The Public Sphere and Satellite Television in North Africa

The Public Sphere and Satellite Television in North Africa:

Gender, Identity, Critique

By

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For Clara
For Zina

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The idea of writing this book came to me in the mid-1980s, from seeing the cables that came off large parabolic dishes tucked onto the balconies of buildings, stretched across courtyards and streets and passed, like vines, from one building to another, one house to another. These new intruders, which spread out across the space, didn't seem to bother anyone (or hardly); on the contrary, they received constant attention, because to have access to the end of one was to be among the fortunate few. Today, almost everyone has their own cable and their own "parabola", turned in the direction of their choice. Between those two moments many things and events have passed, and this book bears the traces. With the onset of the Arab Spring it seems that we have passed from one era to another. I say "it seems", because studies in communications generally tend to follow the latest occurrences, without asking about the ways that the arrival of a new form of media can profoundly affect a society. This book hopes to contribute to reflection on the capacity of media to generate major changes in society, even if these are not immediately visible and are sometimes attributed to other causes than the media. It also proposes a deep analysis of the relationships between the "public" and satellite television in a period that preceded the Tunisian Revolution, and helps interrogate the presentism that seriously affects media studies in the Arab world, and the frenetic need "to kill or ignore the past", even the recent one, just to suit "the flavor of the day"—that is, just to be read and understood. This says much about our state of intellectual dependence. This study belongs to slow science, which takes its time in understanding the emergence of things and their developments. And it is also a book whose thesis argues for *the existence of a television public in non-democratic societies*, a public that certainly is fluid and uncertain, but which allows us to understand how the political functions and appears thanks to ordinary gestures, the everyday and "little nothings". In short, as is said so often these days, "politics from below". By linking analysis to theory and to description, this book shows that "small objects", like watching satellite television, help to show what is at work in the social fabric. That said, contemporary televisual practices are worth analyzing, to show new dynamics which are anchored in national or transnational television production in North Africa, but which continue to involve satellite

television. Finally, this work contributes to the study of media in North African societies, which are admittedly lacking in comparison to other regions of the world, including the Middle East.

I would not have been able to access my many fields of research without the "intermediaries" who allowed me to meet the participants in this research. From Montréal, Naima Bendris arranged my first contacts in Morocco. In the field, the Bendris family, especially Khadija Bendris, welcomed me as one of their own and let me have a home from which I could extend my fieldwork and move to other sites in Morocco. I particularly want to thank the families who welcomed me in Tangiers, the Mohammeds and I'timads. François Navez-Bouchanine gave my work a new impetus by arranging my entry to worlds I would otherwise have had no access to. From Quebec, Nourredine Mnasri introduced me to his Tunisian friends, and especially to Aberrahmane Ben Marbrouk, who opened his home to me and took me into his confidence. Hamida Guidich was my guide in the southern suburb of Tunis and, with a smile, helped me discover its "hidden transcripts". My knowledge of the northern suburb is owed to Faten and her family. In Algeria, I owe a particular debt to Hafida Hadj-Moussa and Omar Mahfouf for their unreserved support. Hafida, an extraordinary advocate, more than once put me back on track when I was going in circles. I cannot name all the people who made connections to others, nor all the participants in this work, which lasted more than a decade. But I have not forgotten them. Without them and their trust, this work would not have been possible. My thanks.

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Finally, my gratitude goes to Geneviève Laurier and Victor Tsai. They know why. Clara has accompanied me with her light and luminous presence; she made the writing of this book an experience to cherish.

"European thought is at once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations, and provincializing Europe becomes the task of exploring how this thought—which is now everybody's heritage and which affects us all—may be renewed from and for the margins. But, of course, the margins are as plural and diverse as the centres."

(Dipesh Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 16)

CHAPTER ONE

SATELLITE TELEVISION:
THE POWER OF SMALL THINGS

Why and how do North Africans watch satellite television? These questions motivated me to write this book. What people do with satellite television, the ways they react to it, what they say about it, and the choices it prompts them to make all expose key issues in their societies. An individual's history with television extends beyond the person who is telling it, to intertwine with other realities which intersect and feed into each other. Watching and speaking about television are actions that take place in relation to other spaces apart from the one where the television is located, and to other representations than the ones with which they are usually associated. These actions and representations are not limited to the concrete space in which they are inscribed, although as they unfold they remain connected to that space. This book examines satellite television in the Maghreb, its uses, and the relations it weaves between sites that include the home, the neighbourhood, the café, the workplace, etc., and looks at the type of public sphere from which it emanates. We will not be able to avoid consideration of the public sphere if we want to understand how television in general, and satellite television in particular, resonates with the issues at play in society.

It seemed a necessary first step to put the public sphere into question, not only to frame the empirical object, satellite television, but also to discuss commonly used concepts and to consider their applicability to the societies under study. I do not intend to provide a review of the genealogy of the concept of the public sphere, but in order to understand how public spheres function in the Maghreb it seemed important to avoid certain theoretical dead-ends. The concept of the public sphere is too complex to be used without taking precautions, and it needs to be reconsidered in relation to local realities. As Bernard Lahire writes: "Because, despite a certain plasticity that allows it to support certain analogical transfers, a sociological concept is weighed down by all the sociohistorical concepts that it has helped to clarify, and has no meaning outside of its renewed

relation to new contexts, on the one hand sociological work cannot be seen simply as the intuitive application of sociological rationales, elaborated by others, to realities that have not been scientifically constructed; and on the other hand, one cannot hope to advance knowledge of the social world by theorizing from theories without passing through empirical inquiry" (2007, p. 77, tr.). This reflection helps point us towards the comprehensive conception of the public that I defend here, one that is freed from normative hierarchies and takes better account of its dynamics. This conception gives my approach its meaning and direction.

