authenticity of the news broadcast by the mainstream media and to find the information spread over various social media channels in one place, providing a balance account of the events and scope, "more objective than the Ministry of the Interior's estimates and less enthusiastic than the allegations of demonstrators" (Mamfakinch, 2014). Their biggest success was a number of articles that were subsequently picked up by traditional media outlets. Also, Mamfakinch played a major role in the disclosure of the GPS coordinates of an infamous detention center near Rabat in May 2011. This disclosure provoked a popular march onto this detention center, which was the first march violently repressed by the security services. However, Morocco's linguistic diversity continued to be a challenge. As Lbadikho admits, due to the activists' careers and francophone daily life, they were not used to writing in Arabic. Thus, oftentimes

the content they relayed through their channels were in Arabic, but the title would be written in French, "which kills everything in terms of audience." For him, this is not a detail, because it influenced to what extend an article was shared.

6.4 CONCLUSION

Cyberactivists and bloggers played an important role during the 2011 mobilizations in Tunisia and Morocco, both by collecting information on the ground and subsequently processing and distributing it online. Cyberactivists abroad performed a distinct function within the community because their location provided them with better technical means as well as the distance allowing them to devote their time efficiently to the "information warfare". Also, their experience accumulated over the years enabled them to adopt sophisticated communication strategies, helping to channel the information to a national and an international audience more efficiently than their peers in their countries of origin.

Contrary to the narrative of the spontaneity of the protest and the internet as a silver bullet to topple dictators, these initiatives emerged from groups of bloggers and cyberactivists who had collaborated repeatedly over the years, characterized by a distinct group consciousness. The formation of this collective identity was not an inevitable process, given that blogging served primarily as echo chambers for intimist writings in both cases. The group identity that eventually emerged was, however, distinctively non-diasporic, even though much of the most political blogs were written by bloggers based abroad. The majority of activists based abroad were either students or political exiles such as Sami Ben Gharbia, the co-founder of the platform Nawaat, confirming hypothesis 3.1, namely that exiles will be the most active among cyberactivists living abroad.

The comparison between the Tunisian and the Moroccan case highlights how the severity of governmental control influences whether activists decide to be affiliated with a formal diaspora organization. Whereas the contacts of Tunisian cyberactivists with formal organisations were sparse, Moroccan students created offshoots of Moroccan Human Rights organizations abroad. This contrasting behaviour confirms hypothesis 3.2, namely that the majority of political diaspora bloggers in the context of severe governmental control is not affiliated with a formal diaspora organization. Furthermore, the development of a strong activist identity also indicates that cyberactivists living abroad engaged in political action directed at their home societies downplayed the fact that they lived abroad (hypothesis 4.1). However, given that they were, for the most part, either students or political exiles, it remains an open question whether they actually had a strong diasporic identity

to begin with. It seems more likely that their recent immigration history explains their strong attachment to their home country's politics.

Finally, even when bloggers are politically inclined, in a relatively open climate numerous political initiatives can emerge without having a larger impact. While campaigns originating online face problems of passing over to the streets and finding approval among the larger population anywhere, the linguistic and political stratification of the Moroccan blogosphere proved a challenge to gather support even among bloggers alone. Concurrently, in both countries bloggers started to converge, in Morocco due to a deliberate initiative to create a forum for political debates, whereas in the case of Tunisia, it was the intensification of censorship coupled with its increasingly indiscriminate targeting that provided the community of bloggers with a common enemy, creating a sense of solidarity unseen before, bridging prior divides between radical activists and moderates. While the protest of 22 May 2010 was not important in numerical terms, it served as a dress rehearsal for the social mobilizations later that year, during which cyberactivists applied their writing, reporting and communication skills honed over time. Within these increasingly politically conscious communities, bloggers living abroad took actively part, and especially during the 2011 uprising, performed an important role as coordinators of the concentrated dissemination of information online. These groups, comprised of students and young professionals in Morocco, and of students and activists in exile in the Tunisian case, performed tasks that were otherwise more difficult to perform inside the country, following a logic of division of labour. Their contribution was viewed as an organic part of the mobilization effort, benefiting from better technological means at their disposal as well as the possibility to dedicate themselves fully to the cause because they were either full-time activists or students that could defer their studies.

7

CONCLUSION

7.1 FINDINGS

In this thesis I carried out a comparison between the Tunisian and the Moroccan online activist sphere in the years preceding and during the 2011 uprising with a particular focus on bloggers and activists based abroad, taking into account the influence of repression and collective identity. In this concluding chapter, I integrate and evaluate the main findings of the study. In order to explain the 2011 uprisings in Tunisia and Morocco and the nature of the participation of cyberactivists abroad, this thesis relies primarily on concepts and theories developed in the literature on contentious politics, but also draws on the literature on cyber activism and political engagement of migrants. Given the authoritarian nature of both states, the concept of political opportunity structures was used to elucidate how exogenous factors such as the threat of repression structure the strategic choices actors make. In these authoritarian regimes, the internet can serve as a free space allowing netizens to temporarily evade the control of the state. Whereas the literature on social movements focuses primarily on how the internet empowers non-governmental organizations to scale up their mobilization efforts by providing a low-cost, efficient organizational and communication tool, this thesis focuses on campaigns and movements that originate online. In this context, underlying structures and hierarchies, the impact of repression on political opportunity structures as well as the development of collective identities were analyzed.

