Brain Drain: Why Moroccan Journalists Leave their Country

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Abstract

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This thesis analyzes the reasons Moroccan journalists leave their country. It looks closely at the conditions under which journalists work in the country, what they are searching for when they leave, and their experiences working abroad. Ten Moroccan journalists were interviewed (five women and five men). They were asked to share their own experiences while working in Morocco and after they left. In-depth interviewing was used to facilitate the exchange between the researcher and the participants. Giddens' (1984) and Mosco's (2009) structuration theory was mobilized as a theoretical framework to situate their experiences.

This research found that journalists left because they were looking for personal freedom and to improve their quality of life. They were also interested in personal development, in their careers and education. While restrictions on press freedom weren't identified as a primary reason to leave the country, the participants offered insight into how self-censorship that occurs in Moroccan media can follow them to other countries. Finally, looking for more financial security was a reason to leave for half of the journalists who were interviewed, but even those who were not financially motivated to search for work elsewhere found that the higher salaries they received abroad have contributed to their increased quality of life.

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Chapter One: Introduction

People have long moved across the globe, crossing borders in search of jobs, security, and a better future (Harari, 2018). Many Moroccans feel that immigration is one of the best options when seeking a better living and a brighter future; a recent study shows that the Kingdom has the second highest rate of brain drain in the Middle East and North African regions (Alaoui, 2019). Journalists are no exception; in the last two decades, many Moroccan journalists have emigrated to a variety of destinations, including Europe, North America, and the Middle East to seek new career opportunities in journalism or other fields of employment. Most studies about Moroccan journalists have focused on their social status and their working conditions that lead in some cases to harassment and imprisonment when taboos and red lines are transgressed (Chalfaouat, 2015, p. 465), but the factors motivating Moroccan journalists' decisions to leave the country have not been studied, and thus are still unclear.

When I started working as journalist for a semi-private television station in Morocco in 2009, I was surrounded by Moroccan colleagues as well as French, Algerians, Tunisians, and others from a variety of Arab countries. The fact that some of my French and Arab colleagues joined the network and settled in Morocco was puzzling to me, knowing that many of my Moroccan colleagues dreamed of leaving and joining a famous network like the BBC, Aljazeera, or Alhurra. The fact that a country like Morocco was a destination for foreign citizens from Europe and North Africa seemed like a complex phenomenon, considering that many other journalists were choosing to leave Morocco seeking new opportunities elsewhere. In short, I have always been fascinated by how journalists move from one media organization to another in different parts of the world.

As a junior journalist myself, I felt lucky to be able to work in a multi-cultural newsroom. It was my first job, and at 22, I was happy with the work environment, the salary, and privileges at the time. But a few years later, the image I had built up about this job started to shatter. Three years after I started, I was still a junior journalist with a heavier workload and more duties, but my salary was the same as it had been my first day in 2009. I did not see any chance of advancement on the horizon, and the journalists in our newsroom, including me, were not given the opportunity to be creative on the job. Our daily work routine consisted of newsroom meetings at the beginning of shifts where we were assigned topics to work on and producing what were essentially prefabricated stories that relied mainly on news wires. It felt more like a news factory than a newsroom.

It took me another three years of reflection to finally realize the grass is actually greener in many other places, and I decided to leave my job and move to Canada to pursue higher studies in journalism. During these years, I witnessed colleagues moving on with their professional lives, and I wondered if their reasons to leave were similar to mine. This thesis is an attempt to answer this question that has plagued me ever since: Why do Moroccan journalists leave the country to seek opportunities elsewhere?

Generally speaking, news professionals in Morocco see the role of the journalist as either a mobilizer, educator, or informer, or even a combination of all of these (Mellor, 2007, p. 47). When I was working in Morocco, I noticed how some of my colleagues enjoyed introducing themselves as journalists working in television and savored the praise that comes with the job. This struck me as ironic, as I knew from our conversations many of them actually hated not only their salaries but the job itself, mainly because they had an idyllic image about the watchdog role of journalists and the mission of holding political systems to account but had found out a few

years into the job that this image does not reflect the reality on the ground; most Moroccan journalists are told what to write about, especially in radio, television, and the partisan press. While this situation did bother many of my colleagues, most of them still agreed that the social status the job grants is nonetheless compelling, and worth sacrificing some journalistic values. To work effectively though, journalists require freedom of speech. This is still not a fundamental or absolute right in many countries, including Morocco. While the Kingdom officially upholds the right to freedom of speech, in practice there are limitations on this freedom. Moreover, the absence of democratic press laws has also made media institutions in Morocco vulnerable to attempts at direct political control (Ibrahine, 2002, p. 634). Almost 79 per cent of practicing Moroccan journalists say that the press in Morocco is not free (Said, 2004, p. 43). Preparing for this research and reading this statistic led me to the hypothesis that chasing a job in which there is freedom of expression could be a solid reason for a Moroccan journalist to want to leave.

While the new Moroccan constitution of 2011 "provides larger guarantees to protect freedom of expression, several subjects remain untouchable for the media and public debate, mainly the monarchy, Islam, and the territorial integrity in relation to the disputed status of Western Sahara" (El Issawi, 2016, p. 11). As El Issawi (2016) explains, the Moroccan media has experienced rapid development over the past 15 years that has resulted in "diversifying content and operations, moving from an ideological and official tone to a newsy one, and allowing greater representation of citizens' everyday problems" (p. 7). Social media has also played a crucial role in this diversification by creating additional platforms where journalists could discuss controversial issues more easily. But despite the proliferation of media platforms offering space for marginalized voices and widening the available audience, many journalists still operate under strict limitations on their freedom, and risk arrest and imprisonment if they publish

information the monarchy disagrees with (El Issawi, 2016). One of those journalists is Hicham Mansouri, who left for France after conducting an investigation about electronic surveillance against Moroccan journalists that led to him being arrested by the Moroccan police with one of his female friends. Mansouri spent "10 torturous months in jail after being arrested on trumpedup charges of operating a brothel and adultery, which is illegal in the North African nation" (Fournier, 2019). In 2013, journalist Ali Anzoula was arrested for publishing an article on his online newspaper *Lakome*. The article "contained a link to an El País article about a video posted by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)" (Reporters Without Borders, 2016). He was indicted for "allegedly providing 'material assistance' to a terrorist group, 'defending terrorism' and 'inciting the execution of terrorist acts'" (Reporters Without Borders, 2016). Anouzla spent five weeks in "preventative detention" before being released on bail on October 25, 2013 (Reporters Without Borders, 2016). Another case concerns Omar Radi, who wrote a tweet condemning a judicial decision sentencing a dozen of Morocco's leading activists to 20 years imprisonment. For his tweet, Radi was charged with "insulting a public servant," a crime that can result in a year in prison (Errazzouki, 2019). Radi was released on bail after an appeals court in Casablanca accepted his petition, but he was then imprisoned a few months later for the same reasons. Radi was sentenced in July 2021 to six years in prison for "sexual assault and espionage," a charge the Committee to Protect Journalists claims is "absurd" (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2021).

To protect themselves, many Moroccan journalists have become skilled at selfcensorship. During my six years working for a Moroccan TV station, I witnessed and experienced this first-hand. Journalists are careful when reporting on taboo topics such as the monarchy, Islam or territorial unity. Historically, journalists were warned that adopting a critical tone when

discussing these topics risked punishment, including termination or even jail. In a 2004 survey of Moroccan journalists, sports and entertainment journalists were the only ones who said that they felt free to write whatever they want. It is interesting to note that 12.3 % of journalists at the state-owned radio station refused to answer when asked to what extent they benefit from freedom of speech (Said, 2004, p. 52).

Moreover, contrary to expectations, these challenges have not been lessened by the introduction of social media. In fact, social media has become a way for the government to keep a close eye on journalists, activists, and those who have controversial opinions on political issues and social problems. The government spies on Internet activists and journalists with mass surveillance programs (Alami, 2015). Given these limitations on freedom of expression, one might assume that oppression is the principal reason why journalists decide to leave the country. Though this hypothesis may hold true in some cases, the fact that many journalists leave Morocco to find employment in countries where journalism is similarly restricted suggests that oppression is not the only motivation. While some journalists do leave for Europe or the United States, countries known to respect of freedom of the press and the watchdog role journalists play, we also see many Moroccan journalists leaving their country for places such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) or Turkey that have similar or even more severe press restrictions. Why would a journalist leave a country like Morocco ranked 136 out of 180 countries in the index of freedom of the press, to work for a media organization in the UAE ranked 131 or Turkey ranked 153 (Reporters Without Borders, 2021)?

While researchers have studied freedom of speech, the status of journalists, and the condition of journalism in Morocco (Hidass, 2000), there is little scholarship that focuses on the main research question in this study: Why do Moroccan journalists leave and seek employment

elsewhere? The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to uncover and examine these reasons, and make this research accessible to an English-speaking audience. Through interviews with journalists who left Morocco, this research aims to reveal what those journalists think about the state of journalism in Morocco and how their current situation is different than the one they had while living in the Kingdom.

To answer these questions, I used in-depth interviewing as a methodology. I spoke to ten Moroccan journalists living in Europe, North America, and the Middle East. They either currently work or had worked for a media organization. They all had practiced journalism in Morocco at one time and had made the conscious decision to leave the Kingdom. I was planning to meet some of them in person and interview the rest through video call, but due to travel restrictions during the global pandemic, I opted only for video calls.

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter one has provided a short overview of the situation journalists find themselves in in Morocco, and their status in society. It briefly explained the challenges facing journalists practicing the craft in the Kingdom, in order to place the study into a context that will facilitate the understanding of its results. Chapter two contains a more detailed examination of the Moroccan media, taking the reader through a chronological exploration of the press in Morocco since the late 1990s to today, with a focus on the factors that have contributed to both the increase and decrease of press restrictions in the Kingdom. As well, this chapter explores the theoretical concept of structuration, as this study will put structuration theory to use in order to situate Moroccan journalists' agency, or lack of agency, in dealing with the challenges of the job and the steps leading to their decisions to leave the country. Chapter three focuses on the methodology and data analysis used in this study. As mentioned, this thesis has used in-depth interviewing to gather data from journalists, and a grounded theory

approach/thematic analysis was utilized to analyze this data. Chapter four focuses on a discussion of the results of the interviews. This section includes categorized themes that emerged from the interviews. It highlights the reasons that can push a journalist in Morocco to leave the Kingdom, along with an analysis of the choice of destination. Chapter five is the conclusion of this study, that makes links between the findings and theory, and addresses the limitations of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter begins with providing an overview of the literature that deals with the press restrictions in Moroccan media from the late 1990s to today. This first section of the literature review moves chronologically, focusing on moments when press freedom was either loosened or restricted, moments that are closely tied to the relationship between journalists and the monarchy. This section discusses how some journalists practice self-censorship in order to maintain their jobs and the consequences that can arise if a journalist does not adhere to restrictions imposed by the Kingdom. The next section deals with the social status of journalists in Morocco, including how they are paid and viewed in Moroccan society. Finally, this chapter will turn to the theoretical concept of structuration that will be used to look at what sort of agency Moroccan journalists' have in their profession and how this may affect their decisions to leave the country.

