

Contrasting Global Cultural Flows in Morocco and Algeria

**An Analysis of Post-Arab Spring Changes in Morocco and Algeria through the
Lens of Appadurai's Five Dimensions Theory**

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Section 1: Introductions

The last five years have been an intense and tumultuous period for Northern Africa, particularly for the Maghrebi region, which was centrally affected by the Arab Spring. The protests and demonstrations that began in December of 2010 brought about a massive restructuring of the region as a whole- overthrowing existing governments, bringing new ones to power, and in some areas, breaking out into civil war. Only two countries passed through the Arab Spring with unchanged heads of state- Morocco and Algeria. And, while neither Morocco nor Algeria have suffered the more brutal or severe of these changes, they have nonetheless seen fundamental reshaping of their cultural landscapes. Using Arjun Appadurai's 'five dimensions' framework for examining globalization, we can begin to contextualize recent changes in post-Arab Spring Morocco and Algeria and observe emerging patterns within the complex landscape.

Four trends rise predominantly into view. First, we will observe a slow but continuous shift in the Moroccan Ideoscape and Technoscape towards a system of greater civil and personal freedom. At the same time, we will witness an opposite shift in the Algerian Ideoscape, Mediascape, and Technoscape- rather than increase civil and personal freedoms following the Arab Spring, the Algerian government has actively worked to stem such changes. Under further examination, we will observe a rift beginning to develop between the Financescapes of Morocco and Algeria, which have until recently been wed by the international energy trade. This change is mirrored by a widening of the rift between the Moroccan and Algerian Ethnoscapes- the two countries'

historically shaky relationship has only worsened in post-Arab Spring Northern Africa. This final shift is significant, because it holds the potential to increase the rate of extremist radicalization in the region.

Before we begin to examine these shifts to any great depth, however, we must first contextualize them within the political structure of the Maghrebi region as a whole. This necessitates an inspection of both the Moroccan and Algerian governments prior to the Arab Spring, as well as a close look at the historically icy relationship between the two countries. By creating this contextual framework, we develop a solid foundation from which to explore the shifting cultural flows within Morocco and Algeria.

Section 2: Theoretical Context

Let us begin with a brief exploration of Arjun Appadurai's theory of 'five dimensions'. In his article "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy", Appadurai writes that the new global cultures have "to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order" (Appadurai, 33). He categorizes the five primary "dimensions of global cultural flows" as ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes (Appadurai, 33). The titles of these scapes are largely self-explanatory, and for reasons of paper length, I will not redefine the terms here. Suffice it to say, though, when viewed together, these five dimensions intersect to form a landscape made up of "fluid, irregular shapes... they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors" (Appadurai, 33). By recognizing the component parts of this complex

geopolitical landscape as such, we can begin to use the five dimensions as useful lenses through which to measure historical change in both Morocco and Algeria.

Section 3: International Context

To understand the particular effects that the Arab Spring has had on the cultural flows of Morocco and Algeria, we must first establish a baseline understanding of the Maghrebi landscape prior to the Arab Spring. Establishing this baseline is a task many academics have undertaken, but arguably the simplest and most effective way to understand the Maghrebi landscape prior to the end of 2010 is to examine academic writings about the region from that particular period of time. One author immediately comes to mind: John P. Entelis, who seemingly prophetically wrote in 2008 that “Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia... stand at a crucial crossroads in their political evolution” (Entelis, 9).

In his article, “Democratic Desires and the Authoritarian Temptation in the Central Maghreb”, Entelis paints a patently bleak picture of the governments of the Maghreb. Widespread “Islamic militancy” in Morocco, he writes, had resulted in a “survivalist” government, one which decided “to further limit rather than expand political and civil rights” (Entelis, 21). He decries the “authoritarian excesses” of the government, which include “flagrant abuses of human rights, like arbitrary arrest, torture, and unfair trials” (Entelis, 22). The problem, he hints, is cyclical- the militancy Morocco faced at the time was “self-induced”, resulting from the government’s own failures “to deal with poverty, inequality, and corruption” (Entelis, 20). These problems, coupled with terrorist

attacks on Moroccan soil in early 2003, had resulted in a “frustrated, discontented, and deeply angry Moroccan youth”, many of whom would take to the streets during the Arab Spring in the years following Entelis’ article (Entelis, 20).