Since the Arab revolutions of 2011, new media have provoked interest, drawing attention to an Arab world finally awaking to itself. Driven by the contingency of events, these media have taken front stage to such a degree that they give the impression of having been spontaneously self-created. Does the expression "Web revolution" have explicative value, or has it rather served to eclipse the people who took to the streets demanding "the fall of the regime"? The fieldwork this research is based on ended in 2009, but connections can clearly be made to 2011, since in this research media are already a central dimension in the understanding of Arab societies.

A considerable number of studies since 2011 have focused on new media, including the Web and its many applications (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), but they have excluded satellite television, which scarcely two decades earlier was seen as a part of the range of new media. Why limit this study to 2009? One reason is data saturation, and the continued presence and influence of satellite television in the audiovisual landscape of the Maghreb. Its centrality during the 1990s and 2000s and the role it played in shifting mentalities, particularly political mentalities, were decisive and hard to ignore. This work documents and problematizes this media's nature and influence. Although the fieldwork ended in 2009, the argument this book makes for the central place of satellite television in these societies is still relevant—although today this centrality must be combined with a new but anticipated element, the articulation of satellite television with other new media including mobile telephones and the Internet, a dynamic already noticed during the 2008 protests in Tunisia and especially in Morocco (Hadj-Moussa, 2013).

The enthusiastic linking of revolutionary dynamics to the role played by cyberspace has often simplified complex realities, although some recent studies have happily addressed this failing. The example of Tunisia, where the Arab Spring began, helps to clarify the impact of the arrival of the Internet and its effect on satellite television, which became the poor relative of a highly visible cyberspace often operated from outside the country. Romain Lecomte (2013), in examining data on the level of

Internet penetration in Tunisia (36.8% in 2010 and 41.4% in 2012) published in a report by the International Union of Telecommunications, criticizes the methodology used and its consequences for the way reality is interpreted. The figures he provides show that, compared to the other countries of the Maghreb, Tunisian "publinets" (cybercafés) "saw only weak development" between 1987 and 2011 (ibid., 31). He pertinently notes that the Tunisian Centre-West, the region where the popular uprising began, had a connection rate of 7.7%, compared to 26.3% in Greater Tunis. Unequal access to the Internet distinguishes "rich Arab countries" in comparison to the others, but it also affects the different regions of a single country. None of the three countries of the Maghreb has addressed this inequality.[1] Still more important for Lecomte, data describing the most-used media during the revolution shows the problems that an overeager interpretation of a "Revolution 2.0" can lead to. In fact, a study on the use of different media during the Arab Spring in urban areas, generally the most connected, shows that 56% of Tunisians identified Facebook and Twitter as the social media sites they used the most, while 82% named satellite television as the media they most often used to inform themselves (ibid., 32). The case of Egypt, where new media seem to have had a more important impact, shows the same thing. There too, according to a study of 1,000 protesters in Tahrir Square, "less than half (42%) reported having used Facebook as a tool for protest […] Roughly nine interview subjects out of ten (92%) reported that they referred to satellite television and eight out of ten (82%) used telephones" (ibid., 32). All of this indicates that, during the key moments of the protests, the Internet did not surpass the telephone, and even less so satellite television. Satellite television continues to be a "social fact", with all this entails. If its interactions with other media during the revolution need to be documented, so should the ways it functions in everyday life, in the calmness of the ordinary. It is precisely there that we will be able to glimpse the effects of change and newness that are so celebrated by methodological spontaneism.

This book does not argue for the effects of media on the public sphere, since they are constitutive of it, but it rather considers the articulations they construct throughout the social fabric, the possibilities they open and the limits that they pose. The intensity of discussion on this subject reflects the hopes inspired by the notion of the public sphere; it gives glimpses of the possibility of democratizing, from below, regimes largely closed to

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1   Unequal access is notably identifiable by level of education, knowledge of dominant languages used on the Web (English in particular), and the poor quality of connection and speeds in semi-urban and rural regions.

contestation, and also of making visible unanticipated practices, newly revealed by contact with the rest of the world. Attempting to grasp the meaning of this requires an often implicit retracing of the processes of democratization and ways of constituting living together. The enthusiasm and hope born of the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt and the popular protests in many other Arab countries make the public sphere, more than ever, centrally in play.

There is, of course, no public sphere without a public. There has been hardly any research on this subject in the Arab world, not even for the Middle Eastern countries that have increasingly interested researchers since the arrival of Arab satellite television. Marc Lynch's *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today* (2006), the most comprehensive study to date, takes a classic approach to the public, privileging media professionals and the actions of political movements such as the Islamists. Lynch's view of the "New Arab Public" is more macro-political than sociological or anthropological. Nonetheless, he is one of the first in Media Studies to have revisited and criticized the notion of the "Arab street", generally understood as a compact and directionless mass.

There are numerous studies of Arab satellite television, mostly in English, but in them the idea of Arab publics remains largely unthought or is based on personal knowledge gleaned here and there in travels and encounters.[2] In many of these works the Maghreb is only a fleeting shadow; this is not only because the major Arab television networks and channels were created in the Gulf countries, Egypt, or Lebanon, but also because this focus fits more easily with political or political-economy approaches in which the "Arab" world is limited to the countries of the Middle East.