Press Restrictions: The Relationship between Journalists and the Monarchy

Following the coronation of King Mohamed VI in 1999, Morocco underwent important economic and social changes. The new King promised Moroccans that his era would be different than the one "his authoritarian father" led (Maghraoui, 2008). In a speech aired on public television in October 1999, the new King promised "a free press, the respect of human rights, and individual freedom" (Ibrahine, 2002, p. 633). The promise of democratic change included changes to freedom of speech, giving the media, especially the print independent press, more flexibility to openly discuss taboo subjects in public, such as Islam, homosexuality, and the private life of the King (Campagna & Labidi, 2007). These changes prompted the establishment of new progressive newspapers, which aimed to widen public debate on the daily life and

struggles of Moroccan people. This independent press consisted of all press not owned by the established political regime and political parties. The first few years of the 21st century were marked by the creation of this "new press," which shadowed the traditional, partisan press (Benchemsi, 2013, p.100). It became an important forum to discuss a multitude of sensitive issues relating the democratization process (Ibahrine, 2002, p. 633). Ahmed Reda Benchemsi, the publisher of the weekly magazines *Nichane* and *Telquel,* and one of the journalists who created "the new press," described what was happening in Morocco at the time as "fairy-tale" like, when compared to the situation in other Arab countries (p. 99). The new King's encouragement of media diversity and freedom of speech engendered a sense of optimism among Moroccan journalists.

The golden era, however, did not last long. If newspapers wanted to remain in business, it became clear they were still expected to exercise some form of restraint (Chama, 2019, p. 76). For example, Benchemsi tried to push the limits of freedom of expression too hard, and in 2006 his magazine and its website were banned after publishing "provocative jokes" related to religion (Chalfaouat, 2015, p. 478). The honeymoon period between the palace and the media finally reached an end when "the new press" started using a critical tone when talking about the duties of the King, Islam and the territorial unity. So, while for a period of time this new form of journalism seemed to be effective, it ended when the government began prosecuting and imprisoning journalists once again.

To understand the progression, it's important to go back in time to 2003, a year that marked one of the major turning points in the modern history of the Kingdom. That year the Casablanca terrorism bombings killed 45 people, which was followed by numerous human rights violations against terrorism suspects in Morocco (Human Rights Watch, 2011). A few days after

the attacks, the Moroccan parliament "hastily" passed anti-terrorist legislation that was first introduced in 2001 following the discovery of Al-Qaida cells. The 2001 law had been widely condemned by human rights groups for the "harsh" measures it allowed and its vague interpretation of "support of terrorism activities" (Maghraoui, 2008). After the 2003 attacks, the Moroccan authorities began arresting anyone they suspected might be involved or even related to someone involved in the bombings, despite the non-existence of tangible evidence against them. Moroccan authorities also expected the press in the country to have a unified tone that duplicated the official one, prioritizing the battle against terrorism even if it meant undermining civil rights and liberties (Maghraoui, 2008).

These events, and the Moroccan authorities' defensive behavior led to the rise of selfcensorship among many journalists. The ones working for public and semi-private media institutions were operating according to a dictated editorial line, and the independent journalists that formed the "new press" were publishing as if walking on landmines. Still, many publications refused to meet the system's expectations and faced tougher restrictions from the established political system ruling the country. Many journalists were vocal about the importance of preserving civil liberties and democratic principles, and that sacrificing them for the sake of security doesn't guarantee the Kingdom's protection against terrorism (Maghraoui, 2008).

The following years were not very rewarding for journalists who believed in the "new press" era. As Campagna and Labidi wrote in 2007, "since 2005, at least five journalists have been hit with disproportionate financial penalties, five have been handed suspended jail terms, and one was banned from practicing journalism altogether" (para 5). To keep the most outspoken journalists in line, the Moroccan government has favored the use of financial penalties, instead of prison terms. Aboubaker Jamaï, publisher of *Le Journal Hébdomadaire*, one of the most

courageous magazines in Morocco that came to symbolize the opening that began under the reign of Mohammed VI, was ordered to pay excessive fines that led to its shutdown (Bouziane, 2013). As Campagna and Labidi (2007) write, "[w]hat set Jamaï and his co-workers apart from other Moroccan journalists was an uncompromising belief in holding accountable the powerful, including the King, who under Moroccan law is deemed "sacred"" (para 30). Jamaï no longer lives in Morocco. He moved to France with his wife and children in 2007, after numerous publication ban orders, lawsuits, and restrictions against him. There is also the case of Ali Anouzla who has been sued multiple times for his publications. In 2009, he was charged for publishing an article about the health condition of the King. A few months later, his publication *Lakome* had to close down for "financial reasons" (Lagarde, 2013).

As in all Arab nations, the Arab Spring of 2011 had a tangible effect on politics in Morocco. The first significant Arab Spring demonstration in Morocco took place on February 20, 2011. It was organized through Facebook by a youth group that called itself "February 20th for change" (Barany, 2012, p.6). According to Human Rights Watch (2011), "the King pledged a process of political reform, after Moroccans took to the streets" demanding social and economic changes, as well as a narrowing in the King's "extensive powers" (para 8).

Morocco was the first country within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to respond to the Arab uprising by rewriting its constitution, declaring the country's adherence to universal human rights, thereby recognizing the superiority of international law over national legislation (Alicino, 2015, p. 166). The King's constitutional revisions were applauded by most in Morocco's independent press; some journalists, however, noted that the King's words would have been more impactful and revolutionary if they had been issued after his coronation in 1999

and not during a time of social unrest. The King's attitude thus appeared to some as tactical and reactionary (Boukhari, 2012).

However, after the eruption of the Arab Spring protests in North Africa and the Middle East in the early weeks of 2011, Morocco managed to keep its political stability. In order to do this, the monarchy promised a transfer of powers from the regime to parliament and to strengthen the role of the prime minister. These promises were included in a new constitution that was approved by referendum in July of that year (Lewis, 2011). But although the constitution was modified to strengthen the authority of the country's prime minister among other political reforms, according to Hicham Ben Abdallah El Alaoui, the King's cousin and a researcher at Stanford University, the promised reforms actually followed the same path as seen before with the King's promises – the King was once again imposing his terms and excluding Moroccan political parties from the movement for change (Al Jazeera, 2011).

As well, after the 2011 uprisings many journalists continued to experience harassment and imprisonment. In 2013 the arrest of Ali Anouzla, one of the most respected Moroccan journalists, who as noted earlier had been previously arrested in 2009, was condemned by many, including King Mohammad VI 's first cousin, Prince Hicham Ben Abdallah el Alaoui. In a Huffington Post article (2013), el Alaoui states that the "arbitrary arrest" of Ali Anouzla reveals the fragility of Morocco's democratic transition. The Prince, who was a former United Nations Peacekeeper in Kosovo (Alami, 2014), said that it was not new for Moroccan independent journalists, artists or activists to be "continuously knocked down by the authoritarian Sword of Damocles" (El Alaoui, 2013).

In the following years, more names were added to the list of harassed or arrested journalists and activists. In May 2013, Hicham Mansouri, an investigative journalist, was

sentenced to ten months imprisonment for adultery. According to Human Rights Watch, the case was "politically motivated" (The New York Times, 2015). Other victims include Moroccan journalist Hamid El Mahdaoui who received a three-year prison sentence, rapper Mohamed Mounir who is serving a year in prison, and Youtuber Mohamed Sekkak, who was sentenced to four years in prison (Errazzouki, 2019). Another case is that of Omar Radi, a Moroccan journalist who, in April 2019, tweeted a condemnation of a judge's verdict in a case involving dozens of activists affiliated with Hirak, described as "a tenacious protest movement that began in the northern Rif region in October 2016" (Errazzouki, 2019, para 4). The activists were each sentenced to up to 20 years in prison. Radi received a four-month suspended sentence and a fine of 500 MAD ($55 USD) (Kasraoui, 2020), but authorities managed to find a reason to imprison him. Radi conducted a hunger strike in prison, after months of captivity without a fair trial. In July 2021, Radi was sentenced to six years in prison for "sexual assault and undermining state security through espionage and illegally receiving foreign funding" (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2021, para 3). According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) (2021), Radi's is one of many independent journalists who have been targeted and charged in the past few years with sexual assault. The CPJ's Program Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa, Sherif Mansour, strongly condemned the sentencing saying:

> Independent journalists in the country are repeatedly harassed and slapped with absurd charges, and Moroccan authorities are not fooling anyone with this retaliatory judicial sham. Radi should be immediately freed. (para 2)

There is also the case of Hajar Raissouni, a Moroccan journalist, who "was sentenced to prison on charges of undergoing an illegal abortion after becoming pregnant while being single.

Raissouni denied having an abortion and said the arrest was prompted by her work" (El-Masaiti, 2019, para 12).

The common link between the targeted journalists in Morocco is that they all work for the independent print press. This press comprises two categories of journalists: Those who play by the system's rules and practice self-censorship to stay in business, and those who refuse to compromise, espousing ideals of press freedom and ignoring the limits on freedom drawn by the established political regime (Campagna & Labidi, 2007). The other existing media institutions in Morocco are either semi-private with some kind of government authority over them, or public institutions with a pro-government official tone. Hence their journalists always practice selfcensorship to avoid punishment. Harassment against journalists and the regime's endless efforts to muzzle the independent press comes from its belief that a free mediascape would "jeopardize the security, stability, and unity of the kingdom" (Chalfaouat, 2015, p.467).

What has marked the last two decades in Morocco is this relationship of love and uncertainty between the King and Moroccans. People ask for rights and political reform, but only if it doesn't undermine the legitimacy of the King as a ruler. The King will periodically grant more openness through political reform, temporarily ease press restrictions, and promote human rights. However, since the late 1990s, it seems that these changes have not been sustainable. As El-Issawi wrote in 2016, the "short phases of openness" the Moroccan national media has gone through, "could not survive the regime's tactics and its adoption of a hostile stance towards media freedom" (p. 5). It seems apparent looking back through history that the King has always had a distrustful relationship with the Moroccan press. It's perhaps not surprising the King, like his father before him, has never allowed Moroccan papers to interview him since ascending to the throne in July 1999.

Social Status of Journalists in Morocco

To become a journalist in Morocco nowadays there are many options. One can apply for the only public journalism school in Rabat to obtain a degree in journalism and communication after completing four years of learning and training. Or one can apply to private journalism schools that emerged during the past two decades in different cities of the Kingdom providing a training of two or three years in journalism. In other cases, some people come to journalism from other disciplines and do not specifically study journalism in schools. They manage to establish their own popular publications, or find media institutions that will give them the opportunity to prove their writing and investigating skills.