The weblink analysis in chapter four revealed that migrants were among the leading figures in both the Moroccan and the Tunisian blogospheres, although the networks differ in terms of structures and connectivity. In the context of great divisions along language lines, an engineer living in France was the undisputed leading voice in the French-language part of the Blogoma. The platform Talk Morocco was designed to overcome the polycentric nature of the Moroccan blogosphere, and while it was not an authority in the presented graphs, its influence

grew over time and generated long-lasting collaborations amongst politicized bloggers. In a densely and more evenly connected Tunisian network, the most widely referenced blogger was based in Tunisia while the majority of bloggers with comparable authority were based abroad. Tunisian migrant bloggers were particularly overrepresented in the subcluster of blogs and portals dedicated to politics. The presence of such a subcluster attests to the dedication of activists to use the internet as a means to protest against the Ben Ali regime in general and its internet censorship in particular. The very fact that the political websites form a distinct subcluster indicates that Tunisian cyberactivists used their blogs to spread their political messages and to connect to like-minded people, while their connections to the general blogosphere via certain bridge bloggers implies that they succeeded in attracting the attention and support of a number of less politicized bloggers. Finally, the statistical analysis confirmed my hypothesis that age is a significant factor to predict the number of inlinks a blog or website receives. However, it also found that the location of a blogger is inconsequential to his level of authority, given that nodes did not receive more inlinks by virtue of being located abroad. This result suggests that bloggers based abroad were not more authoritative and attractive by themselves, although it is possible that bloggers based in Tunisia refrained from linking to blogs based abroad that often were more politically radical to avoid being targeted.

In fact, state monitoring and censorship of online activities had a substantial impact on how netizens behaved, as laid out in chapter five. Even Moroccan web users, who enjoyed considerably greater freedom online, were aware of so-called red lines not to be crossed. Debates of various policy areas including such topics like the persistent failure of the country's educational system were permitted as long as they did not question the political system as a whole, and especially the role of the king. These taboo topics were largely accepted as a given, and when the Moroccan regime repressed individual internet users with jail terms, some prominent bloggers reacted with self-censorship or stopped blogging altogether. In this regard, the Moroccan blogosphere largely reflects the consensus of Moroccan society at that moment in time, which expected a seemingly benevolent ruler to advance the country above all economically, with political rights being secondary, at best. A similar social contract, exchanging economic growth with the acceptance of the political status quo, had characterized much of President Ben Ali's reign in Tunisia. However, in the last years of King Hassan II, Morocco had embarked on a path of political liberalization, permitting the return of the leftist political opposition from exile and its inclusion in a "government of change". The result from the cooptation of the left was a largely pacified Moroccan society, including its dias-

pora, which the government mobilized to contribute to the economic development of the country, a policy manifested online as well, with numerous inter-linked websites catering to the diaspora. Meanwhile, the Islamists transformed into the only significant political force, their main concern being to further their social conservative agenda and not to fundamentally challenge the authority of the king. This large societal consensus preferring political stability in the face of chaos ensuing the 2011 uprisings allowed King Mohamed VI to preempt extended protests by inducing mild reforms and appealing to those fearing loss of the economic progress that had been achieved.

In Tunisia, however, the repression was more pronounced and formative, with even the lightest critique of a given governmental policy being perceived as risky, in real life conversations and extending to online debates as well. These circumstances provoked a range of reactions from internet users both in the country and abroad, depending on the perceived risk incurred, and, in the case of the diaspora, whether they expected to return to their home country or not. As a result, bloggers based in Tunisia often adopted a very poetic, indirect style, whereas the most ferocious and persistent critique of the Tunisian regime was voiced by bloggers living abroad. In fact, their location abroad facilitated their political activism because they felt secure, both for their physical integrity and their economic livelihood. As a result, they were able to adopt the role of the radical mobilizers, and the most dedicated cyberactivists invested a considerable amount of time and money.

The increasing severity of repression of online activities was also an important element in the creation of a strong collective activist identity in Tunisia. The escalation of the government's censorship regime led to the radicalization of formerly moderate bloggers, who joined their politicized comrades-in-arms in their fight against censorship. Where there had been a strong divide in the blogosphere, the seemingly indiscriminately targeted repression of an increasing number of blogs created a common grievance. It culminated in the first self-organized street demonstration in Tunisia for years, even though the protest was still framed as a single-issue – and ostensibly apolitical – action to persuade frightened Tunisians to turn out. While in pure numbers the protest was not important, it was considered a success by the activists involved and encouraged them to plan other events in the following months. Thus, while the cyberactivist sphere was unable to create a revolutionary movement by itself, as the low turnout of the May protest attests, it could mobilize technical abilities, resources and international contacts to promote the 2011 uprising nationally and internationally. It is important to note that the group identity that emerged was a decisively non-diasporic activist identity, although bloggers living abroad were amongst the instigators of the May protest

and subsequently served as the coordinators of the concentrated dissemination of information online during the 2011 uprisings. At this point in time, their contribution was perceived as an organic part of the mobilization effort, and the fact of living abroad was seen as conducive to their tasks, which involved a heavy use of the internet connection often unavailable in their countries of origin as well as the time-intensive curation of existing sources. While the Moroccan blogosphere did not experience the same level of repression and was characterized by a high level of fragmentation, the efforts of a few bloggers to create a common space of debate succeeded in gathering a small, dedicated group of cyberactivists, who were joined by a number of young activist of Moroccan Human rights organizations to form the movement's communication platform Mamfakinch.