The proliferation of media on offer, satellite television included, has given rise to substantial and rich academic production on political economy and on ideological debates (Rinnawi, 2006; Seib, 2007; Lahlali, 2001; Sakr, 2001, 2007; Kraidy and Khalil, 2009; Mellor et al., 2011), but has produced only a few scattered articles on reception and publics in Middle Eastern Arab countries. The marginality of such studies is hard to understand, since important studies have been written on older media, like Lila Abu-Lughod's ethnographic studies of Egyptian television (2005, 1997, 1995), Christa Salamandra's work on Syrian television dramas

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2   Certainly, there are studies on "audiences", but these are quantitative analyses based on generic studies and show general tendencies. For Morocco, see Harras (2010); for an overall view, see the summaries by Hussain Amin and Leo Gher (2008) and Marwan Kraidy (2008).

(2005, 2008), Charles Hirschkind's (2001, 2006) on audiocassettes and the Da'wa movement, and others dealing with popular culture, such as Walter Armbrust's unclassifiable work on mass culture in Egypt (1996, 2000).[3] Once again, in this field Egypt is overrepresented.

The challenges of fieldwork in the region can be paralyzing and discouraging for those who want to engage in new research directions, but it seems to me that the greatest difficulty comes from the way that media and everyday things are seen in the Maghreb: as belonging to the ordinary, considered negligible because undefinable, and caught up in the evanescent and the intangible.

Framing: Temporal Coordinates

This study is marked by the brief but powerfully dense temporality of events that unfold so quickly that they are hard to follow. This is true in two senses. First, the arrival of satellite television was a striking event, and its full significance has not yet been grasped, particularly if we think of the possibilities it has given populations to escape the control exercised by governments over audiovisual media. The emergent and not always identifiable ways that populations and governments come to be implicitly opposed have left indelible traces in North Africans' ways of thinking. This suggests that we can speak of a before and an after with regards to satellite television. The mutation in ways of thinking is imperceptible when viewed only from the moment, but when historicized and reframed in the context of the Maghreb of the "years of lead" (1970s, 1980s, 1990s) the depth of the changes that have occurred become apparent.

One could say that the Maghreb, by coming into contact with satellite television, came out of itself, but in a way that had neither a single direction nor a single form. This movement took place in connection with other phenomena, and was fed by contact with other objects and realities, including the circulation of goods and objects, technologies, money, languages and persons (immigration and tourism), a greater availability of books, and the still recent memory of the colonial period. Satellite television is only one part of a whole, and belongs to a long history marked by exchanges between the south and north shores of the Mediterranean, and by national television, which has served and continues to serve, to some extent, as a relay.[4] In the first phases of satellite

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3   I should also mention the work of Franck Mermier (2005) on Arab publishing, and of Yves Gonzales Tijano (1998) on Islamist pamphlets.

4   "Satellite television" here refers to international and foreign television (which might be national, as for example the French channel Antenne 2), broadcast via

television in the mid-1980s, the televisual imaginary and many of its existential references were essentially Western, specifically French, although they faced some competition from Egyptian television series broadcast on national television.

At the beginning of the 1980s Tunisia and Morocco began efforts to open their territory to other television stations. In 1989, Tunisia started renting broadcasting time to the French station Antenne 2, and gave it authorization for over-the-air broadcasting (Chouikha, 2006; Dahmen, 2001; Ferjani, 2002). In 1988, Morocco created a privately-held company (Hidass, 2006) and an encrypted channel.[5] But the major shift came with the massive, though as we will see uneven, adoption of satellite television. For the first time, North Africans had access to news coming directly from the north shores of the Mediterranean, primarily France, and some of them, Tunisians and Algerians especially, heard or discovered the leaders of the national political opposition for the first time (Ba, 1996; Dahmen, 2001). With the launch of Pan-Arab channels in the mid-1990s,[6] the Mediterranean East made a dramatic entry into the Maghrebi imaginary, more powerfully, in my opinion, than earlier media like the Voice of the Arabs, which was broadcast from Egypt during Nasser's presidency, or the Egyptian TV series that had been the Middle East's most noticeable presence in the Maghreb.

Second, this study is marked by the time in which its research took place. I began my first round of fieldwork in Algeria in December 1994. I wanted to understand how Algerians watched and made use of satellite television, at that time a novelty to which both the Islamists, the armed groups especially, and the State, which was struggling to dominate the public sphere, had quickly become opposed. In an article I wrote (Hadj-Moussa, 1996), I argued that Algerians who chose satellite television were not only resisting the Islamist groups that threatened them, but were also developing and sharpening their critical sense towards the political authorities and their handling of public affairs, a critical sense that was widely shared and not based solely on individual perceptions. This interpretation might seem perplexing, not only because the predominance of terror at the time left little place for coordinated reactions, but also

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satellite to the three countries of the Maghreb. It also refers to international satellite television created by the countries of the Maghreb to target their respective diasporas, and to the first private television stations in the Maghreb.

5   I will not be discussing the development of this channel (for that, see Asloun, 1995).

6   The first Arab satellite channel was launched in Egypt on December 2, 1990 (Hugh, 2004, p. 212).

because television publics are ambiguous, generally characterized as scattered and uncertain, private and not public. I observed that criticism came from everywhere, carried by the aspiration for a more just, free, and democratic society that Algerians, just before the civil war, had experienced in their own "Spring" (1988-1992). The interviews I conducted brought to light major axes that structured the society, including gender relations and relations to language. Exposing these axes, the first of which refers to the foundations of society and the second to identity, brought important alterations to the dominant way the civil war was understood, in which a division between Arabic-speaking and French-speaking cohorts was made one of the variables explaining the Algerian fratricide. It also brought to light unconscious and shared understandings of the place of women in Algerian society and the public sphere. In sum, it revealed the centrality of gender relations.