I personally studied at the public journalism school in Rabat (Institut Superieur de l'Information et de la Communication or ISIC), and had to provide my high school grades and pass a written and oral exam to be admitted. It is worth noting that as ISIC graduates, we always felt that many of the media organizations in Morocco preferred ISIC's graduates over those who came from private journalism schools because of the institute's acclaimed reputation. Only 50 students graduate every year from ISIC and they all usually start working immediately after graduating. Sometimes they can even find a job during their second or third year of study. When I graduated in 2008, a Moroccan semi-private TV station, Medi1TV, came to our school to interview new graduates. They ended up hiring eight journalists between the classes of 2008 and 2009, including me.

There is limited historical data available on the pay scales for Moroccan journalists. As Hidass (2000) points out, it is difficult to determine pay scales in the late 1990s and early 2000s due to the lack of financial regulations at the time. Salaries were not assigned based on any fiscal

rules, nor factors such as the reputation, merit, or professionalism (Hidass, 2000). As Hidass (2000) describes, journalists could be classified into four categories:

1. Government journalists who work for the Public Moroccan Radio and Television Company and the Moroccan official public press agency, Maghreb Arab Press. They are paid the same as any other government worker with the same university degree. In 2000, entry level journalists were paid 3,000 MAD (300 USD) a month, whereas senior journalists were paid as much as 12,000 MAD (1,200 USD) a month. (The minimum wage in Morocco for this same period was 1674 MAD or $167 USD a month).
2. Contractor journalists who work in the public sector who work for the Public Moroccan Radio and Television Company and do not have a permanent employee status. They are hired on a renewable contract and are paid a similar salary to that of government journalists.
3. Permanent newspaper journalists with partisan newspapers who have often been with a newspaper since its creation and maintain their situation due to their social status (connections to politicians, etc.). They are paid much more than their peers.
4. Employee journalists who are hired by private independent newspapers and media outlets to fill many roles. These constitute the majority of the journalists and they are paid mediocre salaries.

As Hidass (2000) points out, the salaries of most Moroccan journalists at the time were "mediocre" compared to the cost of living in the country and didn't include social benefits, meaning they only received a monthly salary and had to pay for their own medical bills, unless they worked for the government that provided basic healthcare coverage and a retirement plan

for all their employees. As well, those "mediocre" salaries were not based on merit or qualifications; having a degree in journalism or multiple degrees would not guarantee a good salary, but a recommendation from a politician or a prominent person would (Hidass, 2000). A study released in 2004 found that seven out of ten journalists in Morocco believe the press in their country is not professional and noted that 35% of journalists working for private newspapers do not have legal status and never signed a work contract with their employer (Said, 2004).

That said, journalists' salaries have increased over the years. In 2009, the semi-private TV stations in Morocco I worked for offered a starting salary of 10,000 MAD (1,115 USD) a month, or more, to newly graduated journalists. This is a steep increase compared to 2004 when only one in ten journalists only reached this salary (Said, 2004). My salary was typical for a junior journalist in a semi-private station in the past decade. In the government owned media institutions salaries were less than those in private institutions and depended on how many university degrees a person had. For instance, a friend of mine who graduated journalism school (ISIC) in 2008 was offered a starting salary of 8,000 MAD (909 USD) plus a quarterly and annual bonus. She also mentioned to me that a few years ago new legislation was introduced to grant salary increases to journalists working for state-owned radio and television. This meant, her current monthly salary (after working for the same institution for 14 years) went from 8,000 MAD to 11,700 MAD (from 909 USD to 1330 USD) plus bonuses. She also added that she could reach a salary of 17,500 MAD (1989 USD) a month, plus bonuses, towards the end of her career. The rise of the "new press" in the past two decades has also contributed to the improvement of journalists' financial situation. In an interview with a former Moroccan publisher in March 2021, he told me that his independent publication managed, starting in the

early 2000s, to pay their journalists fairly well to match the salaries given by their competitors in the print press, private radio, and the semi-private television, which exceeded 10,000 MAD (1135 USD). It's worth noting that in 2020 the average salary of a person with an undergraduate academic degree, working for any government institutions was 9,653 MAD (1,076 USD) (Maroc Diplomatique, 2020).

In terms of social status, the profession is respected by average Moroccan people. Journalists, as employees who are in charge of writing, researching, handling, and analyzing "newsworthy facts" of all sorts for publications and media organizations, are perceived as educated professionals who have extensive knowledge, and their opinion is highly trusted (Hidass, 2000). Even though weakly compensated compared to their colleagues working for international media organizations in different parts of the world, journalists in Morocco are held in high esteem. They are seen as professionals in an important field of work who are expected to be "educated and patriotic citizens" (Chama, 2017). Journalists see their own role as that of a "mobilizer, an educator, an informer" or some combination of all these attributes (Mellor, 2007). However, due to the lack of freedom of speech and their average salaries, contrary to the public's perception, many journalists also see themselves as practicing a job like any other. Indeed, sometimes they report feeling as though they are simply regular employees working in a news factory (Said, 2004).

Structuration

Structuration theory is a way to understand "social life" that focuses on decisions made by people in a certain social setting, without overlooking how social forces affect and determine these decisions (Mosco, 2009, p.186). Mosco (2009) continues:

> One of the most important characteristics of structuration theory is the prominence it gives to social change, seen here as ubiquitous process that describes how structures are produced and reproduced by human agents who act through the medium of these structures (p.186).

This theory can help us highlight the factors contributing to the constitution of people's surroundings in any kind of social framework. Giddens (1984), who sees structure as "rules and resources" (p.169) explained that "structuration theory is based on the proposition that structure is always both enabling and constraining, in virtue of the inherent relation between structure and agency (and agency and power)" (p.169).

The concept of power here is like a double-edge sword, as it is "enabling" and "constraining" at the same time (Giddens, 1984, p. 175). Thinking of this in terms of the research question asked in this thesis, the same reasons that can make someone's life difficult in a certain social setting and hold them back from reaching their goals, could be what pushes that person to break out of their environment and strive for a more fulfilling life.

Giddens (1984) also talks about the concept of "agency" or the ability to take action and accomplish goals (p. 9). People are "social actors" who are capable of taking action according to their position in the society, their cultural and economic status, or where they come from (Mosco, 2009, p.188). Structuration theory helps us focus on the fact that people who respect the rules in their environment and function within the structure, are at the same time preserving the structures around them, reinforcing their power (Scott Poole & McPhee, 2005, p.175). As Scott Poole and McPhee (2005) describe, structuration theory can help provide a better understanding of the "change and stability" of any organized establishment (p. 195).

The relevance of structuration theory to this thesis is significant. Many Moroccan journalists choose to obey the structures within which they exist, whereas others choose to break out of the walls of their jobs and change their lives. The use of structuration theory will be beneficial for shedding the light on the conditions under which Moroccan journalists work in their country, the agency they have or don't have, the social system under which they work, and it will enable us to acquire a better understanding of why they leave.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In-depth Interviewing

Qualitative methods are designed to explore and assess things that cannot be easily summarized numerically (Priest 2010, p. 6). It seemed appropriate to use a qualitative approach in this research, since this study was interested in gathering data about journalists' experiences, which can't be easily quantified. In this study in-depth interviewing was chosen as the most suitable way to gather qualitative data as it is a flexible approach that adapts to the interviewees in order to extract the needed information from them (Priest, 2010, p. 101). Qualitative interviews are known for bringing "the ordinarily private into view" and uncovering "lived experiences" (Weiss, 1995, p. 121). Kvale (2007) describes interviews as an exchange of views and ideas between two people about a specific subject (p. 5). However, the interviewer is the lead in this situation, they set a structure and a purpose for the interview and makes sure their goals are attained (Kvale, 2007, p. 7). Brinkmann (2013) describes interviewing as "very significant tool" that helps us grasp the core features of our "conversational world" (p. 4). However, Kvale (2007) draws a distinct line between interviewing and everyday conversation, writing that "[i]t is a professional interaction, which goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views as in everyday conversation and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge" (p. 7).

In this context, the role of the researcher is very important. The researcher is mostly interested in retrieving experiences in their organic context (Flick, 2018), but without making the

interviewee feel like they are under scrutiny (Kvale, 2007). Moreover, the questions asked during the interview should be delicate, precise, and "in line with the purpose of the interview" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 70). The interviewer should be a very good listener. However, Rapley (2004) suggests that sometimes the interviewer should offer guidance through ideas or opinions if it is appropriate (p. 23). Rapley (2004) argues that interviewing is never just "a conversation" and I agree. In this particular situation, I knew most of the journalists I interviewed, and the interviews were very friendly and open. Even with the journalists I didn't know – never met or worked with previously – I felt a trust that was instantly built due to shared experiences through the similar circumstances we both experienced or witnessed. All these factors made these interviews a significant moment of "knowledge production" (Rapley, 2004, p. 27) where the interviewer's role is to manage the conversation through "gently guiding" the interviewee in a profound conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 4).

The Interviews

The participants in this study were chosen based on two factors: First, they had to be a Moroccan journalist and second, they had to have left Morocco to live in a foreign country in three specific parts of the world: Europe, North America, and the Middle East. It is worth noting here that two of the interviewed journalists had just come back to live in Morocco recently, after a few years in the United States and the UAE. Even though they live in Morocco now, they both still work for the same organizations they worked with while in the US and the UAE.

The interviews were conducted through video call from February 2021 to April 2021. The participants received a consent form by email, and had to read and sign it before we started

the interviews. The consent form gives the participants the right to conceal their identity or disclose it, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time before this research is submitted.

None of the participants chose to be anonymous or decided to withdraw from the study.

The interviews lasted between thirty minutes to two and a half hours. The fact that I know most of the participants through journalism school or my previous work is Morocco, created a sort of intimacy between the researcher and the participant. It helped them open up more and helped me have a better understanding of what they went through while working in Morocco, and what really triggered their eagerness to leave the Kingdom.

All participants were asked the same questions with additional open-ended questions added by the researcher when more details were needed. As such I was able to follow various paths during the interviews. What I was interested in identifying was the motivation behind the decision to leave Morocco and the choice of the country of destination. In-depth interviewing allowed me to answer those questions because of the flexibility of the technique (Priest 2010, p. 101).

The Participants

Name	Job in Morocco	Current job & Country	Gender
Youness Ait Malek	Journalist at Medi1TV	Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT)- Turkey	Male
Ahmed Reda Benchemsi	Journalist and publisher at Telquel	Human Rights Watch- Moroccan office	Male
Salma Bouchafra	Journalist at Medi1tv	PhD student- Sweden	Female

Faiz Chafik	Journalist at Medi1tv	Journalist at MBN-Washington DC	Male
Aboubakr Jamai	Journalist/publisher at Le Journal Hebdomadaire	Dean of Business School and International Relations at IAU College-	Male
		France	
Fal Moumen	Journalist at Medi1TV	Journalist at Skynews Arabia- Abu Dhabi (UAE)	Male
Rim Najmi	Short-term contract journalist (print)	Journalist at DW-Germany	Female
Fatiha Ouali	Journalist at Medi1TV	Correspondent at Skynews Arabia-Moroccan office	Female
Siham Ouchtou	Asharq Al-Awsat	DW Germany	Female
Sarah Zaaimi	Journalist (television and print) UNDP	WWF Washington DC	Female

Youness Ait Malek: Ait Malek says he got himself in trouble with his supervisors in Medi1TV when he started suggesting new innovative ways to produce stories for the news. He was warned not to change the wording of anything that came from the palace, to keep things as-is. He says he was verbally harassed, intentionally ignored by his bosses, and frequently assigned boring tasks. Working as a journalist for Medi1TV was his first job after graduating journalism school in 2007. He left to join the BBC in London for a few years and then moved to work for AlArabi TV. Currently, he is a journalist in the Arabic department at TRT in Turkey and lives in Istanbul.