Entelis writes similarly of Algeria. Despite the (then recent) adoption of “relatively free, albeit controlled, presidential elections”, the country as a whole remained authoritarian (Entelis, 22). Many citizens in Algeria struggle with “the basic necessities of life” and “believe that [the elections] serve merely to consolidate the power of the shadowy military elite”, again providing a glimpse into the mindset of the very people who would take to the streets en masse as soon as three years later (Entelis, 22). Also like Morocco, Algeria’s human rights record was “poor to very bad”, including “arbitrary arrests... excessive use of force...” and “reported cases of torture” (Entelis, 22). It is clear that both Morocco and Algeria contain ideoscapes deeply rooted in authoritarianism, and this governmental ideology has significant implications for the technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, and ethnoscapescapes of the two countries.

Also worthy of note are the countries’ historically icy relationship. Morocco and Algeria have been consistently engaged in a border dispute since 1994, after Morocco imposed visa regulations on Algerian visitors. This, itself, was a reaction to then-recent terrorist attacks that Morocco suspected Algeria was responsible for. As Al Jazeera reports, “checkpoints, on both sides of the border, have been closed”, with the two countries going so far as to begin work on a “barbed-wire fence... expected to separate the entire frontier” (Al Jazeera). Regional conflict over the Western Sahara has not helped situations- “Morocco has asserted control over this desert region” despite

“claims [to independence] Algeria supports” (Al Jazeera). The deeply-held, and deeply-felt, Ethnoscopic rift between Morocco and Algeria has only widened in recent years, for reasons that will emerge over the course of this paper.

Having established the historical context for Moroccan-Algerian relations, we can now begin to decompile each country’s multi-dimensional growth in the wake of the Arab Spring.

Section 4: Morocco’s Movement Towards Freedom

Though Morocco is still run by what is inarguably an authoritarian government, it has nonetheless, on the whole, begun to shift in the direction of increased personal and civil freedoms. This is a clear attempt to ensure intra-national stability in the light of increased protests and demonstrations. The implications of the Arab Spring are most clear in Morocco’s Ideoscape and Technoscape- the newest king of the country, Mohammed VI, had already slowly begun to democratize some aspects of his authoritarian regime when protests began, a process which he has only continued since. At the same time, Moroccan Internet freedom has grown since the end of protests, as have press freedoms.

Francesco Biagi makes the best claim for the gradual democratization of the country in his article “The pilot of *limited* change: Mohammed VI and the transition in Morocco.” While he admits that Morocco’s government is only “a hybrid regime, in which the king remains the fulcrum of the political and institutional system,” and that

democratization is “proceeding quite slowly”, it is nonetheless a very real transitional process (Biagi, 51).

Biagi notes numerous Ideoscopic changes that occurred following the early days of protests, including “wage increases for public sector employees... the guarantee of unemployment benefit... mandatory medical insurance, and free access to the health service for a greater number of citizens” (Biagi, 52). On the whole, these were successful measures. But it was the adoption of a new Constitution that represented the most significant change in the country. While most members of the parliament did not view forming a new Constitution, even in light of the protests, as a priority, the King created the “Consultative Commission on Constitutional Reform” to draft a new constitution which would include a “guarantee of the institutions addressing the issues of good government, human rights, and protection of freedoms” (Biagi, 57). The new, more democratically-minded constitution would be adopted shortly thereafter, and represents a clear shift towards freedom in the Ideoscopic mindset of the Moroccan government as a whole.

But Morocco’s shift towards freedom has not been limited to the Ideoscopic dimension- there has been significant progression in the Technoscopic and Mediascopic dimensions, as well. The country has “Partly Free” access to the Internet according to Freedom House’s investigation of the country (Freedom House). As a result of the Arab Spring, “blocking orders on numerous websites and online tools were lifted”, and the state “no longer engages in technical filtering” (Freedom House). Of course, this freedom is relative- “several online users were arrested over the past year”

under the laws, even in their newer, diminished forms (Freedom House). Still, the shift towards freedom has had clear results for citizens and organizations in the country- “the internet penetration rate grew from just over 21 percent of the population in 2007 to 55 percent in 2012”, and despite no Moroccan news sites ranking in the country’s top ten visited websites immediately prior to the Arab Spring, “Hespress.com, the most popular online news and information website in Morocco” reached number six in 2012 (Freedom House).