7.2 BROADER IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this thesis suggest several general observations. First of all, the thesis provides a glimpse into the dynamics of contemporary migrant populations and their continued ties with their countries of origin. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this thesis indicates that first generation and temporary immigrants and especially exiles tend to be more involved in their home country's politics than second and third generation immigrants. While these recent immigrants may have attempted to influence their homeland's politics before the invention of the internet, this thesis supports the notion that the internet provides them with a means to directly participate in and shape mobilizations from afar on an equal footing with their comrades-in-arms. Unquestionably, the relationship between activists abroad and their fellow countrymen can be troubled at times, however, being removed from the country of origin can occasionally be beneficial, be it to evade repression or to provide the movement with otherwise unavailable resources, such as a steady internet connection and contacts to international media organizations. This internet-facilitated inclusion of overseas citizens in national social movements also adds an additional layer as yet largely unaccounted for in the literature on social movements. So far, the literature has regarded transnational protest primarily as "coordinated international campaigns on the part of networks of activists against international actors, other states, or international institutions" (Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005, p. 2-3), with its most notable example being the Global Justice movement. Other approaches focused on transnational networks such as transnational corporations and banks, epistemic communities and transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Finally, there are attempts to conceptualize diasporas, which are primarily defined by a shared collective identity, as a fourth cat-

egory in Sikkink and Keck's typology of transnational networks (Adamson, 2012, p. 32). However, the cases laid out in this thesis do not seem to fit into either category. While many cyberactivists I interviewed for this thesis might subscribe to a certain amount of cosmopolitanism inherent in the Global Justice movement, their primary focus was decisively local; that is, on their country of origin. On the other hand, those involved in the movement did not mention the typical collective identity, which not only refers to a sense of belonging to their homeland, but also denotes a connection to the diaspora as a whole. Thus it seems that the internet is enabling a new kind of activism that is transnational in nature, but at the same time bound to national identity, motivated by a feeling of "distant proximity" to the motherland. In fact, the title of the thesis emerged during my interview with the Moroccan activist Mohamend X, when he described how it felt to be in France during the 2011 uprisings:

> "Living abroad, it's a distant proximity. In France, there is the language proximity and the media were reporting on the events in Morocco. Also, there are a lot of Moroccans here, so it was possible to do some of the coordination of the 20 February Movement here, in addition to covering the events online for Mamfakinch. (...) I was at a distance, but if felt like I was living the events like someone who was there."

The thesis underscores the differing relevance of organizations – including diaspora organizations – to the population in authoritarian contexts of varying degrees, highlighting once again the relevance of the concept of political opportunity structures. Thus, in highly repressive regimes that border on dictatorship, engaging in political activities beyond those directly sponsored by the government implies defiance of the regime in power. In this context, for citizens living abroad traditional diaspora organizations are potential agents of the state, reporting the activities of their members to the regime. Furthermore, political parties in the diaspora are not necessary instigators of change, because the focus on their role as victims of the regime fails to propose more inclusive avenues for political engagement to political newcomers. In this context, political parties in exile are largely perceived as obsolete and out of touch. Combined with the fear of attracting the attention of the authoritarian regime, politically sensitive citizens tend to seek other avenues for political engagement, such as to debate issues of interest online. In less restrictive environments, however, organizations are able to appeal to the politically interested citizen and even to expand to the diaspora as well. As a result, varying degrees of repression impact on the kind activist careers likely to prevail. While low repression leaves room for traditional organizations, high repression pushes

the politically interested to alternative channels such as the internet. As envisioned by the proponents of the idea of the internet as a "liberation technology", the internet can serve as a free space in authoritarian regimes, allowing netizens to temporarily evade the control of the state. However, while online fora enable otherwise atomized netizen to meet like-minded people they otherwise would probably never have met, the majority of bloggers do not start blogging because they are politically engaged, but because they feel the urge to share their most intimate thoughts with a wider audience. While there might be some that are politically interested from the beginning, others need to undergo a politicization process. This politicization process is largely an individual one, which possibly could delay or even thwart collective action. Also, the perceived online fame of a person does not necessarily translate into offline political success. As such, cyberactivists as well as independent local activists are unlikely to wind up as ministers, presidents and party leaders because they lack the political capital and networks necessarily to emerge victorious from a popular vote.

Finally, the months immediately following the Arab uprisings were dominated by superficial debates on the role of the internet and regime change through social mobilizations. Policy makers and social scientists concentrated on questions of direct causation, asking whether the internet caused the revolutionary movements or not. The initial enthusiasm was countered by a wave of articles seeking to "debunk" the idea that the Arab uprisings were single-handedly triggered by the internet. These articles often used false dichotomies, claiming "the Arab Spring was not set off by Facebook, but by the people," as if those were mutually-exclusive. However, the spread of internet access and its integration into daily life of ever growing strata of the population emphasizes that what happens online is an integral part of the "real" world. Furthermore, revolutions are always characterized by multiple causes. Contemporary protest movements such as the so-called Arab Spring cannot be comprehended without taking into account the role played by the internet. At the same time, any account of the uprisings would be incomplete without a reference to socio-economic pressures and increasing dissatisfaction with corrupt and crony regimes in the area, coupled with a lack of opportunities for the youth. Also, the uprisings would not have happened without the sacrifice of the millions of protesters that took to the streets, as well as to the dedication and strategic skill of long-term activists. Major events such as the Arab uprisings are thus characterized by multiple, interacting dynamics. This thesis modest aim was to contribute to a demystification of the use of internet tools in political mobilization, highlighting how it reconfigures and augments common practices by creating new spaces and

enabling new forms to connect, coordinate and collaborate, for individuals living scattered across several continents.