Ahmad Reda Benchemsi: Benchemsi's case is different from most of the other participants I interviewed, because he is a journalist and publisher. He came back from France after graduating university in the late nineties and worked as a journalist for a while before he decided to found *Telquel* in 2001. Bemchemsi is one of the leaders of the "free press" mentioned earlier in this thesis. A few years later, in the midst of waves of freedom restrictions against the independent press, he decided to leave Morocco for the United States. He was granted a research scholarship at Stanford University and then appointed director of communication in the MENA region for Human Rights Watch. He currently lives in Morocco.

Salma Bouchafra: Salma graduated journalism school (ISIC) in 2009 and joined Medi1tv shortly after. Her job was one of the most difficult at the station, as she was in charge of producing, writing, and presenting the morning news. In 2015, she joined BBC Africa and moved to Dakar in Senegal. A few years later she decided to pursue higher education in journalism in Denmark and the Netherlands. She is currently a media PhD student in Sweden.

Faiz Chafik: Born and raised in Morocco, Chafik graduated from ISIC and worked two jobs before he joined Medi1TV as a reporter. Due to the nature of his jobs, Chafik was always on the go, filming, interviewing, and covering events in different parts Morocco. After a few years with Medi1TV, he started applying for jobs abroad, and was offered two positions in the Middle East and the United States. In 2014, Chafik chose to move to Washington DC to join AlHurra network.

Aboubakr Jamaï: After attaining a high school diploma in mathematics, Jamaï turned to management and finance. He did his undergraduate studies in ISCAE (Institut supérieur de commerce et d'administration des enterprises) in Morocco. He later co-founded an investment bank when he was 25 years old. In 1997 he started a weekly publication called "Le Journal Hebdomadaire" and its sister newspaper "Assahifa". He also spent a year in the UK studying and obtained an MBA at the University of Oxford in 1998. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Jamaï and his publications faced a series of lawsuits and publication ban orders in the early

2000s. In 2007, when the restrictions were unbearable, Jamaï and his family left Morocco for the United States. While in the US, he earned a Master's degree in public administration from Harvard University, and taught at the University of San Diego. Jamaï now lives in France. He is Dean of the Business School and International Relations at the IAU College in Aix-en-Provence.

Fal Moumen: Originally from southern Morocco, Moumen moved to the capital to study in the only public journalism school in the Kingdom. He graduated from ISIC in 2013, and joined Medi1TV in 2015, after working for a while as a freelancer. Moumen had previously declined a few job offers abroad right after completing his graduate studies as he wanted to stay in Morocco. But in 2018, he started applying for jobs and was hired by Skynews Arabia in Abu Dhabi (UAE) as a documentary producer in 2019.

Rim Najmi: Born and raised in Morocco, Najmi is the daughter of two of the most prominent writers/poets in the country. Most of Najmi's work as a journalist in Morocco consisted of shortterm internships in various Moroccan media organizations during her student years. She did

a three-month internship in DW in Germany in 2009 and graduated journalism school in Rabat (ISIC) the summer of the same year. During her short stay in Germany, she fell in love with the country and planned to go back to Morocco, get her diploma in Journalism, and study German to apply to a German university to pursue higher education and eventually settle in Germany. She is now living in Bonn, working for DW, and married with two kids.

Fatiha Ouali: Ouali graduated Journalism school (ISIC) in the capital of Morocco in 2009 and shortly joined Medi1TV in the northern city of Tangier the same year. She worked there as a desk journalist producing daily stories for the news, then moved to work as a reporter for the same station, producing stories about socioeconomic issues for a weekly show. During her last two years in Medi1TV, she was in charge of producing/presenting short stories about daily issues in Moroccan society. In 2018, she started working for Skynews Arabia in Abu Dhabi (UAE) as a principal news presenter but was forced to move back to Morocco in 2020 for family reasons. To this day, she is still working for Skynews as their principal correspondent in Morocco.

Siham Ouchtou: During her fourth and last year in journalism school (ISIC) in Rabat, Ouchtou secured a three-month summer internship in DW (Germany). Her short stay in the country in 2012 made her more enthusiastic about living abroad and pursuing a career in journalism. Ouchtou went back to Morocco after completing her internship in DW, studied German, and applied for Universities in Germany. While studying in Berlin, she also worked as a freelancer for DW, and then joined the network full time when she finished her master's degree. Ouchtou still works for DW and lives in Berlin (Germany).

Sarah Zaaimi: Zaaimi left Morocco for Egypt in 2008 after completing her journalism studies in (ISIC), and her Master's in Diplomacy at Al Akhawayn University in Morocco. While in Egypt she worked for the European Union and lived in Cairo for five years. After Egypt she moved to London for a new academic adventure at the London School of Economics. After finishing her 2nd Masters in LSE (London School of Economics and Political Science), she worked for the BBC for three years before joining the Red Cross and moving to Iraq. After staying in Iraq for a year, Zaaimi was offered a job in the United States. She accepted the job offer and moved to Washington DC to work for AlHurra for a while. Sarah is still living in DC with her son and is currently working for the WWF.

Grounded Theory Approach and Thematic Analysis

According to Glaser and Anselm (1999) the qualitative method of grounded theory is the best at accessing data that covers the many facets of social life (p. 17). Grounded theory is a theory producing methodology that "does not test questions with a theory" (Pulla, 2014, p. 17). Rather, when using grounded theory, data collection and analysis are executed simultaneously with the goal of producing theory (Charmaz & Belgave, 2012; Cho & Lee, 2014, p. 7). That said, a researcher can still use a grounded theory approach without aiming to generate theory (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 30). In the data analysis, I am only borrowing from the analytical approach of grounded theory as this thesis will not be producing any new theory. This research began with a set of questions that it is trying to answer through data collection and analysis, and is using the theory of structuration to position the findings.

In its approach, the overall goal of a grounded theory analysis is to describe and explore a phenomenon (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 30). One of the reasons a grounded theory approach to data

analysis is an appropriate way to deal with the collected interview material is because of the focus on analysing and organizing the data into themes. The goal here is to come up with a list of categories and themes (Cho & Lee, 2014, p. 16), to extract new knowledge out of transcribed interviews (Creswell, 2014, p. 195). In a grounded theory approach, the researcher underlines what is emerging from the data through "preliminary" notes about the codes, and all ideas that cross their mind while collecting data and coding (Charmaz, 2014, p. 4). Moreover, coding is a very important step in which the researcher attributes labels to groups of data and those labels are mainly descriptive and meant to reveal what the gathered data holds (Charmaz, 2014, p. 4). A grounded theory approach is an efficient way to access and develop new knowledge, and also presents detailed description of people's experiences as well as facilitates the creation of meaning (Morse, Bowers, Charmaz, Clarke, Cobin, & Porr, 2021, p. 3). As Priest (2010) describes it: "The goal is to use consistent categories in a systematic way but at the same time allow them to emerge from the data, rather than imposing your preconceived ideas that may misrepresent what's really going on" (p. 170). In this qualitative data analysis, the goal is to obtain new knowledge about the studied subject that navigates outside the limits of the stories told by the participants (Bazeley, 2021, p. 7) by looking for larger themes that connect and run through the interviews.

It should be noted that a grounded theory analysis has much in common with a thematic analysis that seeks to label themes and concepts that are embedded in the data (Ezzy, 2002, p. 86). According to Braun and Clarke (2014) thematic analysis is used to help find "patterns" in the data.

TA (Thematic analysis) offers a toolkit for researchers who want to do robust and even sophisticated analysis of qualitative data, but yet focus and represent them in a way which is

readily accessible to those who aren't part of academic communities. (para 5) As Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, and Terry (2021) write:

> The purpose of TA (thematic analysis) is to identify patterns of meaning across a dataset that provide an answer to the research question being addressed. Patterns are identified through a rigorous process of data familiarization, data coding, and theme development, and revision. (para 10)

Considering the generous amount of data that was collected from the participants, and the difficulty of going through many transcribed interviews in order to make sense of them, thematic analysis is one way to explore the data in order to capture "the complexities of meaning" in a series of interviews (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012, p. 11). This type of analysis requires the researcher to be actively involved in interpreting the data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey 2012, p. 10). The researcher is supposed to get deeply involved in the analysis process and reflect on the themes generated from the data to provide a deep interpretation of the data in hand (Trainor & Bundon, 2020, p. 20). Braun and Clarke (2019) describe the researcher as a knowledge producer (p. 594) and agree that to achieve a high-quality analysis the researcher is supposed to thoughtfully look at the data with a deep sense of reflection (p. 594). Braun and Clarke (2020) describe thematic analysis as a process that allows the researcher to think critically about the data: "The analytic process involves immersion in the data, reading, reflecting, questioning, imagining, wondering, writing, retreating, returning" (p. 5).

In analyzing the data from the interviews, I followed the steps outlined by Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, and Terry (2018), as a way to formalize and set boundaries around the process of analysis. These steps of thematic analysis are compatible, and I would argue interchangeable, with the coding approach in a grounded theory analysis.

Steps of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, and Terry (2018) recommend six steps to guide the researcher in their analysis. The first step starts with what they call "familiarisation with the data" which involves a deep reflection while going through the collected data (p. 10). In this thesis, I did video call interviews with the participants and recorded all the interviews on my computer. This operation allowed me to go back to the recording and listen to what the participants said. I repeated this procedure several times, to the point when I deeply grasped the details of what the Moroccan journalists told me. As such, before I even started transcribing the interviews and identifying themes, the process of going through the recordings repeatedly helped me see "meaningful patterns" that started to emerge from the data (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, and Terry 2018, p. 12). As a result, when it came time to start coding and identifying themes, the process was not very complex, as I already had a good understanding of the data.

The second, third, and fourth steps of theme identifying, and processing include "generating initial themes, reviewing themes, and defining and revising themes" (p. 14), which involves a very comprehensive and helpful way to deal with the emerging themes. Although I followed these three steps during the analysis, it did not feel like it was three independent steps. Rather, it was an iterative process, where I was reviewing and refining my themes during the whole process of theme identification, consistently going back and forth in my data analysis as themes emerged and built on themselves.