My subsequent work showed that the Algerian experience, despite its exceptional character (civil war, for example), was not unique. Beginning in the early 2000s my field was expanded to include Morocco and Tunisia, where I made several visits between 2000 and 2009.[7] My initial intention was to compare the three countries, but during the interviews I realized quickly that, although jurisdiction in the audiovisual field was specific to each country (I will return to this), the drive to find spaces of free expression and links of affiliation and recognition played out in almost the same way in each of the three countries.

In my initial comparative plan the capitals of each of the countries were to be the principal sites of observation, but this starting point, based on a certain realism and on practical concerns, was abandoned in favour of following the possibilities opened up by chance encounters. Comparison cannot be imposed at all costs, and a focus on the capitals was not justified by the reality of the terrain. This flexibility made me more sensitive to opportunities offered by the field (Maxwell, 2005, pp. 69-70). Beginning in my first round of fieldwork I interviewed people who lived outside the capital.[8] This change proved very fruitful. The people I met in Tangiers

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7　I did fieldwork in Tunisia in 2000-2001, 2005, and 2006; in Morocco in 2003, 2007, and 2009; and in Algeria in 1994-1995, 1996, 1999, 2005, 2006, and 2007. My visits lasted between four and nine weeks. Fieldwork was continued in a less systematic manner after 2009, and I have remained attentive throughout the drafting of this book.

8　These first off-site interviews were in fact initially imposed on me by the constraints of the field. I would end up agreeing to meet with a cousin from Sétif, a niece from Gafsa, or an aunt from Meknès. But this "constraint" quickly proved to be a stunning opening for my research.

had valuable things to say about Spanish television, since long before the arrival of satellite television the Tangerois had been oriented more towards Spain than France. Tunisians living in cities of the interior close to the Algerian border told me that, before satellite television, they had been tuning in to Algerian television, which they felt was better than their own since it informed them of international events, including the first Gulf War, where they found its coverage to be excellent. And it was through interviewing people originally from Gafsa, or living in Thala, in Central-West Tunisia, that I was best able to trace the trajectory of the parabolic antenna—or, to use its popular name, the parabola—and to understand how it gradually invaded Tunisia despite the blocks imposed by the regime.[9] Including cities at a distance from political and administrative centres made the phenomenon of the parabola even more striking. Moroccans obtained their first parabolas thanks to informal markets, among other things, and the city of Nador (in northeast Morocco) is famous for its open market of electronic products, ranging from the newest to the cheapest, as a research participant who sold merchandise in Rabat and Casablanca told me.[10]

Comparison became not a prerequisite but a way of noticing details particular to each case, which then brought out differences, often minor but still significant, between the three countries, such as the approximate time it took for satellite television to enter the homes of each country, or the individual and collective uses that were made of the parabola, and which social classes adopted it. This information is essential to understanding the nature of the televisual public, and to avoiding the common practice of treating it as homogenous. Throughout the Maghreb the upper middle classes were the first to access satellite television,[11] but its entrance took very different forms. In Morocco, where television was

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9 The Thalois and Kasserinois or the inhabitants of Kef (Central-West Tunisia) are part of the same demographic group as the Algerians living in Central-East Algeria, and share a long tradition of contacts and alliances. They get most of their goods from Algeria, and contraband markets are very active in the region. Even after the parabola was legalized, it was still mainly sold on the black market.

10 To the traditional black market circuits between Europe and North Africa was added a regional Maghrebi circuit whose starting point was the Tunisian subsidiary of Canal Plus decoders (Dahmen, *op. cit.*, p. 308). Starting in 1999, a market for rechargeable chip cards replaced decoders. During the last decade downloading access codes from the Internet to create chip cards has overtaken other ways of accessing pay TV.

11 This refers not to the individuals who introduced it, but to the social strata that adopted and made lasting use of it.

encrypted and therefore pay-access, it was adopted by collective mini-networks in the second half of the 1980s. As a professor at the University of Rabat who had lived through this period told me, several renters in their small building shared pay television access, which was accessible only to the most well-off social groups. Collective use of pay television was thus limited, and ceased after several years due to economic difficulties.

In Tunisia, satellite television reached the popular classes in the late 1990s and early 2000s. As in Morocco, the well-off classes benefited for the first few years, until access was democratized. Larbi Chouikha's interviews conducted in 1994 (Chouikha, 1995) concerned these classes, and included high-level officials and the traditional urban bourgeoisie who had earlier owned "large traditional dwellings in the heart of the Medina" (110). Collective or shared parabolas existed in both Tunisia and Morocco, but were limited either to small groups of subscribers or to persons who had first acquired administrative authorization. In Tunisia the authorities explicitly encouraged requests for authorization to use collective antennas (Dahmen, op. cit.), but without great success.