7.3 LIMITATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Besides its findings, this thesis also has several limitations. For one, this study uses webcrawls that were not designed by myself. Instead, the webcrawls were created by a research project and subsequently modified to suit my need. Given that I was not involved in the design of the datasets, they contain certain flaws that could have been avoided. However, as I pointed out in the relevant chapter, web crawls provide only a snapshot of the connections existing at this very moment and cannot be conducted retroactively. Unfortunately, at the moment the revolutions were unfolding I was not yet admitted to the doctoral program at the European University Institute, but working for the non-governmental organization Reporters without Borders. I thus had to rely on crawls conducted by others around the time of the uprisings. Thus, to conduct this kind of study, a researcher must have all methods in place at the moment an event occurs. Given the low scholarly interest in Tunisia prior to the revolution, there were very few scholars familiar with the political and social realities in the country that were ready to employ digital methods to explore the online facet of the mobilizations. On the other hand, there were a number of media scholars who collected data during the uprisings without being knowledgeable about the specifics of the cases to accurately target their data collection or to provide a satisfactory analysis. For all researchers who were unable to collect their own data at the time, this data becomes their primary source material, with all its benefits and flaws.

A second limitation of this study is that in its details, the studied phenomenon is contingent on time. While diasporas continue to engage with each other and their fellow countrymen online, the form online communities take is influenced by the technology prevalent at that time, and thus subject to fashion. In fact, online practices and platforms rise and fall in popularity only to be replaced by others. At this moment, large numbers of users move from one platform to another, motivated by the desire to remain connected to the largest audience possible. The increase in value that occurs when the number of users of a product or service increases is referred to as a "network effect" (Katona, Zubcsek, and Sarvary, 2011). The rise and demise of now largely forgotten platforms such as MySpace and Friendster are examples of these gravitational shifts in the primary locus of online sociability.

The events of the Arab uprisings took place during such a gradual move from one internet tool to another. The first manifestations of the Arab uprisings surfaced in December 2010, at a time when the membership of social network sites (SNSs), most importantly Facebook, were on the rise in the countries experiencing protests. Data gathered by the Arab Social Media Report show that the events triggered an increased growth rate of the website. Already before the uprisings started, in May 2010, Facebook was the most visited website in Tunisia, even before the search engine Google, which is the most visited website worldwide (Kuebler, 2010, p.47). In January 2011, however, Tunisia's Facebook users grew by 14 percent and Morocco's by 12 percent, compared to a growth rate of 3 percent and 4.4 percent respectively in the month before the uprisings (Mourtada and Salem, 2011).[1] This dramatic rise in the number of subscribers in the course of one single month can be attributed to omnipresent media reports linking the website to the protest movement ("Facebook revolution"), creating the perception amongst Tunisians and Moroccans that important information was shared on this website and one had to create a profile on it to access it.

The Arab uprisings took place during what can be considered a watershed moment when the once dominant form of online sociability, blogging, converged with other platforms. Whereas before, politicized Facebook users had felt the need to create a blog in order to be recognized by the online activist community, now the majority of bloggers slowly moved their main activity to social network sites. As a result, after the political community that emerged from the blogosphere played an important role in the online campaigns that accompanied the Arab Spring, many former bloggers quit blogging and moved on these platforms given their ease of use and promise of a wider audience. The platforms have become so central to online social life that for many, Facebook as become synonymous with the internet at large, inducing public institutions to embrace the platform as well, especially in Tunisia, where ministries prefer to publish press releases on Facebook instead of using rarely updated websites.

On the other hand, the political web in both countries has witnessed a wave of professionalization. Former bloggers have become professional journalists, founded civil society organizations or created highly professional webzines, thereby eroding the community that emanated from the blogosphere. Eatbees, an American blogger living in Morocco, described the new situation in May 2013 as follows:

1 At the end of 2011, roughly 27 percent of the Tunisian population had an account on the social network, compared to 17.5 percent at the end of 2010. Similarly, 17.5 percent of the Moroccan population had an account at the end of 2011, compared with 12.5 percent one year before.

> "Many of my friends from that era simply stopped blogging, and they've stopped coming here to comment on new pieces I write. Their blogs are either updated so rarely as to have gone into a coma, or they've disappeared altogether. (...) As a blogger, at a certain point one has to make a decision. Either one is going to "turn pro," become an "authority," or keep doing what one is doing as a purely personal venture. Nearly all of the bloggers I follow regularly now are the ones who've gone pro. Either they are working journalists who keep blogs as part of their work, or they are academics who follow social, political, and economic trends regularly and in depth. A few are activists who have made a name for themselves, and made the leap to being full-time policy voices." (Eatbees, 2013)

As a consequence of these developments, to study online diaspora engagement today, a researcher cannot bypass social network sites because they constitute the main locus of online sociability today. As a consequence, she would have to modify her methods, either by acquiring permission and assistance by social network sites to explore their databases or by reverting to manual methods such as analysing pages visually only.