After generating, reviewing, and naming the themes as suggested by Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, and Terry (2018) it was time for the fifth step of thematic analysis, "revising and defining themes," which includes assigning final names to the themes and making sure they truly

represented the gathered and analysed data (p. 14). The sixth and final step involved "producing the report" (p.14), which included a final and close examination of the themes. The results of this analysis are contained in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

Through the interviews with all ten participants I interviewed, I noticed that distinct patterns started to appear. Although they all had unique stories, when talking about the reasons why they left Morocco, some of the same motivations repeatedly emerged from the discussions. Personal freedom and quality of life was a theme that came up often. Many of the participants, especially women – who represent 50% of the interviewees – spoke about the social pressure they experienced while living in the Kingdom that vanished when they arrived in their country of destination. The female participants insisted on the importance of this factor that helped them regain confidence in themselves. They said that living a life in a country where they can wear whatever they want, be whomever they want, and live the life they enjoy instead of one inflicted on them as a result of years of ancient traditions, has been a turning point in their lives. Personal development and career advancement was also a primary motivation behind the decision to leave. Eight out of ten participants left the country to pursue a more professional career in journalism elsewhere, to acquire more experience and therefore evolve as journalists and as individuals We also talked about freedom of expression and to what extent it influenced the participants' decision to leave Morocco. In this regard, most of the participants said it was the lack of organization in the job, the undefined job descriptions, and the loose agendas of Moroccan media organizations that bothered them the most. They all recognized that Morocco is

not a leader in freedom of speech, but at the same time did not necessarily idealise the situation in the organizations they currently work for overseas either.

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We also discussed financial issues, and while the search for better salaries wasn't a motivating factor for all interviewees, most of the participants acknowledged that they are in a better financial situation now than when they started as journalists in Morocco. Two out of the ten participants in this study have a particular status compared to the other interviewees. Aboubakr Jamaï and Ahmad Reda Benchemsi were both journalists as well as publishers before they decided to leave Morocco. Their jobs involved editorial and administerial roles. They used to publish as journalists, but at the same time were in charge of the financial aspects of their organizations, which made them responsible when lawsuits came up. Their publications were dragged through the Moroccan courts for years and they were ordered to pay very excessive fines. Jamaï said that at one point making a living was impossible in this climate and leaving Morocco was the only option to be able to provide for his family.

In order to present a clearer vision of what these interviews revealed, I have organized the themes that emerged into four sections:

1. Personal freedom and quality of life
2. Personal development
3. Press freedom restrictions
4. Financial reasons

Personal Freedom and Quality of Life

Most of the participants in this study agreed with the widely propagated theory in Arab countries that there is less social pressure in foreign countries compared to the Arab world. Whether you live in Europe, North America, or even the UAE a person can enjoy a peaceful daily life compared to the social pressure that is felt in Morocco. The women who were interviewed in this research all agreed that as soon as they left Morocco, they felt like a burden was lifted off their shoulder. They could finally wear whatever they wanted, have a richer social life, go anywhere they wanted with friends without being bothered, travel alone without being harassed, and enjoy the little things in life like a quiet picnic in a park or reading a book in a coffeeshop. In Morocco these kinds of activities are not always safe for a woman. Even in the big cities of the Kingdom, a woman can be harassed while walking in the streets or even driving her car. A woman in Morocco should think carefully before engaging in *any* kind of daily activity, from going to the grocery store to having dinner with friends late at night. She is especially not supposed to be in the streets, coffeeshops, or restaurants late at night and if she is it will be interpreted as if she wants to be approached. Depending on the city and the neighborhood, this can range from verbal harassment to physical violence. According to a 2019 investigation conducted by the Moroccan Ministère de la solidarité du développement social de l'égalité et de la famille, 54.4% of women have experienced some kind of violence, but only 28.2% of these women talked about it to a person or an institution, and 6.6% sued their assaulter (Ollivier, 2020). Sexual harassment is the main act of violence experienced by Moroccan women, and it targets younger women in particular between 15-24 years old (22%) (MAP, 2020).

The female journalists I interviewed to are either single, married, or divorced single moms, and they all agreed they felt relief when they moved to a foreign country. They said that they felt freer, lighter, and no social pressure due to the lifestyle they chose to adopt. Salma Bouchafra who graduated journalism school in Morocco and worked as a journalist in the country for a few years before she left for Senegal, the UK, Qatar, then Sweden said:

> The small things in life that you are not allowed to experience freely in Morocco like walking quietly in the streets without being harassed, turns out to be the biggest frustration in your life as a woman. In Morocco, I felt socially and professionally imprisoned.

In the same context Sarah Zaaimi who also graduated journalism school in Morocco, and is currently living with her son in Washington DC added:

> My lifestyle is different than the one most people have in Morocco, especially as a divorced woman raising her child on her own… What I like about the US is that it is very big and diverse. It is like many small countries in one big county. If you do not like where you live you can easily change your lifestyle by moving to a different city or state as mobility is much easier. Meanwhile, in Morocco there is only one way to live your life, one narrative, and you have to embrace it to be able to live there.

Siham Ouchtou, who decided to move to Germany after visiting the city of Bonn for a summer internship, agreed that the social pressure in Morocco is exhausting for a young woman. As she said:

> In Germany, especially in Bonn, I did not have to care about what to wear in the street to avoid being harassed. Life was so simple and calm, and I felt in my element… In Morocco, any public space belongs to men, and any woman who dares to invade this

space should assume the consequences of being harassed either in the streets or in the workplace.

Rim Najmi, who also chose to Settle in Germany after leaving Morocco, said that leaving the Kingdom was one of the most rewarding decisions of her life. Her short summer stay in Germany in 2008 transformed her life and made her realize what she wants for herself in the future. Najmi said that life was definitely easier when she moved to Germany to pursue higher education and then work as a journalist.

> I had a very stable and comfortable life in Morocco, and I had never thought about leaving the country. Then, I went to Germany for a summer internship, and it made me realize the amount of social pressure women undergo in Morocco. Forget what you want, you always have to fit into the mold of modesty and decency your community creates for you.

Even the journalists who moved to the United Arab Emirates, an Arab and Muslim country, said that life is more relaxed compared to the rest of the Arab world. Fatiha Ouali worked in Morocco for almost a decade for the same TV station, before she decided it was time for her and her career to take a new turn. She moved with her family to Abu Dhabi where she was able to secure a much better job in SkyNews Arabia, than the one she had in Morocco. About the daily life in Abu Dhabi, Ouali said:

Life is much easier in the UAE, than it is in Morocco. There is a better quality of life and journalists are respected in the society. I loved the fact that the work week is between three and four days. It gave me the chance to enjoy my life and be more present at home. Ouali started working in SkyNews Arabia in 2018 as news presenter, but she had to go back to Morocco for

personal reasons in 2020. She currently lived in Morocco and is the main correspondent for SkyNews Arabia in the Kingdom.

The majority of the male journalists I talked to were not concerned much about the change in lifestyle in their countries of destination, because they did not experience as much, or the same type of social pressure, while living in Morocco. That said, some of them did mention that since moving to Europe or the United States, they have realized that daily life in Morocco was not that easy after all, and personal freedom can be violated by random people who think their unsolicited advice matters. For instance, neighbours can have strong opinions about the way you dress, the time you come home at night, or the people who visit you at home. There is a feeling of being judged and you can be made to feel uncomfortable about your life choices. Several of the male interviewees also talked about how predictable aspects of life in some western societies, can help a person have a satisfying existence. For instance, Youness Ait Malek said that it was very reassuring for him while living in the UK not to think about medical bills and Morocco's notorious healthcare system. As he said: "Because of the decline of public services in Morocco, especially the healthcare system, I wanted to live in a country where I could stop worrying about receiving the help I need when I am sick."

Aboubakr Jamaï said he did not have a stable family life in Morocco and was not always certain he would be paid at the end of the month. The stress of the job combined with the multiple lawsuits against his publication prevented him from living a peaceful life. Jamaï candidly said:

> On a personal level, leaving Morocco is the best thing that ever happened to me. While being a journalist in Morocco, I did not have a personal life and did not spend time with my wife and children…I reached a point where I did not have stability.

Although leaving Morocco took away the joy of practicing journalism from Jamaï, it gave him a calmer, less stressful life. As a publisher of a well-respected periodical in Morocco, stress and instability were some of the main aspects of his daily life.

Youness Ait Malek added that even men in Morocco can experience daily disappointments due to the Moroccan lifestyle that struggles to find a balance between religious beliefs and modernity.

> The Moroccan citizen is an oppressed individual. He is capable of so many things, has big dreams, and impressive ideas, but his hands are tied, and he cannot make a change due to the lack of resources. Because of social pressure, and the old traditional mindset of most communities, the average Moroccan is useless, and his dreams are constantly crushed.

For Chafik Faiz, who moved to Washington DC six years ago, personal freedom was one of the main reasons why he left Morocco. He declined a more financially advantageous job offer in a very well-known media organization in the Middle East to be able to settle in the US. In the US, liberties are respected. As a teenager growing up in Morocco, I felt a lack of personal freedom and an increasing social pressure. Getting an education helped me understand how to break free from these social constraints.

What Faiz meant by the lack of personal freedom and increasing social pressure, is that he always felt that he had to make choices that would please everyone around him. People in his community would have opinions about his career choices and what he planned to study after high school, and would do their best to influence his decision to favor ‘safer’ jobs such as working for the government. He also had to be careful about the company he kept. For example, if he was seen with a friend who smoked or drank, both of would automatically be flagged as

immoral or dishonest people. Faiz also revealed that in the beginning of his career as a journalist in Morocco he was depressed, because he felt that seeking the truth was not the main goal of the journalists around him. He felt powerless and his dreams as a young journalist were crushed. He felt that social constraints were holding him back from redirecting his career. He talked about how if you are a middle-class Moroccan, and you manage to find a job that pays well, it's unthinkable decide to quit your job and find another occupation that might bring you more satisfaction. Your family, friends, and colleagues will remind you that a good salary is supposed to be your main goal in life and finding joy in what you do is not a priority. He was looking forward to living in an environment in which he could evolve personally and professionally. Even though life in the United States of America is very demanding and there is no job security or social benefits, Faiz is still very satisfied with the decision to establish a life there, and Morocco is now no more than a holiday destination.

Personal Development

The one thing that all the participants in this study agreed on, is that leaving Morocco opened multiple doors towards personal development. All ten participants said they have progressed on a personal level, professionally, or financially since they left the Kingdom. They all expressed that either through higher education or professional experience, they have managed in a short period of time to accomplish more than what they achieved during their lives in Morocco.

In the six years since she left Morocco, Salma Bouchafra was able to work for BBC Senegal, BBC London, AJ+ Qatar, complete a master's degree in both Denmark and the Netherlands and start a PhD program in Sweden. Whereas she spent her last five years before leaving Morocco

working for the same media organization doing the same job every day, without any kind of encouragement or appreciation from her bosses.