In contrast, collective parabolas were much more popular in Algeria. First used by members of the nomenklatura (1985-1989) (Hadj-Moussa, 1996), they quickly crossed class borders and spread throughout almost all of Algeria, including the cities of the South where some municipalities exercised oversight of television channels (for example, el Guerrara in the M'zab). These mini-networks were produced from below in the sense that voluntary collectives made up of residents of the same neighbourhood or city, ranging from 150 to 400 families, shared the same parabolic antenna. *Stricto sensu* the use of collective parabolas was illegal but, unlike Tunisia and Morocco, in Algeria popular strata quickly gained access to satellite television in a sort of unprecedented effervescence, even if the state did not renounce its total control over the audiovisual and the production of news related to the civil war (Molinès, 2002). This "laissez-faire, laissez-passer" attitude had several causes (Mostefaoui, 1998; 1995, pp. 59-60). On the one hand, the riots of October 1988 had shaken from below the sociological imaginary that had predominated for nearly 30 years, fractured the "pensée unique",[12] and freed up many voices. On the other hand, the State could not risk alienating the population, heavily affected by the civil war, by direct intervention. Later on, this laissez-faire would develop into free passes for some. Finally, as I noted, satellite television became a piece in the merciless struggle for control of the public sphere

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12 The expression "pensée unique"—single or unique thinking—is used to refer to the Algerian state's attempt to impose a single identity and interpretation of history on the whole of the population.

between the state and the Islamists, the first presenting itself as the defender of freedom (of viewing) and democracy, and the second as defenders of authentic Algerian values.

Around the end of the 1990s, the parabola's popularity and spread became irreversible in all three countries. This democratization corresponds to the arrival of Arab satellite channels on the televisual market. Until the late 1990s the most-watched channels were Western, but from then on Arab channels began to compete with them. Overlap between the data from my fieldwork and other studies on the subject shows that the former are no longer the public's central interest. Beyond the accessibility allowed by technological advances, political events including the wars in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) encouraged the spread and presence of Arab television. Several research participants, especially in Tunisia and Morocco, chose to get a parabola or to access digital TV during the second Gulf War (2003) so that they could, in their words, get news "from all sources". The parabola's growing popularity also corresponded to the rise of the Al Jazeera network. If Arab channels remained in the shadow of other international channels for several years, the 2000s saw them become omnipresent in homes, cafés, and other public spaces in the Maghreb.

Diffusion and Appropriation; Law and "Raison d'État"

Parallel to the history of satellite television's penetration into each of the three countries of the Maghreb and the role played by legislation or by its absence, there are two inseparable types of temporality at work. One has to do with the diffusion of satellite television and the other with its appropriation. The first corresponds to the period during which the satellite channels were launched, and involves the political motivations and geostrategic positioning of the groups of states that created them, and also the technological advances that made them increasingly accessible. This temporality has received substantial documentation and debate (Sakr, 2001; Gher and Amin, 2000; Guaaybess, 2004; Rinnawi, *op. cit.*, 2006). The second has to do with these channels' reception, their selection by the public and their effects on their target populations. The reception of satellite television has a very brief history, even if the flourishing economy of satellite media and the many books and articles on the Arab world (usually shorn of the Maghreb), mainly in English, can give the impression that it has been much longer. It has lasted hardly 20 years, as satellite television became popular in the Maghreb in the late 1990s or early 2000s. Financial issues—the cost of an antenna or subscription—are only one variable in the decision to adopt the parabola, and a nuanced approach

needs to consider other variables, including the control exercised by political regimes and its equally important evasion by the population.

When satellite television first appeared in Tunisia, in order to obtain a parabola people had to submit a request to the authorities and pay an annual fee (Chouikha, 2006, p. 557); but this rule was officially annulled in 2006, as the use of illegal means had become generalized.[13]

Such concessions, however, have not changed national audiovisual policies. In each of the three countries, the audiovisual domain has remained the regime's guarded preserve. Algeria might seem like the most radical of the three, since for years it did not allow private television in its territory,[14] but in fact neither Tunisia nor Morocco has truly opened up to the private sector despite overtures in their audiovisual policies. Tunisia's overtures to Canal Horizon in 1991 and the over-the-air broadcasting of programmes from Antenne 2 in national territory since 1989 were both sowed with obstacles: the first faced the vagaries of a market that proved to be more limited than anticipated (Dahmen, *op. cit.*), while the second faced a harsh reality when the political regime decided to ban A2 from broadcasting in Tunisia after the publication of a book that criticized it, *Notre ami Ben Ali* by Nicolas Beau and Jean-Pierre Turquoi (1999).[15] Agreements were made with other channels, for instance with the Arab channels ART and Orbit, owned by Saudi private capital, but these were

13 In 2001, roughly half of the antennas installed in Tunisia came from the black market (Dahmen, *op. cit.*, 305, sourced from ART). It is very difficult to find statistics on audience size in the Maghreb. See the IPSOS studies carried out in the region:
http://www.ipsos.com/mediact/sites/ipsos.com.mediact/files/MENA_Audience Measurement.pdf . My thanks to Aziz Douai of the University of Toronto for bringing this to my attention.

14 As of the first revision of this text (April 7, 2013), the Algerian authorities had only recently given authorization to "tolerated" private channels to operate openly on Algerian territory for a provisional period of one year (*cf. Liberté*, "Echourouk TV, Ennahar TV et El-Dazaïria autorisées à ouvrir un bureau à Alger. Télé: toute une gymnastique pour exister") <http://www.liberte-algerie.com/actualite/tele-toute-une-gymnastique-pour-exister-echourouk-tv-ennahar-tv-et-el-djazairia-autorisees-a-ouvrir-un-bureau-a-alger-197567> (consulted April 7 2013). In April 2014, we can note that some of these stations are highly problematic. During the 2014 presidential elections, they showed an extreme dependence on the regime, serving as platforms for the candidate-president and using outdated propaganda techniques against the members of the emerging Barakat movement, opposed to the Algerian president's fourth mandate.