But, as we will see, these kinds of progressive changes have not yet reached Morocco’s neighbor to the south-east, Algeria.

Section 5: Algeria’s Movement Away from Freedom

Prior to the Arab Spring, Algeria’s press could be called “Robust and independent-minded by Arab standards” (Entelis, 22). However, where Morocco has acted to ensure intra-national security by shifting their Ideoscape, Mediascape, and Technoscapes in the direction of increased civil and personal liberty, Algeria has done the opposite: Internet and press freedoms are at an all-time low, and do not seem to be changing.

Where Morocco has shifted towards freedom, Algeria has “declined from Partly Free to Not Free” (Freedom House). This follows the country’s immediate reaction to protests- namely, “preventing access to internet providers across much of the capital... in an attempt to prevent planned demonstrations gathering pace”, as reported by The Telegraph in 2011 (Ramdani). At the same time, while the Algerian constitution

“guarantees freedom of expression... a freedom of emergency was in effect from 1992 until February 2011 allowing the government to penalize any speech deemed threatening to the state or public order” (Freedom House). While this change might resemble progressive development, it is, in fact, a farce- “substantial legal restrictions on press freedom remain in press”. The Technoscopic dimension of the country has become increasingly narrow and restrictive, reflecting deeper and more traumatic shifts in the government’s basically held Ideoscopic principals.

The Mediascopic dimension of the country has also shifted away from freedom under the burden of increased government discretion- “bloggers and traditional journalists are subject to defamation laws” and “restrictive laws continued to be used to prosecute journalists in 2014” (Freedom House). Two international incidents have resulted from these laws- in the first, journalist Abdelhai Abdessamia was held in “pretrial detention” for over a year and a half for “facilitating his editor’s escape from the country”, a necessary precaution after the editor “reported on the president’s waning health” and was subsequently charged with endangering state security” (Freedom House). A second international flight occurred this year, when cartoonist Djamel Ghanem was “charged with insulting the president and fraudulently accessing a computer network” after he posted, and later removed, a mocking image of the president on the newspaper’s computer system (Freedom House). Ghanem sought political asylum in France.

Algeria’s increasingly restrictive landscape represents a distinctly different response to the Arab Spring from that of Morocco, and these shifts in the policies and

attitudes of their respective countries have manifested in the pair's individual, as well as their shared, Financescape and Ethnoscape. This has, as a result, put Algeria at increasing odds with its neighbor.

Section 6: Shifting Financescapes and Ethnoscapes

It is important that we pause to consider this notion of a shared Financescape and Ethnoscape between Morocco and Algeria. We have earlier addressed the long-soured political and cultural relationship between Morocco and Algeria, but this relationship is increasingly complicated by the energy situation in the Maghreb region.

Historically, Morocco has imported the majority of its energy from Algeria in the form of oil, and Algeria has consistently benefited from this relationship (Zoubir, 63). Presently, though, Morocco is working to shift their energy usage from primarily oil-based to primarily solar-based. To this end, they have recently begun working with the DESERTEC Foundation to build the single largest solar power plant in the world (Green Horizon Films). As Morocco has begun to liberate itself financially from Algeria, it has simultaneously attempted to mend that relationship- as reported by Al Jazeera, Morocco has repeatedly petitioned Algeria to open the Moroccan/Algerian border "for economic reasons, but the issue remains a low priority for Algeria" (Al Jazeera). Of course, this makes sense, financially, but it also stands as a reflection of more deeply-held Ethnoscopic tensions between the pair.

These Ethnoscopic tensions, paired with Algeria's increasingly restrictive Mediascape, Ideoscape, and Technoscape, carry a significant risk not just for the

Maghrebi region, but the globe as a whole. As George Joffe explores in his article, “Sealed borders and closed minds between Morocco and Algeria”, the “petulance as policy” that exists between the two countries has the unfortunate potential to cause an increase in extremist behavior in the region. “The militia war in Libya”, he writes, “threatens to spill across Algeria’s unguarded borders”, bringing with it “extremist groups” (Joffe). This increase in extremist behavior has already begun to show consequences - “the reality of extremists groups’ growing strength” was demonstrated as recently as two years ago when Al-Qaeda attack a gas facility in Algeria.