> Leaving Morocco to seek personal advancement elsewhere was the best decision I have ever made. I really started living the life I have always wanted when I left Morocco, and I have accomplished so many things in the last six years. Even the difficulties I faced were life lessons. I am very happy that I learned to be more ambitious and adventurous. I learned to be even more independent, more tolerant, and believe more than ever in myself.

Another two female participants wanted to pursue higher education after journalism school and were accepted into German universities for master's degrees. They both agreed that the education system they joined in Germany helped them evolve and opened new horizons ahead. Rim Najmi said that when she moved to Germany and started her graduate studies, all the people she met at that time helped her in one way or another. Although studying in a new language she only had a year to master was challenging, the support she received helped her persevere and graduate. She argued that this experience in a German university helped her learn how to push her limits and gain more confidence in her abilities.

Even for those who left so much behind them when they moved from Morocco, leaving was nonetheless an opportunity to grow. Two of the participants stood out in this regard. Aboubakr Jamaï and Ahmad Reda Benchemsi, the two publishers, had to leave the country after multiple publication bans and being forced to pay unusually high fines. Leaving the country was not an easy decision for either of them, however they still managed to shine overseas. Benchemsi joined a research program in Stanford University after leaving Morocco, and Jamaï was accepted at Harvard University and earned a master's degree in public administration, which was only one

of many successes he accomplished after leaving Morocco in 2007. In my interview with Jamaï he said that it was painful for him to abandon managing *Le Journal Hébdomadaire*, which was his passion, but he is grateful for the opportunities that crossed his path afterwards. As he put it: "I am very grateful that even in my misfortune, I was still very lucky with all these opportunities". After graduating from Harvard, Jamaï went on to teach in the University of San Diego, then he worked a few consulting jobs with numerous international organizations, before putting down roots in France. Jamaï said:

> I was always trying to improve myself and managed to do so while in Morocco and after I left. I was very lucky to graduate from Harvard University, right after leaving Morocco, and I strategically aimed to acquire more knowledge through higher education, by being part of prestigious universities… Later on, I was able to collaborate with many international organizations, which was a very rewarding adventure, and it helped me find a new path when I left my country.

Most of the participants in this study claimed that the practice of journalism in Morocco lacks professionalism and vision, especially in radio and television. Because images are seen to have more impact than the printed word, more control and pressure are practiced over television journalists. Sarah Zaaïmi, who has worked in newsrooms in different countries, recalls that her experience working in Moroccan television was very shallow.

> We do not have proper television practices, we do not have proper newsrooms, and we do not have adequate planning… In television, all they care about is finding ways to break your ego as a journalist every day. They will ask you to do meaningless humiliating tasks to reach that goal… On the other end of the spectrum, you have the

print press where there is – especially in the late 90s and early 2000s – some room to practice professional journalism in some newspapers.

That said, Zaaïmi still believes Morocco has a lot to offer in terms of talent and ambitious people who despite all the difficulties, manage to succeed wherever they go. As she put it: "Morocco really has a lot to offer, otherwise we would not have so many talented journalists, who did not struggle finding jobs in the UK, the US, or any other place in the world."

Press Freedom Restrictions

All the participants in this study who worked as journalists in Morocco experienced some type of direct or indirect censorship in the workplace. They recalled that their bosses usually did not appreciate when journalists tried to be innovative and challenge traditional work methods, especially when it came to news related to the monarchy, territorial integrity, and Islam. About his personal experience Youness said:

> After a few years of being a journalist, I concluded that the media organization I worked for in Morocco was just a smaller version of the whole country. The Morocco I learned about in books is a fantasy, and the truth is what I experienced while working in Morocco. The TV station I worked for was just like any other company practicing commodification.

All ten participants interviewed in this study acknowledged that Morocco is not a leader in terms of liberty of expression and press freedom. It was interesting that they all talked about how media restrictions are not directly spelled out. All participants shared that while there were no clear instructions regarding sensitive topics, they just knew they were expected to understand which topics were taboo and they should stay away from. For many, it is a type of selfcensorship that builds up overtime during a journalist's career. In Morocco, the monarchy, the territorial

integrity related the Sahara (southern parts of Morocco), and Islam are considered red lines that cannot be crossed. The regime expects the media and population to have a unified narrative about these topics. In Moroccan public television – which constitutes all Moroccan TV stations in the country – the same type of discourse is broadcast. In the printed press, you can still find some independent publications that have tried to take a different tone, however they often pay the price in return.

Le Journal Hébdomadaire and *Telquel* are examples of the independent press that have tried to stand out. They were also good places for journalists to work in terms of salaries, offering some of the highest in the market. According to the former publisher of *Telquel,* the average salary of a journalist in his publication in the 2000s ranged between 12,000 and 15,000 MAD (1,340 and 1,675 USD), when at the time the minimum salary in Morocco was much lower: 1,660 MAD in 1999 and 2,032 MAD in 2009 (186 USD in 1999 and 227 USD in 2009) (Ouardirhi, 2019).

Aboubakr Jamaï, the publisher of *Le Journal Hébdomadaire,* said that the idea to leave Morocco first crossed his mind in the late 1990s when he went to do his MBA in the UK, but then the situation with the press started to shift positively during the last years of King Hassan II's reign. *Le Journal* started evolving and at that point Jamaï was eager to pursue this journalistic adventure. Many positive initiatives were established by the previous monarch, which gave hope to ambitious journalists such as Jamaï. For a long time after the current King succeeded his father's throne, it looked as if the new King was trying to be progressive and revolutionary, Jamaï asserted that many were more hopeful in the late 90s than they were during the first decade under the rule of the current King.

> *Le Journal* was the demystifying mirror of the political class. We were the sound of reason that reflected on the regime's misbehaviors… We were always voicing that the new era of Mohamed VI is not as bright as the new regime has always tried to portray it.

Originally specialized in finance, Jamaï started in the banking field and only began thinking about venturing in journalism when he noticed the lack of expertise in economic issues among Moroccan journalists: "In Morocco either you have journalists who are honest but do not understand how an economy works, or others who have the expertise but are corrupted." Jamaï says he came to the realization early in his career in finance that the more powerful in the Kingdom try to block promising and progressive financial reforms that will benefit the country as a whole, because it will harm their businesses. Faced with difficulties to work efficiently in the banking sector, Jamaï switched to journalism, and founded *Le Journal Hébdomadaire* in hopes that this new platform would shed light on economic issues. *Le Journal* came to be the financial system's watchdog.

> I think the regime did not like our tone and frequently tried to silence us due to our way of covering politics and economy in Morocco. We were convinced that real political change comes hand in hand with deep economic reform… In early 2000s, there was a wave of false modernity and a high level of incompetence, and *Le Journal* was a constant reminder of this truth.

Jamaï mentioned that *Le Journal* openly and repeatedly urged the King to stay away from the business world and focus on politics. This editorial choice of criticizing the mismanagement of politics and economy in Morocco meant that *Le Journal* was brought to court in multiple lawsuits which led to excessive fines that Jamaï was unable to pay. The first was two million MAD (223,350 USD) in 2001, after being sued by a high Moroccan official when *Le Journal*

published an investigation that revealed this official bought a private residence using public funds. The second time, Jamaï was ordered to pay three million MAD (334 300 USD) to a French consultant who, according to *Le Journal*, was paid by Morocco to produce a report in the Kingdom's favor regarding the Sahara conflict. Jamaï feels these sentences were pure judicial harassment, used to punish journalists and publications that try to play a watchdog role in the society.

> Many times, I was thinking about leaving but I did not, because I was hopeful. *Le Journal* was banned twice in 2000, but I only left when I was convicted in appeal court. They even went after my salary when I could not pay the fines. Then *Le Journal* was physically closed in 2010.

Another example of an independent publication that has struggled when they tried to deliver high quality journalism to Moroccan audiences is *Telquel*. In a conversation with its former director of publication, Ahmad Reda Benchemsi, he said that there was a misinterpretation of the political climate when the new King came to power in 1999. They thought the era of freedom of the press was starting in the early 2000s. At that point Benchemsi said that the independent press, including *Telquel* unleashed their creativity and began to write openly about the King, Islam, sexuality, etc. However, as they were to find out, this freedom was only temporary.

> The monarchy needed time to establish a new solid ruling system, and this operation took years. During these years, the regime did not care about what the press was saying because they had other priorities. Therefore, journalists interpreted this silence as a green light for the independent press to overcome the redlines drawn by the old regime. We

thought it was OK to adopt a critical tone when talking about the political transition, but we later understood that it was not appreciated.

According to Benchemsi, another type of censorship is to put pressure on the independent press through controlling advertisements. When an independent newspaper starts experiencing major ad withdrawals from big advertising companies, it means they are being punished for something they published. It is a way to reshape their editorial orientation by driving them into a precarious financial situation or even bankruptcy.

> In Morocco, a magazine or newspaper can be a very successful business model, if not faced with financial restrictions from the more powerful… We created fair competition in the market because of the quality of our publications, and it was a good environment for journalists to thrive.

Benchemsi ended up leaving Morocco in 2011 after years of financial pressure. He decided to go to the US after he reached the limit of his capabilities to practice objective, fair and balanced journalism, and sustain a living in the country.

Leaving Morocco for a country that upholds freedom of speech did not always guarantee that the job would be free of disappointment. Another surprising theme this study uncovered is that Arab journalists who leave their countries to work for international media organizations in Europe or the US, can sometimes have trouble parting from their traditions and beliefs, and embracing their new work environment. Seven out of the ten journalists I interviewed argued that working in a pan-Arab newsroom in a foreign country is very similar to working in an Arab country. The upper management might be European or American, but the dominance of Arab culture can make those newsrooms look just like those back home. As Siham Ouchtou, who now lives in Germany, described:

I was expecting that practicing journalism in the Arabic newsroom of German public television would be fulfilling. But the reality was different than my expectations. It is still much better than practicing journalism in Morocco, but some of the journalists I worked with are similar to those back home, which negatively affects the work environment. As Sarah Zaaïmi described, the coverage of Middle East news in the UK newsroom she was in was "shallow" compared to the issues she really wanted to get into.

> When I worked in a pan-Arab newsroom in the UK, the daily news was mostly about the Middle East, and the coverage was very shallow, just scratching the surface every day. I was a producer in a debate show, I felt a big improvement in the practice of journalism compared to Morocco, but it was still very boring.

Chafik Faiz said that even though she is working in the USA, self-censorship when it comes to sensitive issues still comes into play.

> Although I work for an American media institution, my Arab superiors will still advise me against criticizing some Gulf countries' leaders. There were no official instructions about this matter, but Arab journalists can sometimes unload the fears they brought from home on their colleagues, and practice self-censorship.

Overall, the majority of the participants I talked to in this study believe that absolute freedom of the press is almost obsolete in Morocco and only limited to a few platforms, independent newspapers or documentaries. However, the work environment, the clear job descriptions, and the resources provided by many media institutions in foreign countries, allowed them to find a balance, and still believe that journalism as a profession is meaningful and promising.