Furthermore, besides investigating how the shift to new internet tools affects the form online diaspora engagement today, there are other aspects of the Arab uprisings that remain understudied. One of these concerns the involvement of international organizations. As we have seen throughout this thesis, for years, Western politicians were eager to praise the revolutionary potential of the internet, most notably after the prominent use of internet tools for political protest in the summer of 2009 in Iran and, of course, in the so-called Arab Spring. Given this fervent belief in the internet as a "liberation technology," several Western development agencies and political organizations initiated training sessions and fellowships aimed at equipping activists with the necessary technological skills to voice their criticism of corrupt governments while employing measures to ensure their personal safety. Given this concern for personal safety, however, bloggers living in strict authoritarian contexts might be less available for these agencies, possibly turning members of the diaspora into preferred references for international organizations, given the higher freedom of movement afforded by Western passports. If this is the case, activists living abroad might therefore attend more trainings and receive more opportunities to network with other activists. The acquired training and networking might in turn increase their status inside their own blogosphere. The role played by diaspora bloggers put aside, it would be sensible to research whether the afore-

mentioned training and networking sessions had an impact, that is whether those bloggers and activists receiving them were at the core of the mobilizations.

Finally, the mobilizations in Tunisia were characterized by several important so-called "white lies." These included the framing of the death of Mohamed Bouazizi as an act of desperation by a university graduate even though he never graduated from high school, as well as the rumor that General Rachid Ammar, chief of staff of the Tunisian Armed Forces, refused Ben Ali's request to repress the uprising. Whereas the former originated with local activists embellishing Bouazizi's story as they talked to the media, the latter circulated online and was later claimed by the diaspora cyberactivist Yassine Ayari. Furthermore, in the months and years following the ouster of President Ben Ali, the media, both offline and online, abounded with rumors and misinformation. At the time, this development seemed to stem from the sorry state of Tunisian journalism. Decades of tight control of the press had resulted in a profession lacking reporting skills and deontology, coupled with a population skeptical of the truthfulness of traditional (read: official) media outlets. Instead, Tunisians flocked to Facebook, where rumors spread like wildfire. However, in the months before the 2016 American elections it became clear that propaganda spread through online channels is not a phenomenon limited to countries with a structurally weak journalistic profession. During the campaign, preposterous news pieces pretending to emanate from respectable sources spread on Facebook, scrupulously crafted to maximize circulation and subsequent advertisement revenue. It thus seems that in times of crisis, the media can lose its credibility in favour of internet rumors in democracies as well. The analysis of the factors contributing to the crisis of journalism and the rise of "fake news" in democracies consequently ranks high on the research agenda of media scholars. A comparative approach, including case studies of countries in transformation such as Tunisia, might enlarge the scope of such an investigation and provide valuable insight.

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A

APPENDIX

A.1 WEB CRAWLS

The web crawls used in chapter 4 derive from the openly available e-Diasporas Project developed at the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris by Dana Diminescu. The following sections contain complete lists of the nodes included in the network as well as those removed and merged. It must be noted that the categories used by the e-Diaspora project vary. Given this caveat, the categories as given are listed here for completeness, however, in the thesis, only the relative presence of the category "blog", both individual and collective, is compared across the cases.

A.1.1 *E-diasporas.fr crawl Tunisia*

With its data collected between April and July 2011, the Tunisia crawl from the *e-Diasporas Project* contains three blog aggregators. Given that these operate as an equivalent to a registry, they link by definition to most blogs in the network, even though they are not actors per se, unless they refuse to list certain actors out of principle. Such conflict has been overcome since the clash between political bloggers and *tn-blogs.com* in 2002. Finally, a website of a German journalist working in Tunisia and publishing her texts on her website was removed as well.

Removed nodes:	Merged nodes:
tuniblogs.com	zizoufromdjerba.com
tn-blogs.com	zizoufromdjerba.blogspot.com
tn-bloggers.com	
sarah-mersch.de	metallicnaddou.blogspot.com
	nadiafromtunis.blogspot.com
	riadh-sidaoui.blogspot.com
	riadh16.blogspot.com
	rsidaoui.blogspot.com

Table 8 contains a complete list of all websites included in the Tunisian network, as well as their category and location. For the purpose of the regression in chapter 4, the location was converted into a binary variable "diaspora", with websites located abroad coded as 1 and websites in Tunisia coded as 0. As visible in the table below, two websites were coded as located both in Tunisia and abroad. This is the case for democratietunisienne.com and fhimt.com, websites created in the wake of the 2011 uprisings and were managed by both members of the diaspora and their allies in Tunisia. For the purpose of the regression, they were coded as diaspora.

Table 8.: Complete list of nodes, Tunisia

Node	Category	Location
atf-paris.fr	site	France
kapitalis.com	portal	other
freearabicca.wordpress.com	collective blog	Tunisia
antikor.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
democratietunisienne.com	blog	France-Tunisia
tunisiensdumonde.com	site	France
ecrire-libere.blogspot.com	blog	France
NoMemorySpace.wordpress.com	blog	Tunisia
dicorevolution.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
tnkhanouff.hautetfort.com	blog	Tunisia
tacotac.wordpress.com	blog	Tunisia
femmesrevolution.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
eddou3aji.blogspot.com	blog	Canada
manichaeus.blogspot.com	blog	France
islamayeh.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
globalvoicesonline.org	site	other
falou333.unblog.fr	blog	Tunisia
ltdh-tunisie.org	blog	Tunisia
tunisieup.com	site	Tunisia
myblog-wallada.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
tareknightlife.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
info-tunesien.de	forum	Germany
dawwen.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
bidules8.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
blog.kochlef.com	blog	Tunisia
samibengharbia.com	blog	other