15 In 1994 the Tunisian government had already forbidden "the import and sale of parabolic antennas" (Dahmen, *op. cit.*, p. 178).

not formally or officially announced; one reason for this silence was the open secret that these channels' owners were involved in substantial urban development projects on the Lake Tunis shoreline.

Morocco, for its part, is considered the first Arab African country to have launched a private station, 2M International, in 1988. This encrypted pay-access station brought together important Moroccan capital and a range of foreign companies: Bouygues (France), Vidéotron (Canada), TF1 and Canal Horizon (Asloun, 1995, p. 74). But 2M did not have the success that was expected, and in 1994 the Moroccan state took 80% control of it.[16] 2M presented the regime's liberal face. It rearranged a few things, changing the drapes on Channel 1's national news, with its unending reports on the activities of the king and government, by introducing news flashes and public affairs programmes. It mostly covered international events, but "maintained great discretion on Morocco" and remained profoundly subservient to the Makhzen, according to Ahmed Hidass (2006, p. 542).[17] Morocco was also the first country in the Maghreb to rebroadcast the satellite channel Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC) on the airwaves (Asloun, 1995; Mostefaoui, 1995); it was nicknamed "ma bonne est content" (Asloun, *op. cit.*, p. 258)—literally, "my maid is happy," using the same initial letters MBC—because it broadcast tele-series that were popular with women who stayed at home. To access foreign channels, Moroccans first used couscous steamers (Sabry, 2010, p. 96; Poindexter, 1991) and plastic bags (Asloun, *op. cit.*, p. 117), makeshift receivers that were quickly replaced by parabolic antennas used mainly for individual reception.[18]

Until 1992, as in Tunisia, all methods of reception required previous authorization and were strictly reserved for tourist complexes and hotels

16 In 2006, a similar experiment was attempted with Med1 Sat, a station affiliated with the first private radio station, Medi Radio 1. Medi Radio 1 was an initiative of King Hassan II (Zaid, *op. cit.*, p. 131). It soon changed its name and in 2008 became 100% Moroccan owned. In 2010 it changed again, becoming private. In 2006 it was the only private television station accredited by the High Authority for the Audiovisual [Haute autorité de l'audiovisuelle].

17 The Makhzen refers to the politico-administrative leadership of Morocco under the king's control.

18 Tarik Sabry (2010) tells a picturesque story of a young man from *Derb* Mellah in Casablanca who one day noticed that the parabolic dish attached to the roof of the imposing Hyatt Regency Hotel was shaped like a couscous steamer. He put the idea into practice and it rapidly spread throughout the kingdom. Algerians living on the coast also used couscous steamers to capture French channels beginning in the 1970s (interviews in Algeria), long before the arrival of satellite channels.

(Asloun, *op. cit.*, p. 302). A law in 1992 (decree no. 2-91-338) relaxed these restrictions by merely requiring users of individual or collective antennas to declare them to the relevant authorities. To protect state television and 2M, a fee of 1,000 and 5,000 dirhams respectively was imposed on owners of individual or collective antennas. Popular discontent and massive recourse to the black market led to this fee being withdrawn in 1994.

De-monopolization was *de jure* the most advanced in Algeria, but the National Broadcasting Enterprise (ENTD) did not need to worry about other broadcasters: the private sector was merely a decoration displayed to protect national unity.

In all three countries, audiovisual regulations seemed at first sight to be liberal openings on the part of the regimes. Analysis shows, however, that in each case the field remained under the influence of the political authorities. According to Mostefaoui, the first relevant organization in Tunisia, the High Council for Information [Conseil supérieur de l'information], counted only one journalist among its members when it was created in 1974.[19] The High Council for Communication [Conseil supérieur de la communication] which replaced it in 1989 "remained an empty shell" (1995, *op. cit.*, p. 45). In Algeria, the High Council for Information, created in 1989, had provisions that left individuals only feeble autonomy, and the start of the state of emergency in 1992 put an end to its potentially interesting actions. The National Council for the Audiovisual [Conseil national de l'audiovisuel], created in 1991, was to elaborate directives for audiovisual creation and development in collaboration with the Prime Minister, but it also proved to be without substance (ibid., p. 48), and became a moralizing and censuring body. In Morocco, where the state historically had the upper hand over the audiovisual and left the press to the opposition (Zaid, 2009, p. 12), King Hassan II's death marked a shift in audiovisual policies. On October 31, 2004, the Higher Council of Audiovisual Communication (HACA) was created.[20] This independent body had many responsibilities, which included awarding broadcasting licenses, ensuring pricing systems were respected, and defending freedom of expression. It was welcomed as an excellent initiative, the first of its kind in the Arab world; but it did not escape criticism, which pointed out its serious lack of transparency and raised questions around the way its members were nominated and the King's overwhelming influence (Hidass, 2006, pp. 545ff). Bouziane Zaid (2009), whose opinion on the subject is more nuanced than Hidass', notes that liberalization and the awarding of

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19 For a full account, see Mohamed Hamdane (2005).