For those who left for countries where press freedom is equally, or even more restrictive, high salaries, a work environment with many resources, and a generally high quality of life have made the transition worthwhile. For instance, Youness Ait Malek, who currently works for Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) in Istanbul, says he is happy to be living in Turkey. He recognizes that Turkey is not a leader in press freedom but noted that he thinks every media organization has an agenda and he doesn't mind serving it as long as the work environment and the quality of life is good. He also mentioned that being respected and appreciated on the job is very important to him, and this has been his experience in Turkey. As he put it:

> I don't mind working for a media institution that has an agenda, because every media organization has one... I did work according to a clear agenda when I was in the BBC and the work environment was great. I am doing it again in Turkey as I am working for a government owned institution. All I ask for in the job is respect. I can't work for a media organization that does not respect my creativity and talents. I can't be dictated everything I say and every word I write. I need to feel heard and seen.

Financial Reasons

Half of the interviewees said they did not care or think about money when they decided to leave Morocco and it was not the main motivation that pushed them to move abroad. They were capable of providing for themselves in Morocco and had been making a good salary compared to what the job market offers in the Kingdom. Youness Ait Malek was one of the people who said that his motivation to leave Morocco was never financial: "I used to make a good living for a journalist in his twenties." Ait Malek was mostly looking for a place where he

could evolve professionally and be treated with respect as a journalist and a citizen. Chafik Faiz felt the same way as Ait Malek. Though the financial aspect of a job is important to him, he still opted for his current job in the US to guarantee a stable open-minded lifestyle. Faiz actually declined a higher salary job in Skynews Arabia, because it was located in an Arab country. Four out of five female journalists I interviewed, based their decision to leave on the lifestyle in the country of destination. They said they were looking to break out of the social pressure they felt in Morocco and did not care much about the money. That said, they still knew that with their education and professional experience, they could manage to maintain a good living anywhere they went.

However, the journalists who said they weren't motivated to leave because of money found that as soon as they started earning a significantly higher salary, plus incentives, in the countries they moved to, they realized that they were definitely underpaid in Morocco. They now admit that their current salaries have played an enormous role in improving the quality of their lives. They are convinced more than ever, that if they were to go back to Morocco it would not happen until retirement, or until they are financially independent.

Two journalists did say the financial aspect of the job offers they received were major contributing factors that led to their decision to leave Morocco. Both these journalists work for Skynews Arabia located in Abu Dhabi (UAE), and agreed that this institution is known for providing its journalists with all the resources they need to comfortably perform their jobs, including a competitive salary, to attract journalists from different countries

The journalists who left Morocco primarily because of the deterioration of press freedom also said that finances played a role in their decision-making process. As mentioned earlier, Aboubakr Jamaï, the publisher of *Le Journal Hébdomadaire*, was repeatedly fined beyond his

financial means by Moroccan courts. He said that before leaving, he had to think about a destination where he could maintain a stable life and be able to provide financially for his family. As he said: “I left Morocco because I was not able to make a living anymore and provide for my family… I was almost 40, married with two children, and no financial assets.

Overall, the financial situation of Moroccan journalists is undeniably better than many professions in the Kingdom. A journalist can definitely earn a much higher salary than a doctor or an engineer who works for the government. But although the financial situation for journalists has improved in the past two decades, it is still not enough for some of them to feel economically safe. As most of the participants in this study mentioned, their salaries were very good for junior journalists just starting their careers. However, these salaries were only feasible because they were single when they started working with no spouse or children to support.

As a journalist myself who worked in a Moroccan media organization for six years before leaving for Canada, my salary was similar to most of the participants in this research and I was always struggling financially. If you only want to eat, pay rent, and afford your bills, you can live on a journalist’s salary. But if you want to be able to afford extra things, such as travel abroad, practicing hobbies, or expanding your knowledge through taking courses, the salary is not enough to achieve these goals.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis has provided a closer look at the reasons why journalists leave Morocco. While it's well known that many Moroccan journalists have left their country looking for opportunities elsewhere, a 'brain drain' of educated professionals who manage to find competitive jobs in other countries, the reasons behind their decisions to leave had been unexplored. This study has aimed to fill the existing knowledge gap around this topic. The last chapter of this thesis returns to the research question asked in the introduction: Why do Moroccan journalists leave their country? It summarizes the findings, adds analysis, and positions these findings within the context of structuration theory.

My curious nature has always pushed me to initiate conversations with my Moroccan colleagues about our situation as journalists and what we hope to achieve. It was through these conversations that I began to think seriously about why journalists leave the country and decided to pursue this research. As a Moroccan journalist myself, I left my country in 2015. My reasons to leave were personal, but I did not realize I had so many until I started enjoying my life as a student and a journalist on the other side of the Atlantic. I did not realize I was missing so many facets of life until I started experiencing them. Morocco is a Muslim and Arab country in which many people still believe old traditions should dictate the way you live your life; when it comes to topics like religion or politics, there is only one acceptable narrative.

Throughout this thesis, I have acknowledged that I brought my personal background into these interviews, and I believe that because I was so open about my reasons for leaving and the life I lead now, that the people I spoke to were willing to open up about their reasons for leaving and how their old lives compare to their current situation. In this research, I was able to interview ten Moroccan journalists (five women and five men) who moved to Europe, North America, and

the Middle East over the course of the past two decades. The participants in this research were invited to talk about their personal experience leaving Morocco and asked about their motivation to leave. The interviews were conducted through video calls and in-depth interviewing was used to facilitate the interaction between the researcher and the participants. As I knew most of the interviewees from journalism school in Morocco or my previous journalism job in Kingdom, the conversations were very candid.

Many Moroccan journalists leave, bound for countries like the United Kingdom, France, Germany, or the United States, known to be more respectful of press freedom than Morocco. However, some do move to countries that are known to be very restrictive when it comes to the media, such as the UAE and Turkey. This thesis focussed on both cases. Throughout this research, as I tried to figure out the process they went through to favor a specific destination among many choices, I had speculated that because the Kingdom is not a leader in freedom of speech, journalists would primarily want to leave in order to practice journalism freely. But even though there is some truth to this hypothesis, it turns out there are various reasons that can push Moroccan journalists to leave, and freedom of speech is not on the top of the list. I had also wondered if journalists leave for the same reasons, but the reasons differed from one journalist to another based on their background, ambitions, and the job they had while in Morocco. In the end, four major themes arose: 1) personal freedom and quality of life, 2) personal development, 3) press freedom restrictions, and 4) financial reasons.

The first major findings of this research distinctly revealed that Moroccan female journalists endure more pressure than male journalists as women in a male dominated society, as working women, and as journalists who usually work unstable schedules and have to collaborates with teams mostly constituted of men. Moroccan female journalists – and Moroccan

women in general – are not free to live an independent life without being harassed or judged. They cannot wear whatever they want in the streets or in the workplace. They risk being verbally harassed or looked at in a degrading or derogatory way, reducing them to a sex symbol. In Moroccan society that claims modernity but still thinks according to old traditions, women are told that they are better off getting married when young, starting a family, and raising their children. Even female journalists are advised likewise, told that it is a male dominated profession, and it is not the right work environment for a woman. Moroccan society still believes that female journalists are more needed at home, than in the newsroom. I recall that some of my former, highly educated, male colleagues in Morocco said they wanted to have a stay-at-home wife, whose only job is to take care of her husband and children. They thought it would be too much for a household to have both partners with stressful unstable journalism jobs.

One of the female participants in this study brilliantly drew the conclusion that men in Morocco think that most public spaces belong to them, and that women should assume the consequences of invading this male dominated space. If a woman is verbally or even physically intimidated, it is always her fault either because of the way she dresses or her attitude.

All this to say, the female participants I interviewed were missing an important component of a fulfilling life in Morocco – personal freedom. As soon as they set foot in a European or North American country, they felt freer, lighter, and more in charge of their own choices. Four out of the five women I interviewed moved to a European or North American country, and they all immediately felt in their element. They started enjoying the little things that can easily boost one's quality of daily life, like riding a bike, reading a book in a coffee shop, or picnicking in a park, without being seen as aliens. Now that they are living the life they have always wanted, they do not see themselves as ever choosing to go back as this would risk

compromising their personal freedom. Returning to Morocco would be an enormous step back for them, and they repeatedly stressed that this feeling of personal freedom has made their lives much easier and calmer.

I also found that some of the male participants in this study complained that the structure of Moroccan society can be constraining for them as well. These journalists had also left Morocco to settle in European countries or the United States because of the relaxed tolerant lifestyle and the quality of public services, such as healthcare.

Overall, however, it was striking to hear from the majority of female participants that women in Morocco need to fit into the mold that old traditions and society have built for them. Whether educated or not, single, married or divorced, their lives are challenging, and they feel constantly watched and judged, by family, co-workers, or neighbours, etc. Interestingly, many women said they did not feel this way when they were in the situation itself. During our conversations most confessed that they did not realize they were deprived of many freedoms until they traveled abroad, discovered new countries, and caught a glimpse of what they were missing. To put this finding into the context of structuration theory, in Morocco they were trapped in a restrictive social environment and were forced to obey its norms, until they decided to break out of this lifestyle and explore new ones. These norms and structures are usually formed by visible and invisible factors, such as male authority or old customs and traditions. As Giddens (1984) explains:

> In many contexts of social life there occur processes of selective 'information filtering' whereby strategically placed actors seek reflexively to regulate the overall conditions of system reproduction either to keep things as they are or to change them (p.27-28).

It is worth noting here that according to the two people I interviewed who had moved to the United Arab Emirates, although it is an Arab and Muslim country, they believe that it is an example of a country that due to its multiculturalism, is more respectful of its people's personal freedom, especially foreigners that constitute approximately 89% of the population (Global Media Insight, 2021). The female journalist who worked in Abu Dhabi, along with another male journalist I interviewed said that the UAE, is different than other Arab countries because of the modern lifestyle that is dominant in the county and the nature of the population that is widely constituted of expatriates. This factor is one explanation for the fact that even though the UAE is not a leader in freedom of expression – The UAE is ranked 131 on the 2021 press freedom index while Morocco is ranked 136 (Reporters Without Borders, 2021) – it is still an attractive destination for Moroccan journalists. Similarly, the journalist who I spoke to who now works in Turkey – ranked 156 on the press freedom index – said that the quality of life in the country and the respectful work environment he's experienced has made the move worthwhile.