Table 8.: (continued)

Node	Category	Location
riadh-sidaoui.blogspot.com	blog	Switzerland
attounissia.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
imenetnouredinerentrententunisie.net	site	France
roumientrelafranceetlatunisie.blogspot.com	blog	France
demain-je-brule.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
moonsgirl.com	blog	France
jolanare.blogspot.com	blog	France
kahaw.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
hazemksouri.blogspot.com	blog	France
3al-7it.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
tunesien.info	site	Germany
bylasko.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
tunisia.embassyhomepage.com	site	other
mohamedmadhkour.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
webdelarevolutiontunisienne.blogspot.com	blog	Spain
anti-conformismes.blogspot.com	blog	France
resurrection-jasmin.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
rsidaoui.blogspot.com	blog	Switzerland
astrubal.nawaat.org	blog	Tunisia
takriz.com	site	Tunisia
free-race.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
mouwatentounsi.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
h-lifois.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
assabilonline.net	site	other
olfayoussef.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
karim2k.com	blog	other
tounis.blogspot.com	collective blog	Tunisia
houblog.net	blog	Canada
citoyensdesdeuxrives.eu	site	France
exception-tunisienne.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
tounsia4ever.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
helft-tunesien.org	site	Germany
unerevelation.blogspot.com	blog	France
ftcr.eu	site	France
chedia.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia

Table 8.: (continued)

Node	Category	Location
byrsa.blogspot.com	blog	France
leblogdenadouille.blogspot.com	blog	France
khilazwaw.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
tunisiawatch.com	site	Tunisia
tkharbich.blogspot.com	blog	USA
fatmaarabicca.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
tunezine.com	site	Tunisia
tanhida.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
loeilattentif.centerblog.net	blog	Tunisia
tbarbich.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
emmabenji.canalblog.com	blog	Tunisia
patriotetounsi.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
tahya-tunis.skyrock.com	blog	Tunisia
atmf.org	site	France
tunisienne-et-fiere.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
tunisiensdebelgique.com	collective blog	other
subzeroblue.com	blog	Canada
naceur.com	blog	Tunisia
www.pinklemonblog.com	blog	Tunisia
riadh16.blogspot.com	blog	Switzerland
adibs1.hautetfort.com	blog	Tunisia
debatunisie.canalblog.com	blog	Tunisia
jidtunisie.net	site	Tunisia
madjerba.canalblog.com	blog	Tunisia
nadiafromtunis.blogspot.com	blog	France
kamelmorjane.com	site	Tunisia
dholma.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
soulefchimere.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
www.alternatives-citoyennes.sgdg.org	site	France
tun-68e.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
wled-el-banlieue.com	site	Tunisia
tunisielaique2.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
samsoum-blog.blogspot.com	blog	USA
khalil.posterous.com	blog	France
wajdikhalifa.blogspot.com	blog	other

Table 8.: (continued)

Node	Category	Location
youchefayla.blogspot.com	blog	other
taherlaswad.blogspot.com	blog	USA
24sur24.posterous.com	site	Tunisia
revuedeblog.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
mraghabia.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
revolution-tn.blogspot.com	blog	France
britishtunisiansociety.blogspot.com	collective blog	other
atunisiangirl.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
delle3a.com	collective blog	Tunisia
tunisnews.net	site	Tunisia
ote.nat.tn	site	Tunisia
thalasolidaire.over-blog.com	blog	Tunisia
maxulaprates.com	blog	Tunisia
samibenabdallah.rsfblog.org	blog	France
saharaclub.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
trapboy.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
tunisien-tunisien.blogspot.com	blog	other
nawaat.org	collective blog	other
generation-tunisie-libre.com	site	Tunisia
nemella-sworld.hautetfort.com	blog	France
bebhadra.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
bassambounenni.blog.fr	blog	Tunisia
journaliste-tunisien-9.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
critiquedelapenseequotidienne.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
hendoudfree.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
jeune-tunisien.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
ate-tn.net	site	Spain
un-oeil-sur-la-planete.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
arabasta1.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
artisticmouv.blogspot.com	collective blog	Tunisia
bab-bhar.blogspot.com	portal	Tunisia
nared2009.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
elcalammagreb.blogspot.com	collective blog	Spain
stranger-paris.blogspot.com	blog	France
rafrafi.blogspirit.com	blog	France

Table 8.: (continued)

Node	Category	Location
reveiltunisien.org	site	Tunisia
tunisie-canada.com	site	Canada
tarek-cheniti.blogspot.com	blog	other
tunisiares.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
ambassade-tunisie.fr	site	France
carpediem-selim.blogspot.com	blog	France
touensa.org	site	Tunisia
kissa-online.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
seifnechi.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
rap125.com	blog	Tunisia
associationatc.org	site	Canada
manif22mai.wordpress.com	collective blog	other
lesraisinsdelacolere.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
tunisie-buzzers.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
tunisie2009.bloguez.com	blog	Tunisia
blogues.canoe.ca/taiebmoalla	blog	Canada
freetunisia.org	collective blog	USA
chiheb.maktoobblog.com	blog	Tunisia
cyberdissidents.org	site	other
fhimt.com	site	France-Tunisia
revolutiontunisie.wordpress.com	blog	Tunisia
etkalem.blogspot.com	blog	Canada
princesse-des-lieux.blogspot.com	blog	Tunisia
destino-tunez.com	site	Spain
zizoufromdjerba.com	blog	Tunisia

A.1.2 *E-diasporas.fr crawl Morocco*

The *e-Diasporas Project* provides two crawls for Morocco. The first network was created in April 2010 as part of a trial for the project. The second network represents an update of the first network's links in July 2011. The crawls contain four websites that can be considered beyond the boundaries set for this study. These discarded

Removed nodes:
fatima-salma.over-blog.com
enmarruecos.blogspot.com
mobisud.fr
mobisud.be

websites include a blog on Moroccan cooking, a photo blog, as well as two websites of a telecommunication company catering to the Moroccan diaspora.