Morocco and Algeria have operated as a binary pair for much of recent history, with the implications of significant interconnectedness as well as fundamental disagreement well intact. The Arab Spring, however, agitated and accelerated this process of differentiation, setting the two countries on very different paths. As a result of the Arab Spring, Morocco and Algeria have continued to separate on an Ethnoscopic, Mediascopic, Technoscopic, Financescopic, and Ideoscopic level.

Section 7: Conclusions, Predictions

Examining developments in Morocco-Algerian sociopolitical relations through the lens of Appadurai’s five dimensions, we can draw some interesting conclusions about the actions of the two countries. We can even, to some extent, begin to make informed predictions about the future of the region as a whole.

While there were clear differences between the ideologies of the governments of Morocco and Algeria long before the Arab Spring- they are essentially opposites on

fundamental economic and political levels- it was the Arab Spring that catalyzed the quickest and most intense period of sociopolitical development in the region in at least ten years. As Morocco sought to placate protesters by expanding its existing process of gradual democratization, Algeria actively countered demonstrations by quenching existing freedoms and imposing new restrictions. These are fundamental differences in policy and action, which is perhaps why they shine all the brighter under the lens of Appadurai's five dimensions of development.

As much as the protests helped to accelerate the growing separation between the two nations' Mediascapes and Technoscapes, there were already clear, pre-existing differences in the civil and personal freedoms of the two countries. It wasn't so much that a unfree press became free in Morocco (or vice versa in Algeria), nor was it that an open internet in Algeria was suddenly shuttered (or, again, vice versa in Morocco). Rather, Algeria's impositions against freedom grew (even as formal policy shifted in the opposite direction), and Morocco created new freedoms where before there were none. These differences are in fact complex manifestations of delineations on basic Ethnoscopic and Financescopic levels, with border conflicts and economic disagreements spreading back throughout recent history. The interconnectedness of these differences speak to the difficulty of the region to de-escalate conflicts, and perhaps speak to regional relations that can only be called impudent. Morocco's clear attempts to separate themselves from Algeria financially add further fuel to this fire, and Algeria's refusal to open the border to economic movement equally escalates the situation.

Our exploration of the complex, ever-fluid landscape of Moroccan-Algerian relations puts us in a position to make a number of interesting predictions regarding the future of the region. Admittedly, in many ways, very little will change in the region in the near future. Morocco and Algeria are still very firmly authoritarian nations, and each feature (and continue to benefit from) policies that are clearly oppressive. This is complicated by the fact that chilled relationships between the countries make it unlikely that Algeria will roll-back on its refusal to open the economic border, and Morocco has no incentive to continue to import energy from Algeria when it will be producing enough energy to fuel most of the region. As the two countries become increasingly independent of one another, this has the strong possibility of disincentivizing foreign relations and the consequent growths in freedom.

Further frustrating progress is the threat of extremism in the region, and the potential for continued aggression to promote continuing Jihadism. As the past few weeks have shown, ISIS has become a very real threat in the world, and even it is only one of many groups interested in destabilizing not just the Middle East, but the globe. While each country may express a disinterest in the politics of the other, they are in fact damned to interconnectedness by that same issue of terror that presently binds us all, as a globe. The only clear path forward, and the only opportunity to elevate the Maghrebi landscape as a whole and the Moroccan-Algerian relationship in particular, is increased communication and interaction, though an obvious method to bring that about isn't clear.

If progress doesn't occur, and doesn't occur soon, it is very likely that some of those very same disenfranchised, disconnected youth who participated in the Arab Spring will find that protests, in the case of Morocco, don't work fast enough, or, in the case of Algeria, at all. Neither Algeria nor Morocco stand to benefit from such a development. It is critically important, not just to these two countries, but the region as a whole, that the governments of Morocco and Algeria take a close look not only at their *behaviors* in the past five years, but at the clear and measurable effects those behaviors have had on Appadurai's five dimensions of their geopolitical landscape.

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