Overwhelmingly all the people I interviewed talked about how there are more opportunities for personal development abroad. When I was a journalist in Morocco, for years I kept trying to go back to school, while still working full time. My attempts were met with discouragement from some of my friends and colleagues, in addition to restrictive rules from my employer and the Moroccan schools I applied to. Most of my friends told me that I should be grateful to have a job and that we had studied enough throughout our lives, my employer refused to accommodate my work schedule so that I could also study, and the schools I contacted in Morocco required full time in-class presence as a condition to accept my application. This negative experience was completely wiped away when I moved to Canada and was able to easily study and work at the same time, and I realized that in this new country my own growth

depended on how much effort I was willing to put into a self-development project. In a similar manner, the participants in this study revealed that they all managed to accomplish some kind of personal or professional achievements when they left Morocco. Whether it was a higher degree from prestigious European and American Universities, a more meaningful job, a better financial situation, or the ability to practice journalism more freely, they all managed to reach some sort of personal satisfaction. Throughout the interviews, I noticed that moving forward, evolving, and accomplishing more career goals repeatedly emerged from the conversations and it even sometimes dominated the discussions. These themes surfaced in almost all the exchanges I had. Either through higher education or a better job, they were all looking for an environment in which they could thrive. This study revealed that, in one way or another, all the participants managed to change their path, explore new horizons, expand their knowledge, find more meaningful jobs, and improve their personal and professional situations. On their life changing journeys, all participants faced difficulties and challenges. Some disappointment certainly crossed their paths, but they found that overcoming them was easier in the places they chose to settle in than in Morocco. Stepping out of their comfort zone was challenging, but the disappointments were minor and were turned into life lessons.

Participants spoke about how in Morocco there is not much job flexibility and switching professions is not an easy task. If you are a journalist, it is expected that you will remain a journalist. Even if you are willing to switch careers it is a society that is not very supportive or forgiving if you try to break out of the mold set for you. Looking at this situation within the theory of structuration, Moroccans are constrained by social structures, whether it be family expectations, societal norms, or job requirements. It is a situation best described by Giddens

(1984) as “both constraining and enabling” (p. 25). While movement is possible within these structures, they are also constraining. These constraints can either push a person to either accept their current status or do their best to exert agency and change it. All the participants in this study stressed that leaving their country made them realize that the grass can actually be greener beyond the Atlantic or the Mediterranean Sea when you are educated, ambitious, and adventurous. Even those journalists who left after they were dragged into Moroccan courts because of their opinions and their publications were banned multiple times, still managed to find some comfort in their decision to bow out and leave Morocco when life became unbearable in the Kingdom.

While freedom of the press did not emerge as a leading reason why journalists left Morocco, it still emerged as a theme. One interesting finding came from journalists who are now working in Arabic branches of foreign newsrooms. Some of the journalists I interviewed who left for Europe and the United States were expecting the job to be better on so many levels, and while it was in many ways, they still faced disappointment when they were hired to work in the Arab sections of newsrooms. They all agreed that coming from an Arab country to work in an Arabic newsroom with Arab journalists felt like they had never left Morocco. The problem, they said, is that when some Arab journalists leave their countries to join foreign media institutions, they bring their fears with them to the new workplace. They unconsciously unload their concerns on their colleagues and urge them to practice self-censorship, even when there are no explicit instructions from upper management to do so. For example, even in an American or European government owned media organization, an Arab journalist might still ask their coworkers to be careful when talking about what is seen as a sensitive issue back home, such as criticizing the government. It is interesting that while journalists might be seen as trying to break free from

authoritarian structures by leaving the country, some only physically leave and continue to be part of the same social/political structures that exist back home, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

Other than these examples, the majority of the journalists I talked to believed that they started experiencing a healthy job environment when they joined media organizations outside of Morocco, like the BBC for instance. They claimed that it was due to the presence of explicit rules and straightforward job descriptions. Some of them also mentioned the important role played by the human resources departments in these media institutions, that implemented labor laws and were not biased. Whereas in Morocco, a human recourses department in a media organization – if it even exists – is used by management as a tool to spy on the employees and discipline them.

While the search for better salaries wasn't a motivating factor for most participants, they agreed that the higher salaries they found elsewhere contributed to their quality of life. The participants talked about how the low salaries that journalists earn in Morocco, relative to the amount of work they do, made them feel underappreciated in their own country, while in other places in the world they are much more financially stable. The participants in this study who have worked for media institutions in the UAE, agreed that the salary and the work conditions were major factors that pushed them to accept offers from SkyNews Arabia and Aljazeera. They also agreed that objective, fair, and balanced reporting, and freedom of expression is not necessarily respected in these institutions, but the unlimited financial resources at their disposal can make it a very compelling work environment. They added, that of all the media organizations that hire Arab journalists, the networks in the gulf countries like UAE and Qatar often offer the highest salaries on the market.

Before beginning this research, I remember speaking to many of my former colleagues who were brilliant, and yet when asked about the reason they still had the same job after many years, their argument was that they were trying to just be grateful for what they had, because there was no guarantee they could do better. The lack of job alternatives in the country is a trap that many journalists convince themselves they cannot escape. Resilience and acceptance are how many of those journalists try to face this reality. While understandable, this passive attitude also reinforces a structure that is causing the deterioration of journalism in the country. When thinking about the state of journalism in Morocco, I'm reminded of this quote from Bourdieu (1998):

> Journalism is one of the areas where you find the greatest number of people who are anxious, dissatisfied, rebellious, or cynically resigned, where very often (especially, obviously for those on the bottom rung of the ladder) you find anger, revulsion, or discouragement about work that is experienced as or proclaimed to be "not like other jobs" (p.38)

Among the community of Moroccan journalists – especially those working in radio and television – I would often hear that the obvious choice for a journalist who wants to improve their situation, is to go work for an international media organization abroad. It was described with this metaphor: the journalist is a soccer player in the national league and needs to join the Italian or Spanish league for a few years to compete internationally, build a legacy, and guarantee financial stability. There is this idea that working for a multicultural international institution will help journalists reach their career goals and materialize their dreams. Again, while this is understandable, what I would caution when applying for jobs aboard is that each person should make a choice that best suits their financial, lifestyle, or career needs. For

instance, the dream of many Arab journalist is to work for Aljazeera, and I was one of them until I had the chance to spend a few weeks in its headquarters in Qatar. I then realized firsthand, that working for Aljazeera in not always about competence and an excellent work ethic, as many Arab journalists think. It is also about having connections and being flexible enough to accommodate and work with the agenda of those who finance Aljazeera.

That said, many journalists believe in the importance of staying in Morocco. Maybe some of them are still hopeful the economic and political climate could positively shift in the future. Others have personal reasons, such as not wanting to leave extended family behind. Of all the journalists I interviewed, only two of them had come back to live in Morocco. They still worked for the same organizations they had worked for abroad, which according to their interviews can be an interesting experience for someone who did not burn bridges with Morocco and still has family there. They had the chance to be closer to family while keeping the same job, and they seized to the opportunity.

I think journalism in Morocco is facing a crisis. Many journalists are scared to be objective, fair, and balanced, and those who actually try to be, face job precarity and even prison sometimes. A number of Moroccan journalists and human rights advocates are currently in jail because of their work. If newspapers continue to be drained of their talents or pushed to bankruptcy through judicial harassment, and if we do not have real independent radio and TV stations, then journalism as a craft will become obsolete in the near future. We will only have manufactured journalism, which is nothing more than public relations or propaganda.

In journalism school they told us that to be a journalist is to be a seeker of the truth. But when we graduated and started practicing journalism we realized as young graduates that the financial aspect of the job is also important. It plays a key role in creating a healthy environment

for a journalist to thrive. Based on my own experience and on what the participants in this study said, the income of most journalists in Morocco can impact their work and even lead them to set aside their beliefs. A journalist trying to make it until their next paycheck, does not usually regard freedom of speech or the work conditions as a top priority when they are concerned about paying the bills. The majority of the journalists in Morocco are like any other middle-class employees in any other company, trying to be prudent to keep their job and to do this they often have to self-censor. Again, I am reminded of the words of Bourdieu who wrote: "we are witnessing the growth of a vast journalistic subproletariat, forced into a kind of self-censorship by an increasingly precarious job situation" (1998, p. 6)

While I do understand this reality, my hope is that Moroccan journalists continue their quest for self-improvement and maintain ongoing conversations advocating for human rights and press freedom reforms. When they face closed doors though, perhaps it is time to inflate their lifejackets and jump to safety. Other countries can give Moroccan journalists who leave the chance to thrive. The journalists I interviewed have accomplished a great deal after leaving Morocco. Whether it is a better life, an enhanced financial situation, a more meaningful job, or better resources and freedom to practice their craft, each and every journalist I interviewed managed to establish a better life in the countries they chose to settle in. Most of them agree that the suffocating structure of Moroccan society, self-censorship, and financial precarity can easily drive a journalist to dismiss the values of the job and normalize subjectivity.

Limitations

Although this study revealed valuable knowledge about the brain drain phenomenon related to Moroccan journalists who left their country, it is still a narrow research project. Ten

Moroccan journalists were interviewed in the course of this study and what they revealed does not represent all Moroccan journalists' position regarding this subject. What this research does, is provide a fresh perspective of a limited number of Moroccan journalists who left their country, and who agreed to share their own experience. Therefore, it is a starting point in discussing an issue that has not been academically studied before.

This study opens the door to more detailed studies in the future, that could include a larger number of Moroccan journalists who left the Kingdom. There is also a possibility to use this study as a canvas, to design deeper studies that focus separately on each finding that this research was able to expose. For instance, this research includes interviews with many categories of journalists: women journalists, TV journalists, printed press journalists, and editors…etc. Future research could, for instance, focus on establishing a comparison between journalists who work for a media organization, and journalists who supervise and manage a media institution, and why they leave. In this research I was able to talk to two journalists/publishers of wellrespected publications in Morocco, and they both provided different perspectives from those brought by the other journalists who used to work for Moroccan media institutions and did not have editorial or financial responsibilities within the organizations.

Moreover, the female Moroccan journalists interviewed who left the country presented different arguments from the ones male journalists shared. This could also be a starting point for broader research that could focus on the challenges that face women in a male dominated profession and society.

Another perspective that I think would be beneficial would be to bring a psychological perspective into a wider research project. It would be interesting to focus on the psychological

challenges that journalists face leaving their homeland in order to build a new life in a different country and how the choice of destination can change a person's life for better or worse.

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Appendix: interview questions

This is a sample of questions that can be adapted to every participant.

Personal questions:

1- How old are you?

2- Did you live in Morocco since birth?

3- Did you like your life while you were living in Morocco?

4- Did you ever imagine living elsewhere when you were living in Morocco?

5- Do you have family members living in Morocco?

Motivation questions:

1- Why did you decide to leave Morocco?

2- Did you base your decision to leave Morocco on geographic or career reasons? a. why?

3- Are you satisfied with your decision to leave Morocco?

4- Are you planning to settle there forever (the country where the participant lives)? move to another country? Or return to Morocco? a. Why?

5- Do you visit Morocco frequently?
   a. Why?

Career questions:

1- Why did you become a journalist?

2- When you left Morocco, were you planning to pursue a career in journalism or explore other professions?
   a. Why did you decide to pursue a career in journalism? Or
   b. Why did you decide to explore other professions?

3- Why did you choose to work for (the media organization the participant currently works for) or any other employer?

4- Do you like your current job?
   a. Why or why not?

5- How can you describe your current work conditions compared to the ones you experienced when you were working in Morocco?

6- Can you compare your current work conditions to the ones when you were a journalist in Morocco?