Table 9.: Complete list of nodes, Morocco

Node	Category	Location
larbi.org	blog	France
yabiladi.com	community	Morocco
www.marocainsdumonde.gov.ma	institutional	Morocco
labelash.blogspot.com	blog	Spain
louladekhmissbatata.wordpress.com	blog	Canada
alwatan.ma	institutional	Morocco
bladi.net	community	Morocco
lemythe.com	blog	France
lailalalami.com	blog	USA
kingstoune.com	blog	France
blogreda.blogspot.com	blog	Morocco
murmures.net	blog	Canada
moroccoboard.com	media	USA
www.anasalaoui.com	blog	France
www.eatbees.com/blog	blog	Morocco
monagora.fr	blog	France
www.7didane.org	blog	Morocco
makhoudjit.blogspot.com	blog	USA
cabalamuse.wordpress.com	blog	other
myrtus.typepad.com	blog	USA
kalima.hautetfort.com	blog	France
maghreb-canada.ca	media	Canada
www.ccme.org.ma	institutional	Morocco
9afia.blogspot.com	blog	France
talkmorocco.net	community	Morocco
amp-USA.org	association/NGO	USA
supertimba.skynetblogs.be	blog	Belgium
adilski.blogspot.com	blog	USA
wafin.com	community	USA
sonofwords.blogspot.com	blog	Canada
karlamassini.blogspot.com	blog	Canada
mohblog.blogspot.com	blog	France

Table 9.: (continued)

Node	Category	Location
kugelschreiber.canalblog.com	blog	Belgium
moroccanconsulate.com	institutional	USA
amb-maroc.fr	institutional	France
elmuhajer.com	media	USA
minbarachaab.net	community	USA
klamia.canalblog.com	blog	Canada
amanaonline.org	associationNGO	USA
rtv1860.com	media	Canada
www.consulatmaroc-toulouse.org	institutional	France
fincome.ma	institutional	Morocco
cgml.net	institution	France
kennza.wordpress.com	blog	Canada
consulatdumaroc.ca	institutional	Canada
cgmb-maroc.com	institutional	France
washingtonmoroccanclub.org	association/NGO	USA
oef75.blogspot.com	blog	Morocco
amge-caravane.com	association/NGO	France
mre.ma	community	France
poliquonautemarocain.blogspot.com	blog	Morocco
marocentrepreneurs.com	association/NGO	France
blogmaghreb-observateur.blogspot.com	media	Canada
almaghreb-almoulahed.com	media	Canada
maghreb-observateur.qc.ca	media	Canada
maghreballiance.com	association/NGO	USA
lallamenana.free.fr	blog	France
moroccansociety.org	association/NGO	USA
ascib.net/	association/NGO	Spain
slimane.canalblog.com	blog	Canada
atmf.org	association/NGO	France
mars-net.org	association/NGO	USA
al9adiya7amda.blogspot.com	blog	other
maooc.com	association/NGO	Canada
www.cg-maroc-orleans.org	institutional	France
cgm-colombes.com	institutional	France
us.biomatec.org	association/NGO	USA

Table 9.: (continued)

Node	Category	Location
ama-co.org	association/NGO	USA
marouki.joeuser.com	blog	Morocco
yawatani.com	community	France
aataourirt.org	association/NGO	France
aljalia-almaghrebia.com	community	other
savdev.org	association/NGO	France
capdema.org	association/NGO	France
www.consulatmarocdijon.net	institutional	France
atime.es	association/NGO	Spain
bioacm.ca	association/NGO	Canada
lecitoyenmarocain.com	association/NGO	USA
yenoo.be	community	Belgium
boubouh.over-blog.com	blog	Morocco
tunion.org	association/NGO	France
amdt.ca	association/NGO	Canada
www.cg-maroc-rennes.com	institutional	France
lesamismarocains.blogspot.com	blog	Canada
ambamaroc.ca	institutional	Canada
idd-reseau.org	association/NGO	France
cgmrotterdam.nl	institutional	Netherlands
marruecosdigital.net	media	Spain
soumiaz.blogspot.com	blog	USA
badrryadi.centerblog.net	blog	France
saad.amrani.free.fr/blog	blog	Morocco
palmier-savoir.net	association/NGO	France
consulatmarocfrankfurt.de	institutional	other
maes.blogfree.net	community	Spain
www.consulatmaroc-pontoise.fr	institutional	France
asdhom.org	association/NGO	France
association-khamsa.org	association/NGO	France
amctprp.org/RIM	association/NGO	France
centromohammed6.blogspot.com	blog	other
ambexonline.net	association/NGO	USA
wafin.be	community	Belgium
sebti.fr	blog	France

Table 9.: (continued)