20 For a "condensed" version of the royal Dahirs [decrees] related to the creation of HACA, see http://www.haca.ma/index.jsp

broadcasting rights were already in place before the new laws, supporting Mostefaoui's idea of a *de facto* monopolization of the audiovisual in the Maghreb. Zaid gives the example of Radio Sawa, the "Voice of America" in Arabic, financed by the American Congress, which received "an exceptional authorization to broadcast in Morocco" in 2003. Zaid notes that "at the time no juridical frame existed for such an authorization" (*op. cit.*, p. 103)—and it received this from HACA only in 2006 (!). Zaid, who is interested in showing how HACA and the new laws influenced the functioning of 2M and el Oula ("The First", in Arabic), believed that the latter functioned according to rules already in place when Radio Television Morocco (RTM) was operating.[21] In reality, HACA in no way facilitated internal initiatives, since it maintained the same taboos: it is, in effect, forbidden to criticize Islam, the monarchy, or territorial integrity (for example in the case of the Western Sahara).

Revenge of the "Parabolés"

These political fine-tunings and foreclosed openings did not keep Maghrebis from accessing satellite channels. By the early 2000s, generalized individual use of parabolic antennas was an unavoidable fact. They became fixed, rather than rotating, and were turned almost exclusively in one direction: towards the satellites of Arab stations. The modes of reception also changed progressively: analog gave way to digital and to an array of choices between hundreds of available channels. Throughout the short history of the parabola, the pirating of pay channels has been a generalized practice, and access cards with pay channel codes were available for minuscule prices in neighbourhood shops across the Maghreb. We could say, in fact, that the history of satellite television is also a history of piracy. Following the first couscous steamer installed in the shadow of the satellite antenna on the Hyatt Hotel in Casablanca, the little cards with access codes for pay channels from across the Mediterranean slipped through the sophisticated code set up by broadcasters who wanted at all costs to enforce a policy of making consumers pay. Once again, like the parabolas (two-thirds of which, in 1999, had been bought on the black market - Dahmen, *op. cit.*, p. 309), access cards for French channels from the TPS and Canal Satellite bundles were sold on the street[22]—Arab television was for the most part free-access—while the market in demodulators, a key piece in legal and black market commerce,

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21 2M and the National Society of Radio and Television Broadcasting, of which el Oula is a part, are public channels.

22 See Ghita Lamrani (2006).

flourished.[23]

Throughout the history of satellite television and its reception, the political economy of piracy has brought different local and global actors onto the scene and has created situations of precarious political and social equilibrium. Economically speaking, the piracy of station access codes has links to a whole series of trade networks, which include the most legal of commercial practices. If we look only at the management of access codes for pay television and the profits these create, there is a win-win situation for all the "partners". But the economic is only one aspect of the parabola. In authoritarian contexts, where people need to develop strategies just to get by, the social and political effects on the public sphere are more important. These effects, because they are uncontrollable, pose a problem for the political authorities, who find themselves unable to censor unfavourable discourse or to limit the snowball effects of international events that inspire emulation within their national borders. Once satellite television had been massively adopted, blocking piracy might prove to have fatal long-term effects for the regimes in place. Grasping the stakes in play, they have practiced a policy of laissez-faire.

This brief description of legal measures in the audiovisual field shows the degree to which television remains a sensitive issue for political regimes in the Maghreb, despite the economic openings that have been imposed on them. It also shows how, thanks to the "contradictions of the system", whole populations have been able to win lasting victories and secure various gains. From this perspective, piracy is significant because it has allowed whole populations to access satellite television programmes. It has allowed them to make gains similar to those of the poor in Cairo and Tehran studied by Asef Bayat (2010, p. 211). These gains show that in authoritarian contexts it is important to understand how populations formulate demands and obtain rights, and by what means. I will return at greater length to the theoretical aspects of this in the second chapter.

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23 Anissa Mekhaldi (2004) notes that, at the start of 2002, Algeria imported more than \$122 million worth of demodulators (the device that deciphers the cards) and other telecommunication and satellite reception devices. Lamrani (*op. cit.*, 2006) quotes a young "craquer" (someone specialized in the traffic of decoding sites on the Internet) in the Ghallef neighbourhood of Casablanca, who was not overly worried about French companies' efforts to encrypt their programmes. According to him, these were aimed at the French and other Europeans. He was not the only one who thought this way. Companies preferred to let their codes slip out, since it helped them unload the stocks of unsold demodulators in their own countries. In the Internet age, the "dream box" (a device that combines Internet access and satellite channels) is now the object of desire, but it remains highly restricted to urban centers and the middle classes.

The Grace of the Parabolas

The arrival of satellite television in general, and Arab stations in particular, took place roughly in parallel to the political regimes' overtures to pluralism and liberalism. Though there were significant variations from one country to another—a multiparty system in Morocco, the integration of the so-called moderate wing of Islamism in Algeria, its outlawing in Tunisia—in each case state television remained closed to the opposition, with the exception of Algeria between 1989 and 1991 where representatives of the opposition were given air time. With little or no access to national television, the Algerian Islamist opposition was the first to turn to satellite television, first to the French channels TF1 and TV5, and then later to Al Jazeera.[24] The different elements of the Tunisian opposition created their own stations abroad—el Moustakilla, el Hiwar, and el Zitouna—and broadcast critical programmes into Tunisia (Chouikha, 2006, p. 557).