Node	Category	Location
embajada-marruecos.es	institutional	Spain
marocains-d-algerie.niceboard.com	community	France
ampsq.com	association/NGO	Canada
atlassolidarite.free.fr	association/NGO	France
magiaenmarruecos.blogspot.com	blog	Spain
www.sierra.ht.st	association/NGO	France
bled.ma	media	Canada
dafina.net	community	USA
forumhorizonsmaroc.com	association/NGO	France
rmeconsultants.com	business	France
mirabab.fr	community	France
ridm-maroc.com	community	USA
traselviaje.blogspot.com	blog	Spain
plateforme-mre.blogspot.com	association/NGO	Netherlands
marruecos-maroc.com	media	Spain
migdev.org	association/NGO	France
pourunmarocmeilleur.com	association/NGO	Canada
purplemind-candysha.blogspot.com	blog	Morocco
maroc-canada.ca	association/NGO	Canada
emigrant.canalblog.com	blog	Canada
etudiants-marocains.forumactif.com	community	Morocco
marocainsdalgerie.sosblog.com	blog	Morocco
cnmf.fr	association/NGO	France
sahara-libre.blogspot.com	blog	other
nowbi.over-blog.com	blog	France
asso-amel.fr	association/NGO	France
amf.chez.com	association/NGO	France
marocrus.com	association/NGO	other
daba2012.com	association/NGO	France
darnna.com	community	other
aceimi.insa-lyon.fr	association/NGO	France
wladbladi.com	community	France
consulatmarocmilan.it	institutional	other
maghrebin.net	media	Morocco
arabika.ning.com	community	USA

Table 9.: (continued)

Node	Category	Location
consulatmaroc-bruxelles.be	institutional	Belgium
ecmb.association.over-blog.com	association/NGO	Belgium
marbel.free-bb.com	community	France
asociacionmarroqui.com	association/NGO	Spain
aemc14.fr	association/NGO	France
dcUSA.themoroccanembassy.com	institutional	USA
tiwizi59.over-blog.com	association/NGO	France
suisse-maroc.com	association/NGO	other
taha.fr	blog	France
marokkanskforening.no	association/NGO	other
centromohammed6.cl	association/NGO	other
mlouizi.unblog.fr	blog	France
aelmb.net	association/NGO	France
judaisme-marocain.org	culture/religion	Belgium
munt.nu	association/NGO	Netherlands

A.2 INTERVIEWS AND PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE

Tunisia

SAMI BEN ABDALLAH (Paris, 17.04.2010)

YASSINE AYARI (Tunis, 25.06.2012)

HAMADI KALOUTCHA (Tunis, 27.06.2012)

LILIOPATRA (Tunis, 13.07.2012)

AMINE KOCHLEF (Montreal, 03.01.2014)

HASNI REVEILTUNISIEN (Paris, 13.03.2014)

SAMI BEN GHARBIA (Paris, 14.03.2014)

ARABASTA (Paris, 07.07.2014)

RIADH GUERFALI (ALIAS ASTRUBAL) (Tunis, 14.10.2014)

MOHAMED-ALI RAZGALLAH (Sidi Bou Said, 11.10.2014)

GHASSEN BEN KHELIFA (video call, 12.11.2014)

KHELIL BEN OSMAN (video call, 01.12.2014)

HOUSSEIN BEN AMEUR (online correspondence, 06.03.2015)

FAYLA (video call, 25.04.2015)

TAREK KAHLAOUI (Tunis, 23.06.2015)

AZYZ AMAMI (Tunis, 26.06.2015)

-Z- (Paris, 25.07.2015)

MOHAMED MADHKOUR (online correspondence, 25.09.2015)

ZIZOU FROM DJERBA (video call, 31.10.2015)

NADIA A. (online correspondence, 01.11.2015)

AMIRA YAHYAOUI (video call, 29.12.2015)

Morocco

MOHAMED X Mamfakinch (Paris, 10.07.2014)

MOHAMED Y Mamfakinch (Paris, 19.07.2014)

MOHAMED EZZOUAK (Yabiladi) (Casablanca, 27.10.2014)

GHALI BENSOUDA (Capdema) (video call, 03.11.2014)

HAMZA MAHFOUZ (video call, 23.12.2014)

EATBEES (online correspondence, 15.08.2015)

IBNKAFKA lawyer (video call, 21.08.2015)

UNE MAROCAINE (video call, 23.08.2015)

L_BADIKHO (Mamfakinch) (video call, 30.08.2015)

THESANAE (video call, 02.09.2015)

MOUNIR BENSALAH (video call, 10.09.2015)

POLITICONAUTE (phone call, 26.10.2015)

CITOYEN_HMIDA (phone call, 31.10.2015)

A.3 INTERVIEW GUIDELINES FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

1. Politicization
    - Why did you start blogging / When did you become a cyberactivist?
    - Was there a specific event that triggered this decision?
2. Internet censorship
    - How did you deal with the censorship regime in your home country?
    - How did it affect your online activities?
3. Collective identity
    - People living abroad characterize themselves in different ways. Some identify as members of a diaspora community, which can imply the fighting for collective rights in their host country and concerted action towards the homeland. They are also often courted by the home country. What does it mean for you to be a Tunisian/Moroccan living abroad?
4. On living abroad
    - Why did you leave your country?
    - How do you keep in touch with those stayed home?
    - Where do you inform yourself on what happens in the country of origin?
5. Being a cyberactivist based abroad
    - Did the fact that you live/lived abroad matter to the rest of the community? If so, how?
6. Online - offline
    - How did you interact with your fellow activists?
    - Did you meet other cyberactivists face-to-face prior to the uprisings?