One of the products of the opening of political regimes was an independent press.[25] To deal properly with this subject would require examining the situation prior to the pluralist opening, when the press was either muzzled or at the service of the regimes.[26] The new press had to fight to seize new spaces of expression. To describe these societies, as certain authors do, strictly in terms of censorship, with freedom of expression opposed to it as a panacea (Lahlahi 2011, pp. 40-41; Fandy 2007) is reductive, and ignores the complexity and ambiguity of authoritarian public spaces in the Maghreb. While Ben Ali's Tunisia maintained an unmasked authoritarianism and continued to strangle its press, in Morocco and Algeria the independent press succeeded, despite structural weaknesses, in developing a faithful readership that has never demonized it. Because it seems to keep its distance from the political authorities, its readers see it as more reliable than national television or radio, though they might hope for more professionalism. The independent

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24 The Islamists were very active in the field, to such an extent that their organizations (even if unacknowledged) were the first to arrive and bring assistance after the earthquake in central Algeria in 2003 (interviews). In 2002 the Justice and Development Party (Morocco) included "more than 200 organizations" in its network (Vermeren, 2004, p. 340).

25 The printed press in Morocco had been pluralist and partisan since independence. An independent press was given authorization in the mid-1990s (el Ayadi *et. al.*, 2006).

26 Monthly and weekly magazines, even economic journals, were sometimes highly critical. The weekly *Algérie actualités* adopted a critical line under president Boumedienne (1965-1978), using and abusing the revolutionary language of the time.

press in Algeria does little investigative journalism and does not always cite its sources, but it takes a critical stance and has a substantial ability to uncover things. The press in Morocco, even if it has in general interiorized the three untouchables—the monarchy, Islam, and the Western Sahara—produces reports and investigations worthy of respect. For their part, Tunisians in the 2000s were able to overcome obstacles and to produce and share, with the help of the Internet and despite limited reach, information about their country that was otherwise suppressed. In all three countries, several people read the same newspaper, which increases the number of readers (Rebah, 2002; Coten, 2011).[27]

Beyond this, the independent press in Algeria and Morocco circulates ideas and criticisms from outside the country by publishing articles by academics and intellectuals. In the interviews I conducted in Morocco, readers said that they appreciated writers' interventions in the press and in magazines (see Chapter 5). In Algeria, arabophone and francophone dailies—*Le Quotidien d'Oran*, *El Watan*, *Liberté* and *El Khabar*—have for years been a link between the world of the university and the broader public, publishing idea pieces by academics and members of the Algerian diaspora. Newspapers and magazines in Morocco and Algeria also use the Internet, for instance via YouTube or on their websites, to disseminate debates and lectures from the cities where they are based, interviews with ordinary people, sit-ins, and so on.

The Power of Small Things

Media are both at the centre of the lives of social actors and a means by which they give meaning to their experience, by definition varied and multidimensional. Media allow criticism that resonates with everyday life and is supported by cultural references that can appear furtively in the turn of a phrase or gesture. For example, in Tunisia, when heavy police presence could be sensed almost everywhere, I met ordinary people who told me about their passion for the poetry of Cheikh el Imam, Marcel Khalifeh, Mahmoud Darwish or Nizar Qabbani, and recited or sang me a few verses. This is neither innocent nor coincidental, since these poets and artists were famous for their contributions to renewing poetics and for their critical and political engagements in the contemporary Arab world. And this is not just a random example: after all, many people were

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27 Anouar Trabelsi, whose thesis deals with the Internet, heavily under surveillance by the Ben Ali regime, notes that information gained clandestinely on the Internet was shared with "other web surfers" and "people without access to the network" (2001, p. 351).

surprised by the Tunisian revolution, which startled them like a mushroom springing up from the white sands of Tozeur![28]

Many examples could be given as evidence of the networks of influence between different media, new and old: everyday speech, jokes, cartoons, satire, or music, all of which provide intermediary spaces for everyday actions and communications, and the criticism that flows from these. This criticism runs like a stream under the surface of the ground, and although it is visible it often goes unseen. In most social theory, this everyday criticism neither seems to evoke political life nor to be inserted into it, and as a result it is absent from discussions of the common good or of living together. It does not exist, and once it is mentioned it is already no longer there. This has a strange resemblance to the fate of popular culture that Michel de Certeau (2011) summarizes with the evocative phrase "the beauty of death": it is resurrected by studies of folklore that are financed by the same state whose police came to destroy it.

Still, several important studies have tried to defend the centrality of ordinary life and of "small things" in the context of authoritarian regimes. Jeffrey Goldfarb (2006) uses this expression to account for the importance of small things or small actions that allowed for the overthrow of the Polish totalitarian regime. He distinguishes between "factual truth" and "official truth". For him, "free politics" is built on the former. Interactions between people and the small things these interactions produce actualize "free politics" (2006, p. 21). Democracy is in the details, Goldfarb says; it is actualized, for example, when oppressed people detach themselves from official truth and interact with each other. Without equating the Maghreb to Poland, we could say that the adoption of satellite television by North Africans constituted a detachment from official truth that provoked internal ruptures, especially in the way that individuals position themselves towards things imposed on them. Today, what regime would dare deny Moroccans, Tunisians, or Algerians access to satellite television? The results of this detachment, carried out every day and anchored in daily practices, are uncertain and have variable geometries. Detachment may

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28 Similarly, when Tunisians voted for the Ennadha party in 2011, this seemed to some an unnatural gesture. This attitude, without confusing Ennadha with Tunisian society, ignores the fact that Tunisians are in the majority Muslims, and forgets that under Ben Ali's regime they could not express their religious beliefs in public. This is also shown by Maryam Ben Salem's (2010) research on the pressures experienced by women who wore the hijab. I met a member of the Ibadite minority in Tunisia who told me that he could not wear a beard, as dictated by his community's tradition, because he would have been harassed by the police.